Assessment Report

Baseline Assessment of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Efforts at Tacoma Community College

TACOMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

I have shared my own lived experiences and how they inform my deep commitment to creating an institution where everyone is welcomed, respected, included, and valued. Strengthening the college's efforts in equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) has been among my highest priorities since becoming Tacoma Community College's (TCC) President.

TCC has taken intentional steps toward realizing our EDI-related goals over this academic year. We finalized a Strategic Plan and are beginning to review our policies and procedures—all through an equity, diversity, and inclusivity focused lens. We are also working closely with the City of Tacoma to become identified as a culturally responsible institution. The process of becoming an equitable, diverse, and inclusive institution requires more than creating plans, revising policies, working with external partners, and creating new administrative offices and positions, however. While these are all important steps forward, to truly achieve the stated aspirations, our college must be unified in continuing to embrace a vision and enact best practices toward our EDI-related expectations.

Tacoma Community College has an opportunity to be a model for our institutional peers, and the responsible college that our community deserves. We can be models in the letter of our policies and procedures, and also in the spirit of our actions, measured by our intentional efforts in closing opportunity gaps.

President Ivan Harrell II, Ph.D.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report was devised to help the author, Dr. Judy Loveless-Morris, to learn about Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) efforts on campus, how concerted and measured TCC's EDI efforts are, what mechanisms support or impede our EDI efforts, and to identify opportunities for improvement. This assessment could not have been done without the participation and contributions of interviewees (thank you). The observations in this report are not exhaustive or representative of all the equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts on our campus. Key efforts and voices are missing in this assessment. The assessment does, however, provide a starting place to begin strengthening and expanding EDI work at Tacoma Community College (TCC).

To understand the matters outlined in the first paragraph, I developed a simple EDI focused assessment (see APPENDIX A). The assessment guided my conversations with staff, faculty, and administrators. The interviews with 46 people were aggregated for anonymity (by institution and departments), and then analyzed for common themes.[1]

FINDINGS

I learned about a large number of excellent equity-centered efforts on campus; and there are still other efforts that I do not know about. Despite all of the exceptional equity efforts on campus, the major problem confronting institutions trying to enact inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning environments is not a lack of good ideas or plans, but the ability to implement or execute them effectively and systemically.[2] Put another way, there is a difference between an attitudinal commitment and an institution-wide behavioral commitment to equity.

Effective EDI processes are more than hollow, nominal, and simple conceptual adherence to EDI. Institutions intentional in their EDI efforts can identify clear goals. Likewise, they can point to specific implementations and measurements. Finally, their processes also include an evaluation period that allows for reflection and correction. Using these indicators, TCC currently leans more toward an attitudinal commitment to equity, rather than a behavioral one.

To illustrate, almost all of the respondents in the assessment process stated that their areas[3] were committed to inclusive excellence.[4] The conversations that informed this assessment allowed me to learn about the compassionate colleagues who I work with, as well as some of their approaches to serving our students. On one hand, common equity-related priorities emerged among participant responses, including diversifying our workforce, narrowing opportunity gaps for students, EDI-related training, and culturally responsive curriculum/programming in response. Pre-fabricated responses were not offered to participants, yet patterned responses still emerged! On the other hand, TCC data trends related to the aforementioned priorities show wide and persistent gaps in educational outcomes between different groups.

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[1] Forty-six people were interviewed, but two people (Shirley Siloi and TJ Caughall) in Student Affairs were interviewed together. There responses were combined resulting in a total of 45 interviews.

[2] Tierney, W. G. 1999. *Building the Responsive Campus.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

[3] The use of areas in this report, refers to the various departments and divisions within them on our campus.

[4] Supporting details to this Executive Summary can be found in the full assessment report.

