Long-Term Partners for Serving Los Angeles' African American and Latino Students: USC's Center for Urban Education and Los Angeles Southwest College

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Doing Research That Makes a Difference

The vision of doing socially responsible research through innovative ideas and approaches inspired the founding of the Center for Urban Education (CUE) in 1999. During the past ten years, CUE has become nationally known for inventing research methods and tools to effectively address one of the most challenging problems faced by higher education in the United States: racial and ethnic inequity in access and successful student outcomes.

This chapter describes the ways in which CUE's unique research methodologies have advanced this vision of engaged research. It illustrates how CUE and Los Angeles Southwest College (LASC), one of the nine colleges of the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD), forged an effective partnership to better serve the students of South Los Angeles, who are predominantly African American and, with a growing Hispanic population in the area, Latina and Latino.

A July 21, 2009, *Los Angeles Times* editorial[1] helps set the stage for the context of the partnership between our two institutions and the importance of our work together. The editorial commented on a recent action by the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), the self-regulating body for community colleges in the Western region of the United States. Accreditation is a process of professional accountability to assess the quality and standards of higher education institutions. In part the editorial read:

Two Los Angeles community colleges had their accreditation placed on probation this month, not because their academic offerings aren't good but because they have little way of knowing whether the offerings are good or not.

Failure to conduct "program review" might sound like a minor administrative weakness at schools that try to meet a thousand needs with limited funds. But one of the most basic things a college can do is examine its programs to see whether they work. How many of the students who plan to transfer to a four-year college are able to do so within two or three years? Do the graduates of vocational-tech programs find jobs? Is counseling to prevent students from dropping out actually keeping them in school?

Although the *Los Angeles Times* editorial had asserted that the colleges receiving warnings did not have a process to learn about their own effectiveness, this was not entirely the case. As LACCD officials countered, the accreditors had specifically pointed out that the colleges were not making good use of the data they *had* been collecting about program effectiveness. This is a common problem for many organizations today, as our technical ability to collect and store data is far exceeding our human capacities to make meaning from data and to act based on what we learn from it.

Organization theorists often point out that institutions of higher education typically lack organizational learning structures.[2] As scholars and administrators of higher education, we are aware that the kind of organizational learning that the accrediting association would like to see among its member colleges is complex and challenging. The editorial noted that an accreditation warning that had placed LASC on probationary status in April of 2008 had been successfully *removed* at the same

AACJC meeting at which the other two colleges had been placed on warning. LASC, using the organizational learning processes and tools of CUE's Equity Model, engaged in a comprehensive self-study and change process to respond to the accreditation commission's concerns. Through these collaborative experiences, we know that for institutions of higher education to improve, they must have several important capacities: to use data to diagnose educational problems accurately; to take institutional responsibility for those problems; and to recognize that through professional development educators can develop the expertise for innovation and greater effectiveness.

Through our partnership, CUE and LASC have taken a leadership role in developing ways to turn data into action through *inquiry*, a term that refers to the reflective use of systematically collected data to address problems of professional practice. Above all, such organizational learning requires knowing what questions to ask in order to frame problems in "actionable" ways.[3] Our work has been motivated by the purpose, first and foremost, of improving the educational opportunities and outcomes of the college students of Los Angeles and of students in similar urban areas throughout the country. We address one of the most urgent social problems facing higher education—racial and ethnic inequity in access and degree completion—by asking, "In what ways are our own practices contributing to these inequities?" and inventing tools for others to do the same.

While a procedural issue such as accreditation may seem minor in the face of these challenges, in fact the struggle for accountability and greater productivity of institutions of higher education is an urgent one. The accreditation warnings received by the LACCD colleges are part of a national trend, as

federal congressmen and senators have been pressing through a number of commissions and hearings for colleges and universities to be more responsive to the public and provide greater accountability for the use of taxpayer dollars. More important, both at the national and state level, legislators have been pushing harder to find ways to increase the number of college-educated adults to meet the demands of the twenty-first century global economy.[4]

Los Angeles Southwest College is one of over 40 colleges and universities in the United States that has engaged in the intensive processes of CUE's organizational learning and change model, the CUE Equity Model. These processes, and the tools that CUE has developed to provide structures for colleges to benchmark their practices and improvement goals, have proven to be effective in changing the beliefs of educators about their potential to have a positive impact in their students' lives.

