Chapter 2
Building an Equity-Minded Campus Culture

What Is Equity?

Over the past 20 years, the Center for Urban Education at the Rossier School of Education in the University of Southern California has worked with hundreds of colleges and university systems in the implementation of the Equity Scorecard, an organizational-learning and critical-action research process designed for use in colleges and universities (see Center for Urban Education 2019). Its purpose is to produce equity in educational outcomes for racial and ethnic groups that have been subject to oppression and colonization. Evidence teams made up of faculty, student affairs professionals, and administrators conduct action research using data reflecting the status of racial and ethnic equity in access, retention, completion, and participation in opportunities that build students' social capital

From Equity Talk to Equity Walk: Expanding Practitioner Knowledge for Racial Justice in Higher Education, First Edition.
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(e.g., undergraduate research). By observing campus teams as they conducted inquiries of racial inequity (for descriptions of inquiry methods and tools, see Dowd and Bensimon 2015; Bensimon 2007; and the Center for Urban Education website, https://cue.usc.edu), we have identified obstacles that derail institutions' efforts to remedy racial inequity. To counteract these obstacles, the Center for Urban Education coined the term *equity-mindedness* to refer to 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.

Not that long ago, the word *equity,* particularly when coupled with race, was viewed by leaders, policy makers, and even philanthropic organizations with apprehension and as potentially divisive. For some, the word conjured images of the activism associated with social justice movements (Bensimon 2018). But now the word *equity* is widely accepted and seems to be as commonplace as *diversity*. One of the motivations for this book is to bring clarity to the meaning of equity and protect it from trivialization and losing its power to shine a light on institutionalized racism.

To bring clarity, we consider simple questions like: What does "equity" mean? Equity for whom? What does it entail in thought and action? What does it mean to perform equity as a routine practice in higher education? And, most importantly, what makes individuals equity-minded? Our intent is to elaborate on these questions from a critical understanding of racial equity premised on the following principles:

- Equity is a means of corrective justice (McPherson 2015) for the educational debt (Ladson-Billings 2006) owed to the descendants of enslaved people and other minoritized populations willfully excluded from higher education.

- Equity is an antiracist project to confront overt and covert racism embedded in institutional structures, policies, and practices (Pollock 2009).
- Equity lets practitioners see whiteness as a norm that operates, unperceived, through structures, policies, and practices that racialize the culture and outcomes of higher education institutions.

These principles are fundamental to the project of racial equity in higher education and demonstrate why it is necessary to adopt a critical race stance toward equity. These three principles allow us to understand why, despite our best intentions to be equitable toward all students, our ways of "doing" higher education continue to produce racial inequality in educational outcomes. And they also illuminate the human and structural obstacles that block the path toward racial equity and the responses that equity-minded practitioners can make to overcome them.

Obstacles Blocking the Path Toward Racial Equity

Equity-minded practitioners do not blame students for their lack of success (a deficit-minded approach), nor do they rely on racial stereotypes or biases to justify or disregard inequitable outcomes. Equity-minded practitioners accept that race and racism are endemic in higher education. In this section, we describe obstacles to making campuses more equitable and provide equity-minded counterexamples.

Obstacle 1 Claiming to Not See Race

The math department chair at Anywhere College notices that a large number of African American and Latinx students who are placed in the department's basic skills math course do not proceed to credit-level math courses. She

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> *provides the data at a department meeting for discussion. One faculty member says, "This has nothing to do with race." Others say, "I teach students. I don't care whether they are white, black, or purple," or, "Maybe these students are not predisposed to doing well in mathematics."*

In the example above, the presentation of disaggregated data by race and ethnicity to raise awareness of racial inequities is met with defensive claims that reject the possibility that race and racism are causes. When individuals claim to not see race, they are actually protecting their professional identity and their feelings of efficacy. They are also protecting themselves from being viewed as racist.

- Saying "this has nothing to do with race" shows a lack of awareness of the ways in which race may play out in the math classroom. For example, the faculty member may not realize that he never interacts with students who are Black or Latinx or that these students rarely participate in class. The faculty member is unable to see or understand the ways in which race plays out in higher education generally and how it plays out in mathematics more specifically.
- Saying "I don't care whether they are white, black, or purple" is a claim of color-blindness as if it were a virtue. The individual who refuses to see that a student is Black, white, Latinx, or Native American is essentially refusing to see the student.
- Saying "these students are not predisposed to doing well in mathematics" is claiming to not see race while

stereotyping minoritized students as not having what it takes to do mathematics.

