

FA Draft Response to Foothill Equity Plan

As members and leaders of a labor union, we are acutely aware both that racism has been historically used in this country as a wedge to divide working people from each other and that there have been those in the labor movement itself who fomented this. But at the same time we also claim the proud part of labor's legacy that has included inter-racial organizing efforts and countless anti-racist organizing projects, which extends into our lives as professional educators. It is from this perspective that we enthusiastically support the overall direction of the Foothill College "Equity Strategic Plan." We recognize that it is primarily focused on equity for students, and agree with centralizing race in our equity efforts. When we make our institution welcoming to and supportive of the most disadvantaged and oppressed, we all do better.

Our response is based on a first read by members of FA's newly formed Equity Task Force. While we have concentrated upon several specific priorities or goals within the "Equity Strategic Plan" which fall at least partially under FA's purview, we've also expanded our review to encompass other important observations. In as much as FA is a District-wide organization, and the task force itself includes members from both colleges, we offer our commentary with the intent that the conversation will eventually be expanded to include De Anza College and become a truly districtwide project. The "Plan" identifies four areas of focus for specific attention:

- 1) Access, Supports and Opportunities;
- 2) Organizational Policies and Practices;
- 3) Campus Climate; and,
- 4) Student Outcomes.

We are eager to engage in a discussion of each of these areas to come to stronger and more accurate models of the factors shaping outcomes. Of particular note, we believe are the Organizational Policies and Practices that shape the student success and equity discourse and usually determine how resource allocation decisions are made.

Overall Observations

Power/Institutional Change

On page five (5) of the Equity Strategic Plan, the authors note that this work will require ongoing "disruption of systematic oppression." Thus, we expect that one such disruption will be re-centering the power of students of color throughout the institution, so that they are fully empowered democratic agents in control of their own destinies and those of their communities. While the current statewide Chancellor and Board of Governors—as well as local administrative decision-makers—have been publicly supportive of this anti-racist project, formal shared governance processes on both the state and local level are far too weak and under-resourced to be truly effective vehicles for democratic change. If we approached this work with the idea of insuring that students of color were *truly respected and resourced* to control their educational destinies, we believe we could significantly improve the faith that all members of the Foothill College community have in the process of shared governance.

Another possible vehicle we would suggest for this process of empowerment are the various service learning and civic, political and community engagement projects in operation

throughout the FHDA district. Through community-engaged curriculum embedded in our classes, paid and unpaid internships, guided pathways initiatives leading to careers in advocacy and government, we already see models of successful student empowerment. We hope that such initiatives can receive stronger institutional support. Expecting students and faculty to engage in these projects as “extra curricular” volunteer activities does not adequately re-center Foothill’s educational mission to meet this challenge.

The Whole Student: Housing, Food, Transportation and other Basic Needs

We are truly excited by a vision of equity that takes seriously the notion that we must meet students where they truly are and then empower them to invest their time and energy adequately to benefit from the opportunities offered by higher education. The "Plan" makes note of the desperate food, housing and transportation crises facing so many of our students (e.g. p. 34). What might even more explicitly be called out is the compromising choices poverty forces upon our students. Pay for gas to get to work? Or spend that money to get to class? Pay for rent, or pay for food? And, perhaps most significantly, take on an extra job or extra hours or invest time into study and learning?

Improving access to financial aid and other campus-based services will certainly help. But, frankly, the gap between need and resources is simply too great under the current resource model. The District’s recent success with the Measure G bond has opened the very real possibility that Foothill in particular and the District generally could make meaningful steps to provide affordable housing to hundreds of students, many of whom are currently homeless. But again, these are decisions that should be made with the full inclusion of students through a transparent and empowered democratic process and not simply handed to students as a fait accompli.

The Role of Administration

What is the role of Administrators in this process? Will administrators be full partners in this project? What deliverables will be asked of Administrators other than providing exhortations to “do better”? Many of us have been laboring at this project for decades with minimal resources or acknowledgement only now to be told by administrators who themselves have no actual record of accomplishing such feats that the elimination of all equity gaps should be accomplished in time frames that no one has ever actually experienced (see the state Chancellor's "Vision for Success"]. While we acknowledge the gesture, we also want to see full buy-in and accompanying metrics of accountability from our administrative partners.