Our experiences shed light on what is required to transform these individual insights into cultural change at the institutional level. They also inform a number of major national initiatives that would rely on benchmarking goals for the production of greater numbers of college graduates. Setting benchmark goals is only one part of the change process. As we discuss below, there are three types of benchmarking,[5] and all are necessary to respond to the pressing challenge set forth by President Obama in the first year of his presidency: to dramatically increase the number of college-educated adults in the United States.

The Center for Urban Education's commitment to doing research that will "make a difference"[6] arose from the predicted consequences of the demographic and educational changes nationally and, most particularly, in California. An

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impressive number of reports documenting the urgency of increasing college participation and degree attainment have been published in the last ten years. The reports' authors expect them to serve as catalysts for action. But data alone, no matter how compelling, are not sufficient to bring about institutional change.

Increasing college participation and completion depends on the actions of institutional leaders, instructors, and others whose practices shape and influence the learning experiences of students. Often institutions are stymied in their efforts to increase the numbers of students retained and graduated because they lack the structures, tools, and strategies to diagnose their own practices, learn how they work and for whom, and change them. Consequently, colleges typically respond to calls for increased degree productivity by mounting new programs or student support services without evidence that these are the right solutions or that they are working as intended. The rush to adopt new programs can be both costly and wasteful.

For the last ten years the Center for Urban Education, created as part of USC's Urban Initiative, has been inventing tools for organizational learning and experimenting with new research methods to facilitate practitioner-led change from within institutions. This involves working with the resources colleges already have and catalyzing existing knowledge for growth and innovation. CUE pioneered a multidisciplined inquiry approach that is providing expertise to higher education institutions across the country as they undertake changes to be more effective in addressing racial and ethnic disparities in access and outcomes. These changes are the same as those that are needed to serve growing numbers of students more

efficiently. In the next section we discuss CUE's research methods and their connection to increasing participation in higher education for the rapidly growing population of first-generation, immigrant, and low-income students.

Engaged Research Methods: The Practitioner-as-Researcher Model
In 1999–2000, USC's president and provost substantiated the meaning of an engaged university by inviting USC scholars to submit proposals for innovative ideas to advance the university's strategic initiatives. The Center for Urban Education came into being through the winning proposal submitted by the USC Rossier School of Education. The initial seed funds helped CUE leverage several million dollars in grants from private foundations, including the James Irvine Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Lumina Foundation for Education, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation; the federal government through the National Science Foundation; and private contracts from higher education systems and institutions.

When CUE was established, the primary approach to address racial and ethnic underrepresentation in higher education was through the enhancement of diversity.[7] Racial and ethnic diversity—as a characteristic of the student body, the faculty, the curriculum, and co-curriculum—was a major thrust of institutions of higher education around the country. With assistance from private foundations, colleges and universities started a variety of diversity efforts, including the development of required diversity courses and programs to bring about greater inclusivity and intercultural understanding, studies of

the campus climate for racial "minority" groups, and empirical assessments of the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on the intellectual and social development of undergraduates.

While the attention to diversity was a sign of progress toward a more racially integrated system of higher education, CUE's researchers realized that the "diversity movement" had its greatest relevance for predominantly white universities and colleges struggling to attract more African American, Latina, Latino, and American Indian students.

CUE's location in downtown Los Angeles, in a neighborhood surrounded by schools that are predominantly Latino, Latina, and African American, made it obvious that achieving racial and ethnic diversity, while relevant to USC and its peer institutions, was a nonissue for most of the colleges in California, particularly community colleges. Due to California's demographic trends, the great majority of colleges have achieved and surpassed the first stage of diversity, at which the majority of their students are no longer white students. Having achieved greater numerical representation of African Americans, Latinas, Latinos, and other groups that have traditionally been underserved by higher education, institutions must move on to what we call the second stage of diversity. In this stage, college access translates equally to college degrees and certificates for students of all racial-ethnic groups. This shift of focus from equal access to equal outcomes reflects CUE's leadership in emphasizing equity as a national goal and national responsibility.[8]

To help institutional practitioners develop new knowledge and practices (i.e., to change themselves) that will bring about equity, CUE developed the practitioner-as-researcher approach.[9]