Equity-Minded Response: Understanding Race Critically

The math department chair at Anywhere College notices that a large number of African American and Latinx students who are placed in the department's basic skills math course do not proceed to credit-level math courses. She rejects the explanation that such students are simply not interested in math. She also recognizes that instructors may not be aware of these patterns of enrollment and may not be trained in culturally inclusive pedagogic practices. To build awareness and to provide training to math faculty, the chair holds monthly brown-bag lunch gatherings to discuss articles and book chapters related to race and math education. Once her faculty are more comfortable talking about race, the math department chair plans on having individual meetings with each instructor, when she will share disaggregated course success rates and discuss self-assessment strategies to help instructors better understand what aspects of their pedagogy might be changed to help ensure equitable outcomes.

Confronting claims of not seeing race requires a critical understanding of race. The math chair in this example sees race critically in several ways:

- By noticing who (by race and ethnicity, Black and Latinx) is failing in the math pathway
- By rejecting the stereotypical explanation that Black and Latinx students are not interested in math
- By considering that faculty may lack the expertise to help Black and Latinx students be successful

Obstacle 2 Not Being Able or Willing to Notice Racialized Consequences

A philosophy instructor at a Hispanic-serving institution generally focuses on canonized Western authors but decides to devote a class day to the work of Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. The animated response her work generates among the Latina students surprises him. However, he decides to drop her readings from the course because they do not "fit" with the rest of the curriculum. The writing style violates the rules of academic writing. He feels it is more important to teach the canon than try to be inclusive.

- In this scenario, the instructor takes notice of the Latina students' animated response to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, but it does not move him to self-reflection on his syllabus and teaching practices.
- The instructor falls back on traditional conceptions of how to teach Western philosophy and does not consider alternatives or ways of connecting philosophy to students' knowledge and lives.

Equity-Minded Response: Self-Change in Response to Racialized Consequences

A philosophy instructor at a Hispanic-serving institution generally focuses on canonized Western authors but decides to devote a class day to the work of Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa. The animated response her work generates among the Latina students surprises him. He experiments with incorporating other diverse authors in the curriculum and finds that the class responds positively when exposed to a spectrum of perspectives. The philosophy instructor realizes, in the course of this experimentation, that he almost allowed an inaccurate stereotype about Latinas to justify his use of ineffective classroom practices.

Equity-minded individuals understand that presumptions about cultural predispositions, capacities, abilities, and ambitions are often incomplete or inaccurate. Such practitioners are careful not to employ such presumptions when examining inequities in educational outcomes. They are also aware that their practices, even if they view them as race-neutral, can disadvantage minoritized students (Dowd and Bensimon 2015).

- In this scenario, the instructor takes notice of how Latina students respond to material that speaks to their experience, and he builds on his new awareness to change his syllabus.
- The instructor shows awareness that his initial interpretation of Latina students' silence is based on cultural and racialized stereotypes.

Obstacle 3 Skirting Around Race

*Members of the Equity Scorecard team generally avoided naming specific racial groups (*e.g.*, black, Latino, Asian, white), opting instead to use the ambiguous term "diverse faculty." While we certainly recognize that there are multiple forms of diversity, the institutional data on faculty hiring and retention illustrate that a primary challenge centers on recruiting, hiring, and retaining African American, Latina/o, and Native American faculty members. This challenge will be difficult to address if the team does not develop comfort engaging in "racetalk."*

(Bensimon, 2015)

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Skirting around race is a reluctance to talk about race in a clear and direct manner, a phenomenon that applies to scholars as well as leaders and practitioners (Harper 2012). In the example above, an excerpt from a memo written to a vice president of a campus implementing the Center for Urban Education's Equity Scorecard, Estela Bensimon called attention to the use of ambiguous language as a substitute for identifying racial and ethnic groups.

Equity-Minded Response: Saying "No" to Racially Coded Language

Leaders at the college referenced above were highly motivated to address racial inequities; nevertheless, they had to unlearn discursive tactics to talk about race without actually talking about it (Pollock 2009).

