



Inventory of Institutional Policies & Practices for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at North Carolina Community Colleges

Submitted June 30, 2021, to Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The following recommendations reflect findings from interviews and focus groups with students, staff, faculty, and administrators at a representative sample of 12 North Carolina community colleges. Participants were asked about both *barriers* to DEI and to successful student outcomes and about *promising practices* for better supporting historically underserved students of color, along each point in the student pathway. Institutional representatives who participated in interviews and focus groups were largely more comfortable talking about effective practices rather than about policies in terms of DEI and supporting historically underserved students of color. The items below reflect the participants' concerns, needs, and examples of promising practices. Where possible, recommendations focus on institutional policies, but practices are also included.

Note that, while not all of these recommendations are specific to students of color, all are based on challenges raised found to be common among populations underrepresented because of historical or systemic bias and exclusion. For example, much of the feedback we received is related to first-generation students or students from low-income backgrounds, and due to the intersectionality of students of color with these other groups, relevant information is included to support students with these backgrounds.

DEI-specific

- Assemble a representative **DEI committee** to develop and monitor strategic DEI goals using data-based evidence.
- **Disaggregate student data** at each point in the student experience, from program entry to completion, to identify roadblocks and sort them by student characteristics, while pursuing corresponding strategies to increase success of students underrepresented because of past and contemporary system exclusion.
- Collaborate across campus to craft **responses to social justice movements**, in order to increase inclusiveness for students of color.
- Increase awareness of **DEI training** for staff and faculty (including trainings offered by the North Carolina Student Success Center) to increase institutional commitment to, awareness and prioritization of DEI. Consider making training mandatory or providing incentives for participation, since employees are often unaware of DEI concerns or implicit biases prior to training.
- Encourage campus-wide, **facilitated discussions focused on DEI** with students, staff, and faculty.

- **Review institutional and departmental policies** for any instances of racial and ethnic bias, to ensure that students are not singled out or adversely affected because of their race or ethnicity; for example, if a nursing program has requirements related to a student’s appearance, those requirements should not be tied to a person’s race.
- **Review HR policies and strategies** to increase the number of faculty and staff – both support staff and senior administrators – who reflect the racial makeup of the student population, such as diverse hiring committees and revised eligibility criteria. Review the literature for promising practices in diverse hiring and consider partnerships with HBCUs to increase the pipeline.
- **Advocate to change state policies** that work against historically underserved and excluded students, such as the Residency Determination Service (RDS) and restrictions placed on undocumented/DACA students.

DEI-specific

Outreach

- **When hiring outreach staff, add “prefer bilingual” to job descriptions** to help ensure new hires can communicate with prospective students’ families, since Spanish-speaking and other non-native-English speaking populations may feel more comfortable interacting with college staff and asking questions in their primary language.
- **Require DEI training for recruiters** and other staff conducting outreach efforts and interfacing with the community so that they are cognizant of implicit biases and cultural norms when approaching underserved populations in the community.
- **Make promotional materials relatable** by using with pictures of students who reflect the demographic composition of the college and by making materials available in Spanish and other common languages.
- **Do outreach to lower economic health zones** through community centers, libraries, and other common gathering locations, and equip recruiters with training and information about Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and scholarship opportunities.

Application

- **Provide application outreach** to communities that lack broadband internet access; colleges have moved their applications online, but populations without internet access or

access to computers require in-person assistance to complete their applications, either on campus or in the communities.

- **Provide RDS assistance**, particularly for older populations and other prospective students in special situations who may not have access to the needed documentation; make this assistance widely known and visible across platforms and materials.
- **Advise undocumented students about program certifications** prior to registration, to ensure these students do not register for programs that lead to state certification for which they are ineligible.
- **Offer translations** in Spanish and other common languages for both the application and financial aid, and provide information sessions in these languages to maximize access.
- **Review the application process for ways to streamline it.** Ensure that only necessary information and documentation are being requested, and that language is simple and straightforward.

Financial Aid

- **Ensure at least one bilingual staff member** or work-study student is available to assist non-English-speaking families with the financial aid and application processes.
- **Increase FAFSA and scholarship awareness** by offering FAFSA and scholarship information sessions to the community. Make information about emergency aid visible in multiple platforms. Provide training sessions to all staff and faculty about FAFSA and scholarship availability, so they can refer students in need. Require advisors to provide information about FAFSA in initial meetings with students and equip advisors with information about emergency aid for subsequent meetings.
- **Provide scholarships for undocumented students** who are ineligible for in-state tuition or federal financial aid.
- **Consider offering the option for payment plans** to students who do not have the cash on hand to pay full tuition or remaining expenses at the start of the semester.
- **Increase awareness of scholarships** including emergency funds and scholarships for students of color by equipping advisors and faculty with information about these resources and presenting this information at new student orientations.