Several projects, starting with the *Diversity Scorecard* in 2001 and including *Equity for All* in 2006, the *California Benchmarking Project*, and the *Wisconsin Transfer Equity Study* in 2008 and 2009, have contributed to the creation of the CUE Equity Model. This model engages practitioners in various kinds of inquiries, ranging from documenting problems to assessing the adequacy and quality of instructional approaches, counseling services, policies, and practices. Through these locally situated inquiries, practitioners examine their own institutional practices, policies, and cultures at a distance and learn to ask, "In what ways does X facilitate or inhibit the goal of equity in educational outcomes?" The practitioner-as-researcher process helps faculty members, administrators, counselors, and deans become the experts on educational problems as they exist in their local context.

Through participatory critical action research, CUE engages higher education practitioners—faculty, administrators, counselors, and institutional researchers—in "action inquiry," a systematic process of problem identification, data collection, reflection, decision making, and action. As institutional outsiders conducting action research, we create processes and assessment tools for action inquiry on the part of institutional insiders, who use them to assess their own practices and organizational settings. These processes and tools are designed to bring about problem solving to address inequities as they exist in particular settings.

In this research method, the roles of the researched and researcher are reversed to some extent. That is, practitioners (as we show next in the example of Los Angeles Southwest Community College) take the role of researchers, and researchers assume the roles of facilitators. In the role of facilitators, CUE's researchers are responsible for designing the campus-based inquiries and creating artifacts to guide the inquiry. As facilitators, CUE's researchers have the responsibility of managing the sense-making process and keeping the focus on the effectiveness of taken-for-granted practices, policies, and structures over which practitioners have control, rather than focusing on the deficits of students. Locating the problem in institutional characteristics rather than in students' deficits represents a major departure from traditional theories that attribute success to what students do or fail to do.

The Sociohistorical Context of Los Angeles Southwest College

Los Angeles Southwest College serves parts of the city of Los Angeles and some unincorporated portions of Los Angeles County, as well as the cities of Gardena, Hawthorne, and Inglewood. The service area consists of 35.5 square miles, which accounts for less than 1 percent of the 4,752 square miles of Los Angeles County. Although it is one of the smallest colleges in the Los Angeles Community College District and in the state of California, LASC reaches comparatively large numbers of African American students. As told in LASC's "Backgrounder" document, the college has played an important civil rights role "in the tapestry of the community":

> The story of LASC exemplifies how citizen activism can bring about positive change for the community. Empowered by a new era of civil rights and determined to counter negative image repercussions of what the media labeled as the Watts "riots," a group of South Los Angeles citizens sought tirelessly to establish an institution of higher learning

within their own community—one that would enable their children to have equal opportunities as those in neighboring communities. Their vision became reality when the Los Angeles Board of Education approved plans for a new community college in 1967.

> Los Angeles Southwest College opened its doors on September 11, 1967, with 600 students and 22 full-time faculty members. The first classes were held in bungalows that housed the Armed forces during World War II. Today, LASC has more than 6,000 students, 70 full-time faculty members, and 125 adjunct instructors from all areas of expertise and industry. The modern campus is undergoing a massive expansion and technological upgrade that will make it a model for community college education.

> This child of the community has evolved into a vital educational and cultural hub serving students of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds.

About 58 percent of the roughly 7,000 students who enroll each year at LASC are African American. Over one-third of the student body is Latina and Latino, and at least half is low-income. With other racial and ethnic groups each contributing less than 6 percent of the student population, LASC is a historically African American-serving community college that is beginning to incorporate Latino and Latina students. As we discuss below, this process of demographic change has required new attention to the culture of the college and the cultural competencies of the faculty, administrators, and counselors.

The Rejuvenation of Los Angeles Southwest College

Visitors to Los Angeles Southwest College today see gleaming new buildings—a vibrant architecture that is the

most striking symbol of the college's rejuvenation. Funded by Los Angeles taxpayers through a bond act, the construction mirrors the community's hopes for all that LASC can contribute to the social and economic vitality of South Los Angeles. New facilities include instructional labs and student support centers designed to meet the full range of educational preparedness and aspirations that students bring to the college.