Equity-minded individuals avoid racially coded (DiAngelo 2011) language such as *at-risk, minority, low-performing, URMs (underrepresented minorities), nonwhite,* or *better-served,* all of which are racialized labels to refer to students who are not North American whites without actually naming them. Equity-minded individuals humanize minoritized students as African American, Latinx, Native American, Hawaiian, Vietnamese, etc. They also understand that lumping all minoritized populations into a single category is another way of avoiding honest race talk.

In a 2016 essay "The Misbegotten URM as a Data Point," Estela Bensimon argued that the use of "underrepresented minorities" dehumanizes the communities it describes:

> *URM is degrading and dehumanizing because it divests racial and ethnic groups of the hard-won right to name themselves and assert their own identity. The movement to be "Black" rather than "Negro" was a political act of*

> *self-affirmation and agency. It was an act of rebellion and appropriation. "Black" is not simply about color or race; it represents a historical moment of liberation symbolized by Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and intellectual uprisings as symbolized by the writings of Cornel West, bell hooks, Henry Louis Gates, and many more. The emergence of "black" in higher education was an assertion of the right to be present without giving up identity as evidenced in the birth of Black Student Organizations and Black Study programs and departments. Similarly, those grouped within the Hispanic label wanted to acknowledge their nationhood, their indigenous roots, and their connection to usurped lands.*
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> *(p. 5)*

We recognize that talking about race can be uncomfortable; however, getting in the habit of avoiding euphemisms or racially coded language and using specific terms can signal to others on campus or elsewhere that it is important and necessary to view racial equity as an indicator of institutional effectiveness that must be continuously discussed and monitored. This requires specificity and detail. For example, instead of saying "diverse faculty members or students," name the racial/ethnic groups whose outcomes reflect the attainment of equity and the groups for which the institution needs to perform better. If others use euphemistic terms like *diverse students* or *underrepresented groups,* say to them, "When you mention 'diverse students,' who are you thinking about specifically?" Presidents, vice presidents, deans, and department chairs who probe for clarification can model equity-mindedness and encourage straight race talk.

The colleges that participated in the Committing to Equity and Inclusive Excellence project of the Association of American Colleges and Universities did so voluntarily.

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Their genuine concern and motivation to do better for minoritized students was obvious. One lesson learned from this project is that commitment to bring about change is essential, but it does not guarantee against the use of racially coded language. For example, in their final reports, we noticed that some campuses resorted to racially coded language or ignored race altogether. The inclination toward avoiding direct race talk shows that "not talking about race" is the prevailing norm within higher education, and it will require consistent reinforcement and self-correction to make race-consciousness the preferred norm.

In response to the project's final reports, Bensimon (2018) noted that the word *equity* was included in all of the campuses' reports but often was left undefined and unconnected to racial justice. She made the following recommendations to assist the development of expertise and comfort with race talk among the participants (AAC&U 2018, pp. 53–54).

- To safeguard equity from being trivialized, it needs to be defined very specifically at the level of populations (e.g., black students, Latinx faculty, or black, Latinx, and Native American leaders and trustees) and at the level of outcomes (e.g., admissions, participation in high-impact practices, degree attainment in STEM, transfer from community colleges to highly selective four-year colleges, faculty hiring).
- Adopting a definition of equity that is centered on racial justice does not preclude adopting definitions of other kinds of equity related to gender, income, or sexual orientation; however, these other forms of equity need to be treated separately because inequities based on race

and ethnicity originate from unique historical, sociocultural, and sociopolitical circumstances, including enslavement, colonization, appropriation of territories, and linguistic hegemony.
- Say no to euphemistic language. To achieve racial equity, it is necessary to clarify and identify who is experiencing equity and inequity. Racially coded language can render racial stratification invisible, and it abets skirting around race.

Obstacle 4 Resisting Calls to Disaggregate Data by Race and Ethnicity

The director of institutional research at a very large, public, multi-campus university system insisted on aggregating Latinx, black, and Native American students into the all-encompassing category of URMs and everyone else into the category of non-URMs. He felt that, at the system level, it was important to have simple metrics and data reporting formats that would not be too cumbersome for busy leaders and board members. He felt that disaggregating data into separate racial/ethnic groups would introduce unnecessary complexity that would dissuade leaders and board members from examining the data. Additionally, the URM category made the system's progress toward closing equity gaps appear more favorable. He reasoned that the individual campuses could disaggregate their data if they wished.