We also want to see far more transparency in decision-making processes and full democratic inclusion in setting goals and allocating resources to meet these goals. Broad and informed inclusion in decision making means that those most affected by institutional decisions have an opportunity to share their real experience of what works and what does not. That is, we get better data, particularly when we preserve our institutional memory and expertise. Institutional change takes time. We need long-term institutional commitment to this project rather than the “flavor of the month” approach to so many other resource-draining educational “reforms” we have seen throughout the years. Because we have never done what we are attempting here, we are going to make mistakes as we feel our way forward. But to build on our successes, we need a broader base of decision-makers (in more than an advisory capacity) and a long-term commitment of resources.

Responses to specific issues/goals in the Equity Plan

Tenure Process/Evaluations

FA appreciates the Equity Plan's recognition that both faculty evaluation and the tenure process should be supportive rather than punitively driven activities, particularly in Issue 6, Goal 3's insistence that "Administration collaborates with Academic Senate and the Faculty Association to support practitioner efforts..." (41). It might be useful in this regard to make a distinction between policy and practice, in recognition that while the tenure review process itself can always be modified and updated through negotiations with the District, it's in the *implementation* of its various requirements that equity concerns most frequently arise, particularly for faculty of color. The *Agreement* between FA and the District explicitly states that "*all* Tenure Review Committee members" complete training which will, "emphasize the constructive nature of the tenure review process...define cultural competence and increase awareness of the behaviors and attitudes that support faculty diversity" and "enable members to identify bias and maintain objectivity" (6A.4.5). It is thus imperative that the District provide the resources needed to deliver this essential training, which should include the Dean, and which should probably be ongoing.

We also feel that there needs to be greater clarity in Goal 3's language about "removing structural barriers embedded in tenure and evaluation processes." What would be an example of such a barrier, and to what would it be a barrier? In addition, we offer the following revision to the language of sub-priority "B":

"Faculty evaluations are seen as an opportunity to continuously build on the quality of our teaching, **and are viewed as an opportunity to recognize outstanding performance, improve satisfactory performance, and provide useful feedback to encourage the growth and improvement of faculty both contractually and in actual practice.** ~~replacing the current aim of perfectionism, assimilation, and weeding out, for one that values growth and improvement.~~ (42).

And just as the process of attaining tenure is important to insuring that faculty perform their duties in a professional, caring manner and actively pursue effective pedagogy, particularly for their at-risk students, by the same token, administrators must be held accountable through regular evaluation, by faculty as well as their administrative superiors.

- Edits:
 - Under **Part-time Faculty**... Paragraph 6- there is an extra "would" in the sentence. Should read: "We would also recommend the following..."

Part-time Faculty

Equity for students of color also necessitates achieving equity for part-time faculty, who, despite teaching the majority of our classes face greater personal obstacles to insuring student success and are provided with fewer resources and opportunities for professional growth than are their full-time colleagues. Part-time faculty themselves need to feel a sense of belonging to the community before they can fully provide a sense of belonging for their students (see validation

theory). And the quality of education suffers when educators are struggling to meet the same basic needs of adequate food and housing as their students on top of the demands of maintaining a professional life at multiple campuses.

College and District policies and practices that differentiate part-time faculty tend to further undermine their ability to develop equity-based pedagogy and engage with students in the college culture of equity. Sometimes it's difficult for part-time faculty to meet with students privately because they don't have their own office which they can access at any time, or they might want to take a class in educational equity but are not eligible for retraining funds. All of these seemingly little things add up to make it more challenging for part-time faculty to engage in this work.

More generally, equity initiatives refer to increasing diversity among the ranks of faculty to reflect the increasingly diverse student population. We know from research this has positive impact, not only for students of color, but for the entire campus community. But despite recent gains in the diversity of faculty generally, efforts to recruit and retain racially and ethnically diverse part-time faculty are hindered due to their disparate and inequitable working conditions, which may deter many potential faculty of color from entering the field of education; this, compounded by the haphazard, "at will" manner in which adjunct faculty are hired, further compounds the effects of systemic racism. Therefore, any equity plan should include effective, active outreach to faculty of color, full and part-time, from local graduate programs or through targeted advertising, rather than passively relying on our adjunct databases. While this will help address considerations of implicit bias, we must also address inequities specific to PT instructors such as pay parity, health and other benefits, job security and opportunities for advancement/growth.