As any of us would attest, however, state-of-the-art facilities not only deserve, but simply must have, state-of-the-art instructional, student services, and administrative capacities. The heart and soul of a college are its people and students. As noted above, in April of 2008, LASC had received a "wake-up call" from the Accrediting Commission of Community and Junior Colleges. The AACJC had placed LASC on probation, a high level of warning that indicated commission members felt the college was not adhering to state-of-the-art practices to ensure its students' success.

To address the commission's wake-up call, it was necessary for LASC to truly hit its stride in a number of areas, and to do so in a coordinated manner. Planning, budgeting, and assessment of institutional effectiveness had to be working hand in hand. College governance had to be transparent, with the Faculty Senate and College Council taking leading roles. The college had to be responsive to specific concerns raised by the commission. And it had to change its culture to embed continuous assessment and responsiveness in all of its operations and to effectively reach out to Latino communities.

By July of 2009, the college demonstrated to the AACJC that it had satisfactorily met the concerns that led the commission to issue the

probationary status. How was this accomplished? First of all, through the hard work of the faculty, staff, and students of LASC; they all played a role on numerous committees and working groups to change the way the college did business in all its aspects, particularly teaching, advising, enrollment, community outreach, and program planning.

Second, the LACCD, particularly the vice chancellor of institutional effectiveness, provided support and guidance in responding to the accreditation challenge; and the college's board of trustees, through the Committee on Planning and Student Success, provided the necessary oversight. Third, the California legislature and the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges had already endorsed the accountability movement that has been putting pressure on higher education across the country. Through participation in the state's Accountability Reporting for Community Colleges (ARCC) process and in the Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) spearheaded by the Chancellor's Office, the college had already been developing the processes of continuous assessment and improvement demanded by legislators and the accrediting commission.

The bottom line, however, still needed attention. When actions were taken, the college had to be able to assess the impact of those actions on student learning and on the services the college provided to support that learning. Doing so required a new level of professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators as well as a commitment to working across the infamous "silos" of higher education. Next we describe the implementation of the CUE Equity Model at LASC and its impact on LASC's efforts to create a culture of student success.

CUE's Equity Model at LASC

CUE's Equity Model is a multistep process: colleges first prepare by forming cross-functional evidence teams (step 1), taking stock of student success rates and inequities in student outcomes (step 2), and auditing existing data and perceptions of instructional practices on campus (step 3). These evidence teams then inquire by asking what improvements would be necessary to achieve specific performance benchmark goals (step 4). Potential solutions are contextualized (step 5) through the use of equity-based self-assessment instruments that help faculty, counselors, and administrators see their campus through their students' eyes and through the conceptual lens of "equity mindedness." The effective characteristics of "best practices" are investigated through diagnostic benchmarking to avoid the mistake of implementing off-the-shelf solutions that are a poor fit for the campus culture, resources, and student body.

Colleges then act by planning and adopting large-scale changes and "enacting" smaller changes that come about through new perceptions of the student experience (step 6). Becoming student-centered and equity-minded are themselves important ways to enact change. To successfully implement any change involves ongoing assessment (are we doing what we set out to do?) and a solid evaluation plan (how effective is our new solution?); this is step 7.

The final step is the dissemination of knowledge and practitioner expertise on campus and in professional communities of practice (step 8). The goal is to increase practitioner knowledge, because "data don't drive" effective change; knowledgeable practitioners do.

Taking Stock of Student Success

CUE's Equity Model was introduced at LASC in 2005, before it was placed on probation by the ACCJC; but the college was not as far along into the inquiry and benchmarking activities as to show the evidence of progress required for accreditation. The first activity was forming an Equity Scorecard evidence team (step 1) whose members would be responsible for carrying out the inquiry activities to take stock of student success. The team had six members from LASC including the director of Institutional Research (a position held at the time by Dan Walden), an instructor of basic skills math, an instructor of Developmental Communication, the coordinator of Matriculation, the vice president of Academic Affairs, and an administrator of academic services. The team was convened to take stock of student outcomes and organize the data into the four perspectives of the Equity Scorecard. Two researchers from CUE were also part of the team, and their role was to structure the various inquiry activities that took place starting in September 2005 and continuing today.