Somewhat related to Obstacle 3, resistance to disaggregating student outcome data by race and ethnicity (e.g., lumping everyone into the URM bucket) is a very common way of hiding racialized patterns in outcomes. It is easier

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for individuals to speak about URMs than black or Latinx students specifically. It is not unusual to hear people say things like, "Our URMs are not doing so well," "URMs have a lower rate of persistence after the first year," or "Our goal is to cut the graduation gap between URMs and Non-URMs by half."

Equity-Minded Response: Resisting the Use of URM by Disaggregating Data

The director of institutional research at a campus that had employed the URM/Non-URM classification for a long time read "The Misbegotten URM as a Data Point" (Bensimon 2016) and realized the importance of making visible the identity of each group to understand their unique and different circumstances. In a memo to the president and vice presidents, she explained that as a generic designation for African Americans, Latinos and Latinas, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, URM represses the critical race questions that numeric data should elicit. To illustrate the importance of keeping each group distinct, she showed that the URM category was misleading since educational outcomes for African Americans were substantially higher than for other groups. Consequently, she said that the continued use of URM was a form of malpractice that obfuscates inequalities between specific racial and ethnic groups (Bensimon). She said, "This institution has always valued evidence that helps us self-correct. The adage 'You don't have to fix what you don't look at' (Carter et al. 2017) has never described who we are."

Obstacle 5 Substituting Race Talk with Poverty Talk

It was the first meeting of a team of 10 instructors and administrators who had been asked by the college president to lead their campus Equity Scorecard initiative. At the meeting, the group was presented with course-level data for English and math courses that showed racial gaps in which students earn a grade of C or higher. One of the team members objected to the focus on race and ethnicity. He said, "It is well established that inequality is a problem of socioeconomic status. Why are we looking at race? I am sure that we would see the same gaps for 'poor whites'."

Insisting that socioeconomic status trumps race is another form of deflecting talk about race. In *What's Race Got to Do with It*, Dowd and Bensimon (2012) shared that one of the questions they were repeatedly asked about their unremitting focus on racial equity is, "What about income?" Or they are told outright that class matters as much as or more than race. At a national conference, the vice chancellor from one of the largest southern university systems emphatically insisted that income – not race – was a more consequential matter.

There is no question that low-income students experience many barriers to higher education. But minoritized students pay a cultural tax (Dowd and Bensimon 2015) that is levied only on American minoritized students who are burdened with the legacies of educational apartheid.

It is less challenging to talk about income than to talk about race, but Lyndon B. Johnson observed that black poverty is different from white poverty (Johnson 1965). One of

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those differences is that low-income African Americans live in concentrated areas of poverty whereas low-income whites are far more spread out (Badger 2015). Racially segregated neighborhoods that are the legacy of redlining practices make it far more likely that a poor black family will live in a neighborhood where many other families are poor, too, creating what sociologists call the "double burden of poverty."

Additionally, studies show that white people are more likely to identify with low-income people because they may know someone who is low-income, or they have experienced poverty. But because whites are more likely to live separately from minoritized groups, they are far less likely to identify with people who are black, Latinx, or Native American.

Equity-Minded Response: Racial Inequality Is a Consequence of Slavery and Conquest

> *Asked by the college president why the Equity Scorecard team was focusing only on racial inequity and not income, the team leader responded, "First, race – unlike income – is visible to the eye. And whether we like it or not, we make judgments – consciously or unconsciously – based on what we see."*

We recognize and accept that race is a socially constructed category. However, as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva points out, race also has "social reality," meaning that "it produces real effects on the actors racialized as 'black' or 'white'" (2006). But we object to the use of such arguments to legitimate color-blindness. Reluctance to speak about race directly is often covered up with the self-righteous assertion that "I don't see race, I just see people," or with the claim (often made in a tone of superiority) that since race is not a

biological fact we should not make judgments based on it. We have come across faculty who resist examining the quality of classroom interactions between themselves and students who are not white by claiming that it is not their prerogative to assign identities to students.