For example, a review of our dashboards showed that females (n=464) were 1.7 times more likely than their male (n=273) counterparts to be employed at TCC. This specific difference is depicted in the most recent available data (academic year 2018-2019), as well as in the preceding years of data available on TCC's dashboards. During the same data period, white individuals comprised 72% of our workforce compared to their composition of 65%[5] (a 10% percentage difference) in the wider city of Tacoma. In contrast, only 39% of TCC students reported their race as white in the same year.[6] To summarize, the racial composition of the current cohort of TCC employees does not parallel that of the city or its student population. Furthermore, a review of the "Demographics of Tacoma Community College Completers" tab on TCC's dashboards (during the same period of time) shows that race, sex, and income are important predictors of completion.[7] In sum, though 89% (n=40) of respondents agreed that their areas were committed to inclusive excellence, we could do more to hire people who have similar experiences and identity statuses of students. Additionally, the educational inequities by student groups at TCC are similar to the patterns documented at most educational institutions. Educational inequities are durable, but they are not impossible to reduce (see Amarillo College in Texas or Columbus State Community College in Ohio for examples). Our institution has an opportunity to reduce deep and persistent educational gaps in our diverse city.

There are multiple possible explanations for why a gap exists between our vocalized commitments to equity, compared to our outcomes. One explanation is that our institution's dedication to EDI might be nominal. During the assessments, however, I was able to learn about some of the equitable and innovative practices taking place on our campus. Another possible explanation for the gap between equity-based commitment and outcomes is that EDI efforts are decentralized, and therefore lack the concerted focus, effort, and resources needed to produce systemic change.[8] This report will focus on the latter explanation. In fact, interviewees discussed a lack of direction in regard to EDI efforts. People also identified "fear"[9] and a lack of resources as barriers to achieving equity. Furthermore, even though assessment respondents shared examples of culturally responsive programming and curriculum, only 29% of respondents stated that they had clear metrics. Without clear metrics, individuals, units, and institutions cannot determine whether their implementations are efficacious. Conversely, in the absence of metrics, promising implementations may also be defunded or unsupported (in visibility or championing) prematurely, and without substantiation. Individuals, as well as separate units, have EDI-related goals and efforts, but we do not have an institution-wide adopted goals or measurements yet.

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[5] Census.gov

[6] A total of 28.5% of students did not report their race at all. Despite this, the racial composition of employees is, arguably, not reflective of the student or city population.

[7] Other identities and intersectionality are also important for educational outcomes, but are not captured, and therefore, cannot be compared or discussed.

[8] It is also possible, and potentially likely, that both explanations contribute to the outcome.

[9] Several assessment participants used the word fear. Some referenced it in terms of people feeling ill equipped to address inequity. Others used the word fear to indicate that people were afraid of negative sanctions by their peers, or that they may end up doing or saying the wrong thing. Some used fear in all of the aforementioned senses; and some used it vaguely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The figure below depicts EDI benchmark levels ranging from "Inactive" to "Best Practice". Benchmarking our level can assist our institution in creating, tracking, and informing our progress as it pursues equity-related efforts and goals. At the very lowest level (level 1 or Inactive), institutions are not interested in, or working on EDI. At the highest level (5 or Best Practice), institutions have woven EDI into every fabric of their institutions and can demonstrate measureable results. They become pioneers and models for others.