To complete CUE's Equity Scorecard (step 2), evidence team members begin by analyzing available data, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, across four perspectives: access, retention, transfer readiness, and excellence. Initial analysis of the data leads team members to question and focus on specific educational outcomes by student groups for further analysis. These questions in turn become the goals and measures by which institutional effectiveness is evaluated by the evidence team. The scorecard highlights areas in need of further attention and establishes performance goals in the four perspectives as a means to attain equity.

The LASC *evidence* team wanted to learn what happens to students who are placed in foundational, basic skills coursework (which is also sometimes referred to as developmental or pre-collegiate coursework) in the areas of mathematics, developmental communications, and English as a second language (ESL). By following a single cohort of students over five semesters, they discovered that less than 10 percent of the African American students who start out in the lowest basic skills math course are able to persist through the basic skills pipeline and transition to college-level math. They learned that the percentage of Latinas and Latinos in math courses was too small compared to the large number enrolled in ESL courses. Without math, they could not earn a degree or transfer to a four-year college. The team members also noted that not all students who were successful in basic skills math went on to the next course in the sequence. Much to their surprise, they learned that they were losing students who are not successful as well as students who are successful but do not go on to the next course in the sequence.

By completing the Equity Scorecard, the team members became aware in great detail of the long-term outcomes of students who are first placed in non-credit precollegiate courses. The findings were so sobering that one of the team members was moved to remind his colleagues, "The purpose of the college being here is to lift the community and to lift its people with skills . . . basic skills."

To move to the benchmarking steps, the evidence team was reorganized to include more practitioners directly involved in basic skills instruction. The reorganized team was led by Phyllis Norwood, dean of Student Success,

and Linda Larson-Singer, articulation officer and counselor; members included the dean of Academic Affairs (Dan Walden was promoted to this position), the chair of the Department of Mathematics, the chair of the Counseling Department, the director of Learning Assistance Success Center, a counselor from the Center for Retention and Transfer, the chair of the Arts Department, and four additional basic skills instructors.

"Hunches" about the problems of student success

The new team updated and extended the data analysis provided in the Equity Scorecard by linking students' successful course completion rates to curriculum maps. They reviewed diagrams that represented the various curricular pathways students might take as they progress from basic skills level (nondegree credit) to transferable level coursework. As they mapped the curricula, the team chose gateway courses and benchmark courses to focus on in each program. Gateway classes were pre-transfer-level courses that had low levels of successful student completion.

Next the team engaged in a "hunches" exercise. After looking at curriculum maps and statistics showing successful course completion rates for their students, they brainstormed all the reasons why the number of students who were persisting and succeeding in their courses was so low. The group then collaboratively discussed each member's hunches and grouped them into categories such as institutional policies and practices, instruction, students, and academic services and resources.

Examples of team members' hunches regarding the various factors that contributed to low student success included

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poor curriculum continuity, lack of innovative pedagogy, and students' lack of study skills. The team decided to focus on hunches that were within their realm of influence as they subsequently set about probing solutions to increase student success. One main objective of the hunches inquiry activity was to help team members realize that there exist multiple ways for faculty and administrators to improve their instructional methods and student services, rather than blaming students for poor outcomes.

Three Forms of Benchmarking
The hunches exercise helped the team determine what types of inquiry activities to conduct and what types of benchmarks to set for improvement in student success. The Equity Model relies on three forms of benchmarking designed by CUE researchers. The first, *performance benchmarking*, involves the continued use of disaggregated student success data to take stock of student outcomes. The Equity Scorecard is the primary tool for conducting this benchmarking activity. It allowed LASC to follow a cohort of students from their first enrollment in foundational coursework (sometimes referred to as basic skills or developmental coursework) to later enrollment in more advanced coursework that carries the college credits necessary to transfer from community colleges to four-year universities. The second, *diagnostic (or effective practices) benchmarking*, involves comparing pedagogical practices to best practices identified in a variety of venues, such as the research literature, the California Community Colleges Basic Skills Initiative, and the accreditation standards. The third is *process benchmarking*, which involves visits to campuses with exemplary models of pedagogy and program

administration. In the next sections, we describe LASC's diagnostic and process benchmarking activities.

