

PATHWAYS TO RESULTS

Implementation Partnerships
Strategy Brief

SEPTEMBER 2021

Office of Community College Research and Leadership

Program Review as an Opportunity to Drive Anti-Racist Change

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As the more recent iterations of the Program Review manual to guide the five-year program review process for Illinois community colleges asks institutions to disaggregate data toward identifying equity gaps, the process provides Illinois community colleges with an opportunity to utilize the review as a vehicle to implement anti-racist change.

Within the context of career and technical education (CTE) programs of study, the state Perkins V plan identifies equity as a central tenet and encourages colleges to move beyond the race-neutrality of identified special populations to include “others who have been or are marginalized by education and workforce systems” (Illinois State Board of Education & Illinois Community College Board, 2020, p. 5).

Even outside of the context of CTE and Perkins V, the program review templates can facilitate the examination of disaggregated data, identification of racial equity gaps, and commitment to systemic change across programs, academic disciplines, and departments within a single institutional context. In Illinois, historical and systemic racism has especially impacted opportunities for Black and Latinx students to access and complete a postsecondary credential (Partnership for College Completion, 2021a). With over half of K-12 students in



Illinois identifying as members of racially minoritized groups (ISBE, 2021), industries and educational institutions in Illinois will not prosper without truly becoming anti-racist.

Notable author, professor, and founder of Boston University's Center for AntiRacist Research, Ibram X. Kendi (2019) has described an anti-racist person as "**one who is expressing the idea that racial groups are equals and none needs developing, and is supporting policy that reduces racial inequity**" (p. 24). Within the context of the program review process at a specific community college, this would mean identifying and changing those policies or practices that are causing racial disparities at the program, discipline, department, or institutional level. Approaching the program review process with intentionality to disrupt racial inequities in student outcomes requires equity consciousness defined as "**the mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who are willing to assess their own racialized assumptions to acknowledge their lack of knowledge in the history of race and racism, to take responsibility for the success of historically underserved and minoritized student groups, and to critically assess racialization in their own practices as educators and/or administrators**" (McNair, Bensimon, Malcom-Piqueux, 2020, p. 20)." Adopting an equity-conscious lens that meets this definition in the program review process can move institutions toward the implementation of anti-racist change, with the goal of examining current systems to understand how unequal power structures affect racially minoritized people (Georges, Jr. & Bourne, 2021).

Therefore, an anti-racist program review team will not only identify racial equity gaps in the data, but will take responsibility for identifying, naming, and addressing through action the root causes for these gaps. An anti-racist program review team will openly discuss why it is problematic to have so few (or zero) racially minoritized students, faculty, staff, and employers at the figurative and literal table; hold their colleagues and partners accountable for making systemic change; name race and resist terms that seek to remain neutral and color-evasive; know the history of exclusionary and racist practices in the district and how that manifested into the equity gaps evident in their current data;

and will have done the work on an individual and interpersonal level to understand how to contribute effectively to institutional and systemic change. An anti-racist program review process would answer the call from Welton, Owens, and Zamani-Gallaher (2018) to move institutions from hosting workshops centered on diversity to actually making anti-racist change by 1) understanding the racialized context of programs and departments and 2) committing to the implementation of change to close racial equity gaps.

While the Perkins V plan centers on CTE, across the provided templates for program review are opportunities to reflect on the extent to which programs, disciplines, and/or departments are meeting the needs of racially minoritized students in a specific community college district. Informed by the definitions of anti-racism as cited by Welton et al. (2018), an anti-racist program review process would consider how the individuals involved in the review are utilizing it as a tool to confront racism in the context of the identified program of study, discipline, service, or department. Young and Laible (2000) define anti-racism through three central characteristics:

- 1) Focus on white racial dominance
- 2) Understanding how it works throughout our society
- 3) Taking action against white racism

Racism is multidimensional and occurs at the personal (or individual), interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels (Suarez, 2018). The examples below will illustrate opportunities inherent within the program review process to address these levels with intentionality toward closing racial equity gaps and leading anti-racist change.

Personal (Individual) Level

- Provide ongoing training opportunities for faculty and staff to understand and interrogate implicit bias

Interpersonal Level

- Engage with racially minoritized students at your institution or in your district toward understanding the racial campus climate and the influence of this on your own program

of study, service, discipline, or ability in the department to serve students equitably

Institutional Level

- Identify and change the underlying policies and practices within the purview of your program of study, service, discipline, or department that have a disproportionate negative impact on racially minoritized students, thus reinforcing existing inequities

Structural Level

- Initiate a race-conscious partnership that engages multiple stakeholders to close opportunity gaps for racially minoritized students in a high-wage, high-demand field in your district

In the summer of 2020, many institutions issued statements in support of racial justice following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, but they have encountered challenges in translating these statements into action steps (Wesley, Dunlap, & Russell, 2021). In Illinois, numerous colleges and universities have written equity plans as part of the Illinois Equity in Attainment Initiative (Partnership for College Completion, 2021b). The program review process, guided by the equity-centered templates that have been created by the Illinois Community

College Board (ICCB), offer an opportunity to put these statements and equity plans into action at the program, discipline, or department level. Furthermore, the process advances the type of data assessment and pedagogical changes that are critical to advancing anti-racist change in higher education but can be the most challenging and least often pursued actions (Wesley et al., 2021). Scaling and then sustaining anti-racist change are not the jobs of one person on campus; such efforts are made possible by collaborative partnerships between stakeholder groups (Wesley et al., 2021). Thus, a program review team creates an ideal environment to move toward meaningful anti-racist change.

In conclusion, the utilization of program review as an opportunity to implement anti-racist change at your institution can serve to overcome the shortcomings noted by Welton et al. (2018) of institutions claiming to be committed to addressing racial equity gaps but failing to demonstrate actionable steps and outcomes toward this goal. These shortcomings are evidenced by reactionary responses, succumbing to pushback from white stakeholders, overreliance on a single leader to produce change, and a lack of accountability (Welton et al., 2018). Committing to an anti-racist approach at the beginning of a program review process is an opportunity to be proactive, intentional, and demonstrate shared commitment and leadership toward continuous improvement that prioritizes success for racially minoritized and historically excluded students.

Resources

- Addressing Anti-Blackness in Higher Education: Implications for Educators and Institutions, The Center for Organizational Responsibility and Advancement (CORA) featuring Peralta Community College (webinar).
- [*Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence: A Campus Guide for Self-Study and Planning*](#), Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- [*Developing a Practice of Equity Minded Indicators*](#), Center for Urban Education.
- [*Community Colleges for All \(CC-ALL\)*](#), Office of Community College Research and Leadership (video vignettes and podcasts).
- [*Knowing Our Students, Understanding & Designing for Success: A Guidebook for Institutional Leaders*](#), Achieving the Dream

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Office of Community College
Research and Leadership

This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Illinois Community College Board (Grant Number: D5355).
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