Although some areas of our college have not intentionally or strategically identified or begun their equity work, overall, we are not inactive. There are some areas where we do not even meet compliance, and those should be addressed and supported immediately. For the most part, our college is implementing practices and policies that advance equity beyond legal obligations, and toward valuing equity, diversity, and inclusion as a whole. Though conversations with assessment participants indicate that TCC has employees and areas that are committed to equity beyond compliance, we have not yet implemented institutional processes that qualify to describe our efforts as systemic. Even though we are approaching level 3, TCC's current status on the EDI benchmark is level 2. A critical difference between levels 2 and 3 is a planned, methodical, and collective effort. We are not at the point where we work toward efforts in a concerted way, track
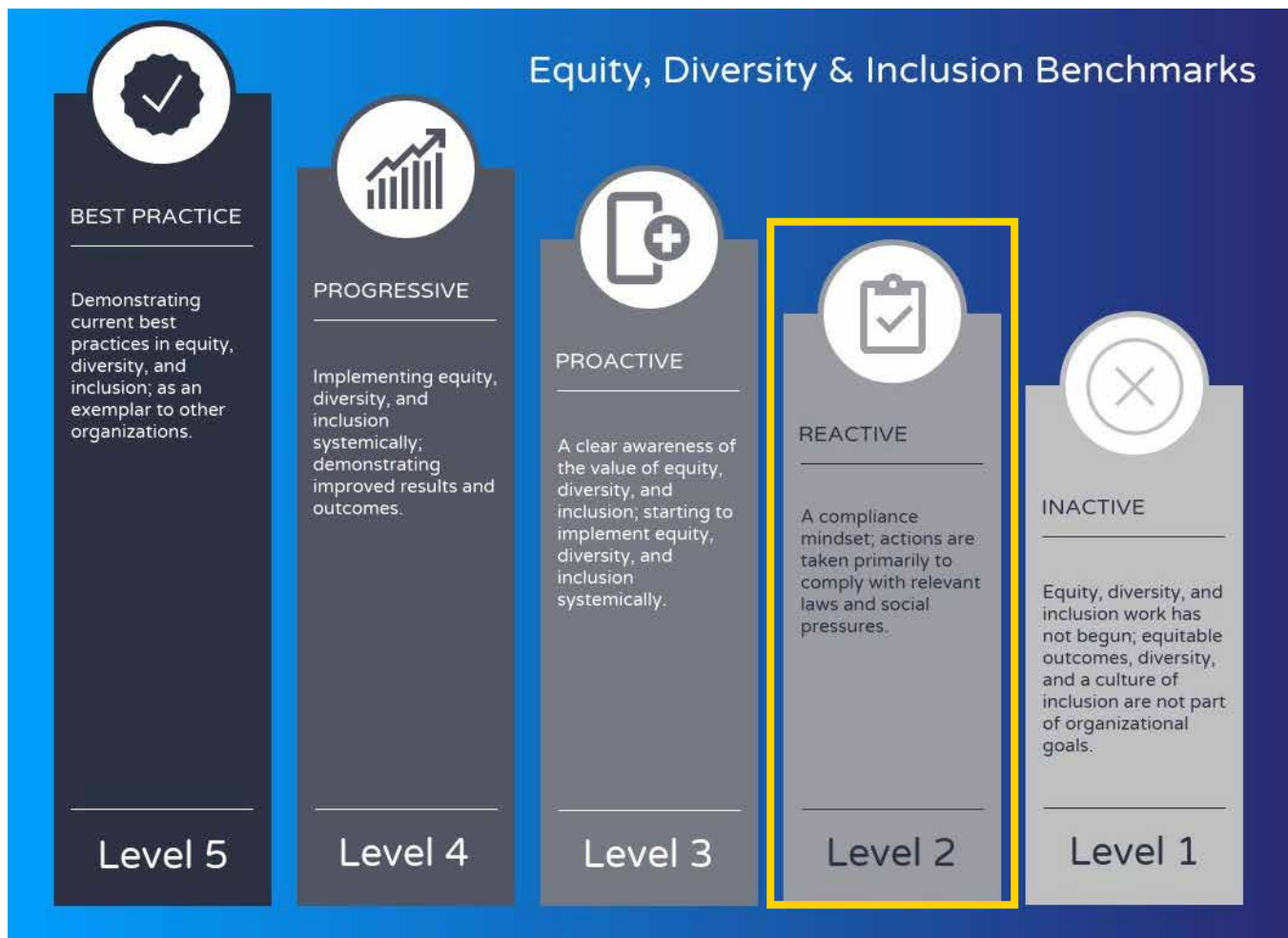

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Benchmarks

BEST PRACTICE

Demonstrating current best practices in equity, diversity, and inclusion; as an exemplar to other organizations.

Level 5

PROGRESSIVE

Implementing equity, diversity, and inclusion systemically; demonstrating improved results and outcomes.