Diagnostic Benchmarking: Syllabus Assessment Inquiry Activity
A key step in the benchmarking activities the team undertook as practitioner-researchers involved a review of mathematics syllabi by the mathematics faculty on the team, who were joined by team members from the counseling area in a small working group. CUE researchers had provided a syllabi review protocol that called attention to a series of equity-based indicators of effective practice in providing course content on a syllabus. (These indicators were derived through a review of research concerning culturally responsive pedagogy[10]. Reviewing syllabi was chosen as an inquiry activity because it presented a way that team members could reframe hunches about student deficits—for example, "students come to class unprepared"; "students are not focused"; and "students have poor study skills"—to identify areas of institutional responsibility for student success.

This inquiry activity, which was relatively inexpensive because all it required was the team members' time, provided important insights into the syllabus as an instructional practice that was not structured to meet the educational needs of students in basic skills courses. One finding from this activity was that the tone of syllabi was more punitive than encouraging. To capture this finding in an engaging way, the team members used a cartoon that depicted a frightened student standing overwhelmed in front of a blackboard covered with mathematical equations. An ominous hand with a pointed finger broke through the blackboard and the caption read, "No, no, no, wrong again!" The evidence team's

takeaway finding that appeared at the bottom of the cartoon read, "Overall, we found most syllabi appeared to reinforce students' fear of failure in math and did not direct students to support resources." The slide also pointed out that although the syllabus reviewed was for a foundational pre-algebra course, the information provided to students about how to calculate their final grade was communicated using an algebraic formula.

Diagnostic benchmarking helped the instructors and staff on the team to understand the problems of student success as problems of practice that could be addressed through specific action steps and ongoing assessment and evaluation. For example, the problems of student lack of confidence and preparation were identified as ones that could be addressed by providing clearer guidance to students about expectations and instructional resources.

The primary impact of what was learned through the diagnostic benchmarking exercise focused on the math syllabi stemmed from recognition that the college was not effectively communicating with students about available instructional resources, primarily those in the Math Lab. After completing the syllabi review, the math subcommittee led a math syllabi review workshop with faculty from the math department. In this workshop, the faculty found that there was a need to incorporate teaching philosophies into their syllabi to better convey the multiple ways in which they promoted student success in their courses. Additionally, faculty discussed the need to know more about the campus resources available to students for tutoring, financial support, counseling, and transfer. Templates are being developed to help faculty better convey student services information to their students.

A number of changes in institutional structures and practices were made as a result of these findings. These changes improved student access to math tutoring resources in numerous ways. The list below highlights the impact of the CUE Equity Model (in combination with concurrent initiatives and administrative decisions) in motivating administrators and faculty to adopt new practices to improve student success in developmental math courses.

- Tutoring resources were increased, and adjunct faculty desks were relocated to the Math Lab so that instructors could hold their office hours there and be available to tutor students. Similarly, the full-time math faculty members began to spend at least one hour a week in the Math Lab.
- Lab hours were increased and made more available to students working full-time by opening the lab on Saturday mornings.
- Workshops were added on Friday afternoons.
- The process students need to use the Math Lab was clarified.
- The Math Lab was relocated to a large, quiet room with new furniture.
- The resources were better publicized, and instructors were asked to actively refer students to use the Math Lab.

Reflecting the improvements in communication with students about tutoring resources and the new course requirements, the numbers of students using the Math Lab has increased. The increased demand, not surprisingly, has led to new challenges such as finding and funding additional tutors, managing peak tutoring times, and providing for both group and one-on-one appointments.

Process Benchmarking: Critically Examining Best Practices
The third step was process benchmarking. This involved visits by the LASC evidence team to campuses with exemplary models of pedagogy and program administration. These included well-known models such as learning communities, learning centers, and summer programs that allowed intensive study in areas such as mathematics, where students would benefit from academic immersion.

The purpose of the site visits, which were structured using observation and reflection protocols designed by CUE researchers, was to gain an understanding of the organizational change that takes place "behind the scenes" when colleges adopt innovative programs or make substantive changes to the curriculum. By talking with people involved in administering and teaching in the programs that had been selected as potential exemplars, participants had the opportunity to learn about the detailed processes of planning, negotiation, administration, and collaboration that are necessary to change institutional practices and culture. These key steps are often lacking when colleges are urged to take on best practices as a quick response to problems of student outcomes.