There are several specific places in the document where these concerns could be effectively addressed. Perhaps the most obvious is "Issue 6" (39 cf.), specifically Goal 3's reference to the "tenure and evaluation processes." What's missing is the other key faculty evaluative/job security structure, Reemployment Preference. Just as the attainment of tenure provides some job security for FT faculty of color, a group which has in some areas been less successful in achieving tenure and remaining with the college, so REP provides some measure of job security for Part-time faculty (though again, faculty of color often have more difficulty in attaining REP than do their white colleagues). As with tenure, a distinction might be made here between policy and practice, as it is not REP itself which makes distinctions between faculty of different backgrounds, but evaluators of faculty (see implicit bias, above).

Accordingly, Goal 3 could be easily reworked to incorporate some of these concerns, as follows (in bold):

"Administration collaborates with Academic Senate and the Faculty Association to support **instructional** efforts to achieve goals 1 and 2, by removing structural barriers to **pedagogical success which are** embedded in tenure, **reemployment preference** and evaluation processes" (41).

We also recommend the following addition as sub-priority "B" to "Goal 3" and a correlative resequencing:

The processes by which part-time faculty attain and retain reemployment preference insure these faculty receive the institutional support, resources and mentoring they need to succeed and insure their students' success.

Similarly, the addition of a "Goal 7" to the goals addressing Issue #10 would better articulate the issues of diversity as they concern part-time faculty in particular:

"College administration, faculty, and staff recognize that part-time faculty play a vital role in implementing this equity plan; therefore, Foothill Administration will provide equitable resources to part-time faculty so they may further engage in the work of culturally relevant pedagogy."

Curriculum

FA is happy to collaborate with both the Senate and the Equity office on making equity integral to both curriculum and the curriculum approval process, per Issue 6, Goal 3, footnote 35 (42). A good first step might be to "unpack" the language of sub-priority "C" so that the obstacles to making curricular policies and practices race conscious are more clearly spelled out as well as the means by which we can circumvent these practices.

Safety

FA Supports all the goals included in Issue #5's which address "Lack of a sense of belonging, safety and space allocation for students of color." We would further add that these goals should apply to everyone in the college community, including faculty, staff and administration.

Miscellaneous edits

"Yet, attempts to assess and revise structural policies, if needed, were infrequently mentioned" (17). **Administrative practices negatively impacting both students and faculty, such as enrollment management that prioritizes cost savings over course offerings and program needs, has yet to be fully interrogated under an equity lens, for the impact they have on student interest and sustained participation in Foothill College.**

"Goal 6: There are no barriers in our enrollment and registration processes." "Work with the Office of Online Learning, Committee of Online Learning (COOL), **the Academic Senate, the Faculty Association** and other stakeholders to identify additional barriers in our enrollment and registration processes that may arise when prospective students are not accessing the physical campus or where there is a reliance on in-person services" (27).

"Any resistance to interrogating the myth of discipline objectivity is problematic. It speaks to the power dynamics that can discourage faculty, especially untenured **and part-time** faculty, from explicitly or implicitly discussing and addressing racism in their fields, by other faculty and administrator colleagues, and/or by curriculum systems that center policy and procedure at the expense of enacting equity in the classroom" (40). **By extension, administrative procedures and policies must themselves be interrogated relative to assumptions of objectivity, as these have a direct impact on the degree to which faculty are able to best support and advance student interests.**

"Current faculty workloads create barriers to learning and effectively implementing culturally responsive pedagogy" (40-41). **Similarly, institutional standards regarding such instructional criteria as class sizes work to undermine equity-focused pedagogy.**

"The Chancellor's Vision for Success goals are no doubt ambitious. Setting metrics locally gave the Foothill an opportunity to think about how individual colleges can enact change that will ultimately make impacts statewide. Similarly, setting individual and department goals can help us collectively achieve equity as a college" (56). **Projections must nonetheless be evidentiary based, positioned with an eye towards realistic goals which can be attained in a reasonable time-frame.**