Enrollment

Registration

- **Provide clear course descriptions.** Eliminate or explain complicated terms and acronyms that might not be understood by students or academic advisors.
- **Set a timeline for the completion of gateway courses,** for example within the first 30 credits, to ensure that students do not delay taking required math courses until later in their academic journey.
- **Review disaggregated program selection data** to ensure the criteria are not serving as a barriers for students of color. Consider alternative criteria that would lead to more equitable program acceptance rates and increase the diversity of students in the program.
- **Provide sufficient evening coursework** for students who work.

Advising

- **Provide clear transfer guidelines** upon or prior to registration, to set students on a pathway to meet their goals and to ensure that students do not accumulate credits that do not transfer to their desired institution or program. Provide information about transfer agreements with four-year institutions and corresponding requirements and costs.
- **Encourage enrollment in high-wage fields** for students from systemically excluded populations through targeted scholarships and support. Embed career guidance in early advising and use labor market data to help students understand the short- and long-term career trajectories associated with different programs of study.
- **Be aware of life situations when recommending course loads.** While it may seem ideal for students to enroll in 15 courses per semester to stay on track for degree completion, doing so may have unintended consequences for students with work and family demands; a full load may cause these students to drop out.

Prior learning assessment (PLA)

- **Explore the possibility of PLA policies** that facilitate internal transfer between noncredit and credit coursework.

Persistence

Advising

- **Require meetings with advisors** prior to registration each semester, to ensure that students are staying on track for their program or pathway, and to address any concerns the student may have. Do not expect students to seek out help, particularly those who are the first in their families to attend colleges. Be proactive and intrusive with support.
- **Train staff and faculty to provide referrals** for any assistance students may need, whether related to do with academic, financial, or personal barriers. Ensure that staff and faculty are equipped with information about existing services, such as counseling, food pantries, and financial aid.
- **Follow through on early alerts** to make sure students received appropriate assistance; clearly identify the appropriate staff for follow through.

Instruction

- **Review curricula and syllabi** for equity and inclusiveness of course content. Consider training faculty in culturally responsive teaching pedagogy.
- **Include instructional components in online coursework**, particularly introductory courses, whether synchronous or asynchronous. First-year students, particularly from populations such as first-generation college-goers, need instructional guidance and assistance completing self-guided coursework.
- **Train faculty to engage with students online** to enhance the experience.

Support

- **Identify outside funding to continue minority programming** such as success coaches; consider expanding to reach additional groups of students underrepresented through systemic bias. Funding sources may include local foundations, the college foundation, or student fees. Advocate for state funding to continue these programs.
- **Identify successful on-campus support models** such as the honors program or dual enrollment support; consider expanding effective supports to all students.
- **Increase awareness of support**, including tutoring and counseling. Consider a one-stop model to provide students with referrals in one central location.
- **Consider offering** a food pantry and clothing closet; laptop and hot-spot loans, and funds or referrals for transportation and childcare.

Campus engagement

- **Encourage students to establish clubs and activities** around cultural interests. Explore freedom of speech and freedom of assembly policies to ensure that student groups can meet. Provide clear guidelines.

Attendance/withdrawal policy

- **Revisit Satisfactory Academic Progress policies** with the needs of historically underserved students in mind. For example, reconsider the threshold for withdrawal based on attendance. Consider student life situations such as family and work demands, and the subsequent financial aid implications of withdrawals.

Transfer

- **Consider offering a transfer-specific center** or other transfer-specific assistance and resources on campus, including office hours for four-year representatives.
- **Ensure that students learn about transfer pathways early**, upon, or prior to initial enrollment.
- **Develop partnerships with four-year institutions** that go beyond articulation agreements to also provide cost savings and faculty collaboration.

Completion

- **Eliminate the need for a graduation application**, a requirement that is often unknown to students and a roadblock to completion. If an application is required for participation in a graduation ceremony, make the application visible and widely accessible.
- **Utilize existing NC tools such as Finish First** to identify students near completion and those who may have already completed a degree.

Workforce

- **Ensure that students are aware** of internship, apprenticeship, and campus employment opportunities.
- **Explore community partnerships** to offer paid work-based learning opportunities and internships.
- **Collaborate with local employers** to develop programs that meet workforce and community needs.

Attrition

Credit expiration

- **Revisit the policy for credit expiration** to consider students' experiences and the time it may take to complete a degree when taking personal circumstances into consideration. Consider extending the number of years before credits expire, and/or increase the availability of waivers.

Past due balances

- **Advocate for changing the state policy** of not allowing students with past due balances to register; this disproportionately affects impacts students of color and also limits their ability to transfer, provide transcripts for jobs, or register for professional development courses. Identify funding sources to pay off balances, particularly those under \$50.