Level 4

PROACTIVE

A clear awareness of the value of equity, diversity, and inclusion; starting to implement equity, diversity, and inclusion systemically.

Level 3

REACTIVE

A compliance mindset; actions are taken primarily to comply with relevant laws and social pressures.

Level 2

INACTIVE

Equity, diversity, and inclusion work has not begun; equitable outcomes, diversity, and a culture of inclusion are not part of organizational goals.

Level 1

Figure 1. TCC's Identification on an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Benchmark

those efforts and our progress. Our goal is to begin working systemically so that we can move toward eventually achieving level 5.

The information within this report can be used to provide insights for advancing our EDI efforts to higher levels. Next steps should include creating a culture around EDI, institutional goals, as well as implementing systemic efforts to achieve them. I offer three recommendations below:

1   CREATE AN EDI CULTURE

Develop and implement a multi-year, comprehensive, professional learning of equity based best practices that are institutional and also area specific for all staff to help educate the campus on the shared definition for equity, the case for equity (or the why), and to equip employees.

2   IDENTIFY AND ADOPT INSTITUTIONAL EDI GOALS

The overall goal is not to eliminate individual and unique unit efforts, but to additionally create *shared* strategic EDI efforts. TCC's EDI efforts should be driven and measured by other college-wide initiatives such as our Strategic Plan and Guided Pathways efforts.

The Strategic Plan's first core theme is equity. Using the Strategic Plan, this report identifies college-wide EDI goals. While all of the objectives are important, selecting a few that the entire campus will work on simultaneously, can assist in ensuring that the college is working on and advancing the same outcomes cohesively and strategically. The recommended objectives (as well as their respective theme and goals) that TCC should focus on for at least the next academic year (2020-2021) are listed below:

Core Theme 1:
Advancing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Goal 1: We are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion by ensuring that our campus reflects our community.

Objective 1: Increase and foster the diversity of our students, staff, and faculty.

Goal 2: We promote institutional responsibility, awareness, and direction action to dismantle systems of oppression.

Objective 1: Develop a shared understanding and common language that reflects our commitment to highlighting disrupting, and ending systems of oppression.

The objectives above were chosen because of the many respondents (including the President) who identified these as foci. The suggested focus does not preclude units from working on EDI efforts outside of those listed above, but does ensure that TCC, collectively, will be engaged in the same concerted efforts. It also provides clear direction that should be reflected in each unit's Strategic Planning Yearly Documentation (SPY-D).

Each unit can create (or continue with) their own sub-goals that contribute to the college-wide adopted EDI indicators. This structure allows individual units the flexibility in determining strengths in their area, the functions and foci of their jobs, and the opportunity gaps that respective areas can address to contribute to college-wide efforts. Taken together, these efforts should contribute toward the collective achievement of core theme, goals, and objectives listed above. These objectives were also selected because of their patterned occurrence in assessment responses. TCC can collectively assess our progress on objectives at the end of the academic year, and determine our systemic effort for the subsequent academic year.

3 CREATE SYSTEMIC EFFORTS AND DOCUMENTATION

Units should operationalize the three indicators, specific to their areas. College areas should also identify how they will measure progress, and who will be responsible for tracking progress. To address the role of physical resources (e.g., technology, time) in impeding EDI efforts, units should also take this time to identify and prioritize the resources needed to achieve equitable unit based outcomes. This information should be considered during the budget process.

Progress will be tracked and reported to the President and our campus community on a quarterly and annual basis. The deployment of metrics and allocation of clear responsibility will help us to improve our culturally responsive programming/curriculum.

Our first couple of reports may demonstrate a number of gaps or a lack of tracking; and that is acceptable. This effort is about starting the work cohesively. I invite the high expectations, as long as they are accompanied by high collective effort and support.