LASC and CUE: Looking Ahead
We do not want to give the impression that LASC underwent a complete transformation as a result of completing the inquiry processes of the CUE Equity Model. However, it is clear to us that through a reframing of the problem from one of student deficits to one of institutional responsibility, the college adopted changes to improve student success. The changes we can most easily observe are primarily administrative and structural, but we believe they provide the basis for deeper cultural and

pedagogical changes. These are needed to address issues identified by the team such as classroom climate and faculty expectations, pedagogy and instructional modalities, curricular sequencing, the validation of standardized and local student placement exams, and the use of self-assessment practices for ongoing professional development.

In addition, the project raised attention to the college's role in developing students' college and learner identities. Cross-disciplinary integration of course content and supplemental instruction that will involve students in academic inquiry, drawing on their life experiences and knowledge from the outset of their enrollment at LASC, are still needed to enable students to more quickly experience rewarding academic experiences at the college.

A key question is whether the structural changes described above provide a foundation for deeper curricular and pedagogical changes in the future. We believe the answer is yes. In mathematics, for example, planning is in the beginning stages to coordinate curricular content in math courses with career and technical coursework, such as nursing, in order to introduce "real world" math problems into the curriculum. This is a step toward rethinking the curriculum to begin to dismantle the long, skills-based sequence that can act as a major impediment to higher rates of student success. Such curriculum reform requires a sustained effort, however, and ongoing professional development and support will be needed.

Similarly, although math faculty participated in a syllabus renewal workshop to transform their syllabi into vehicles for communicating teaching philosophies, learning goals, resources, and encouragement to students, the process of revising mathematics syllabi and incorporating culturally responsive

pedagogies is in the beginning stages. The use of self-assessment strategies is not a typical part of the disciplinary norms in mathematics, at LASC or at other colleges, and the math faculty and others will need additional opportunities to learn how to conduct in-class assessment before adopting it as a routine practice.

Other challenging questions were posed to the college through the benchmarking process: "How is the college enabling students to develop a college student identity and build their own sense of responsibility in the college community? What is the experience of African American students, particularly females, at the college? How does the college address the issues of race and racism in the college community and the broader community of South Los Angeles?" These questions and issues are inherent in the use of the terms *equity* and *equity-mindedness* in CUE's Equity Model.

From the very earliest meetings, the team at LASC rejected the notion of an "academic culture" as one that was distinct or contradictory to the culture of LASC's students and community. The goal to develop a culture of student success at the college was adopted. The team explored what this goal, fully realized, might mean at LASC by participating in facilitated dialogues, symposia, and presentations by colleagues from other institutions organized by CUE. As in the area of institutional self-assessment, the college will seek additional opportunities to learn about the principles and practices of culturally responsive pedagogy, which involve instructional approaches that build on the knowledge and experiences students bring into the classroom.

In serving the Latina and Latino student populations, the college will also be able to build on a number of structural and programmatic changes that have already been implemented, including hiring a bilingual counselor and a new dean to oversee recruitment efforts in the Latino community. With new staff has come new programming and outreach, such as the College Family Day, Bridges to Success program, bilingual workshops and materials on the college enrollment process, and instruction at local high schools. These programs and the increased interactions with Latina and Latino students will bring greater opportunities for LASC to fulfill its mission as a "vital educational and cultural hub."

Conclusion

As discussed, three types of benchmarking activities—performance, diagnostic, and process benchmarking—were conducted as part of the Equity Model. Each of these activities was designed to promote new forms of social interaction among evidence team members that would facilitate reflection about professional norms and practices through the exchange of knowledge and beliefs about student success. The benchmarking processes of data discussion and interpretation of the CUE Equity Model led to an important outcome in terms of the LASC's team learning: the problem of low rates of successful course completion and retention for students who started out in nondegree credit courses was recognized, and to some extent owned, as problems of professional practice, not as student deficits. This ownership of the problem did not reflect a consensus view, by any means; nor did what the project participants learned spread immediately or directly to the rest of the campus. However, the willingness and capacity for problem identification among evidence team members provided a foundation for organizational learning and the action steps that followed.

Higher education decision makers have traditionally favored interventions that look to change students so that they are better able to adapt to the processes and structures that govern postsecondary institutions. The Equity Model at LASC, as at over 40 colleges and universities across the country over the past decade, has sought to reframe these perspectives. In fact, we have successfully shifted the discussion from student responsibility to institutional accountability and placed our own practices at the center of our investigations to bring about cultural and institutional change.

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