TCC recently faced some difficult challenges—the power outage and the on-going COVID-19 crisis. The collaboration and ingenuity our campus community has demonstrated during these times should be acknowledged and celebrated. It should also serve as a source of encouragement. These situations have revealed that we know how to think about and design for the most vulnerable. Equity means that people are disproportionately affected by the same circumstance (e.g., certain groups were more likely to lose their jobs, others were at greater health risk), so we do more for them. It means that when empirical evidence or a blueprint does not exist, we take responsible and informed risks, even if we are not sure it will work. It means that we operate with high trust, and also with equal measures of patience and grace. It means we act.

Equity can be hard, because it is not the default mode of operation, yet these recent circumstances demonstrate that we are a dynamic and outstanding team. We can rise to the challenge and serve as models to our peer institutions. We are Titan-strong.

APPENDIX A: ASSESSMENT TEMPLATE

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Department	Individual/Job Title		Date
Tell me about your area.			
Would you say that your area is committed to inclusive excellence?	☐ Yes	☐ Somewhat	☐ No
What are the top one to three EDI-related outcomes that your area is focused on?			
What are some examples of equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts in your area?			
Thinking about your area, what factors impede your EDI efforts?			
How do you/will you assess the impact of current EDI efforts?			
What is the difference between "X" initiative that is going well and "X" initiative that is flailing?			
In regard to EDI outcomes, what is different about where we were 3 years ago, and where we are today?			
Does your area have any promising practices that we should be looking to scale up?			
Anything else you would like me to know or think about?			

APPENDIX B: LIST OF INDIVIDUALS BY AREA

AREA	INDIVIDUAL	POSITION
Office of the President	Ivan Harrell, II	President
Academic Affairs	Marissa Schlesinger	Provost
Library	Candice Watkins	Director
Health Information Management & Baccalaureate Programs	Charlene Gore	Faculty
eLearning	Christopher Soran	Director
Nursing	Julie Benson	Associate Dean
Instruction / Health, Business & Professional Services	Krista Fox	Vice President / Dean
Workforce Education	Kelli Johnston	Director
Math, Science, & Engineering	Katie Gulliford	Dean
Communication & Transitional Studies	Kim Ward-Flack	Dean
Gig Harbor Campus & Continuing Education Division	Olga Inglebritson	Dean
MESA	Sharon Rivera	Director
Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	John Falskow	Dean
Physics & Curriculum Committee	Phil Hunter	Faculty
Student Affairs	Jennifer Fountain	Vice President
	Patrick Brown	Vice President
Financial Literacy	Austin Keever	Financial Literacy Navigator
Running Start	Christy Perotti	Director
Athletics	Jason Prenovost	Director
International Programs	James Newman	Executive Director
Financial Aid & Veterans Services	Kim Matison	Director
Access Services	Monica Olsson	Manager
Career Center	Natalie Wilkerson	Career Center Coordinator
Adult Basic Education	Rebecca Jayasundara	Director
Student Engagement & Conference Services	Sonja Morgan	Director
Fresh Start	Stephanie Rock	Program Coordinator
Entry Services	Christina Nakada-Alm	Director
Community Standards	Delores Haugen	Director
Counseling	Kathy Brown	Counselor
Early Learning Center	Renee Hernandez-Greenfield	Program Director
CASA/MECA	Shirley Siloi	Equity Navigator
	TJ Caughell	Retention Coordinator
Organizational Learning & Effectiveness	Analea Brauburger	Dean
Institutional Research	Kelley Sadler	Program Director
	Victoria Ichungwa	Sr. Research Analyst
Organizational Learning	Melisa Ziegler	Coordinator
Grants	Walter Chien	Grants Manager
Curriculum Assessment	Amunoo Tembo	Coordinator
Organizational Learning	Kristen Lawson	Administrative Assistant
College Advancement	Bill Ryberg	Vice President
Marketing & Communications	Tamyra Howser	Director
Administrative Services	Lon Whitaker	Vice President
Information Technology	Clay Krauss	Director
Human Resources	Stephen Smith	Executive Director
Campus Public Safety	Will Howard	Supervisor