Racial inequity – unlike income inequity – was born from slavery and subsequent Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation and mitigated opportunity for African Americans. It was born from genocide and land grabbing that diminished the population and territories of Native Americans, as well as out of the colonization and assimilation projects that sought to "civilize" the "savage natives" (Carter et al. 2017). And it was born from waves of Asian, Latinx, and Pacific Islander migration, some of which was sanctioned by the American government (e.g., through the Immigration Act of 1965 and asylum seeking) and some of which was not. For all people of color, racial inequity was born from policies and practices that were not designed for their benefit but for the dominant population of whites. Racial inequity was also born from policies and practices that actively sought to exclude, marginalize, and oppress people of color. As President Lyndon B. Johnson said during his 1965 commencement address at Howard University:

> But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please.
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> You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "You are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.

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> Thus, it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates.
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> This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.

Addressing racial inequity is therefore an act of justice that demands system-changing responses and explicit attention to structural inequality and institutionalized racism.

Obstacle 6 The Pervasiveness of White Privilege and Institutionalized Racism

A black woman administrator was an active participant at an institute on inclusive pedagogies in science and mathematics that included about 50 faculty members from departments across campus, all but 3 of whom were white. In sessions, the woman provided examples of ways in which black and Latinx students were subject to microaggressions in and out of the classroom. She also provided many useful and practical examples that helped the institute directors situate their content in actual situations. Before breaking for lunch, the institute directors received a message from one of the institution's vice presidents advising them that other participants had complained that the black woman was monopolizing the conversation and that the others did not feel "safe" to participate. The black woman was admonished by her supervisor for dominating the conversation. The incident silenced the three black women for the rest of the institute.

The scenario above, which is based on an actual situation experienced by CUE facilitators, depicts strategies borne out of white privilege in the following ways:

- The complaining faculty and the administrators they complained to were white.
- The white faculty, rather than saying they did not want to listen to the black woman's analysis of the racial consequences of their practices, exercised their "white privilege" to make a kind of complaint (e.g., lack of objectivity, emotional, one-sided) that is often used to silence minoritized groups.
- The complaining faculty felt the right to make their discomfort known and likely did not anticipate being ignored. No one said to them, "Don't take it so personally" or "You are being too sensitive" – responses that may have been given if the complainants were black.
- The black woman had insider knowledge about the classroom experiences of minoritized students. Her knowledge enriched the content of the institute and provided teachable opportunities for STEM faculty to learn equity-mindedness. However, her knowledge was dismissed as not objective. The black woman was an administrator, but in the eyes of STEM faculty she was not viewed as an authority.

Equity-Minded Response: Remediating Whiteness in Practices

The administrator in the scenario above, who in fact wants to create an affirming culture for racial equity, could have considered the following actions:

- The administrator could have gone to the meeting and observed the racial dynamics on her own, including

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actually counting by race and ethnicity who spoke and what they spoke about.

- The administrator could have viewed the episode as a "teaching moment" and scheduled a conversation with the complainers about white privilege, racialization, and the validity of the lived experience of people of color as a source of expertise.
- The administrator could elevate the expertise of minoritized staff members by deferring to them, asking for their opinion, and positioning them in roles of authority.

Most faculty and administrators in higher education are white, and when minoritized populations speak out on issues of race and racism they are often described as "discontent," "trouble makers," "disruptive," or "making everything about race." Hardly anyone in higher education would take issue with the desirability of increasing faculty and leadership diversity – but only as long as "diverse newcomers" do not disrupt established institutional norms, practices, and policies. In the scenario above, the black administrator was perceived by her white colleagues as violating the norms of "civil discourse" – bringing up issues that caused them discomfort or that challenged their versions of reality. She also violated academic norms that privilege faculty expertise over the expertise of staff. Most white administrators lack the knowledge, experience, or awareness to consider the incident above as a reflection of veiled racism and white privilege.

Obstacle 7 Evasive Reactions to Racist Incidents

Campus racist incidents have become far too frequent. On a regular basis, Inside Higher Ed and the Chronicle of Higher Education report stories about students engaging in "blackface" (Mangan 2019), clamoring to build the "wall" (Bauer-Wolf 2019), singing racist songs (Berrett 2015), and making all manner of racially insensitive and offensive remarks. Campus leaders often respond to such incidents by parroting the standard phrase, "These are not our values." Below is a different kind of response to such incidents.

Equity-Minded Response: Calling Attention to the Saliency of Whiteness

> *In a special meeting of the faculty and students that was prompted by a series of racist incidents, the president (a scholar of critical race studies) gave a candid speech on "whiteness" as the root cause of such incidents. He told the audience, "Despite racial integration and increased access to higher education for minoritized populations, whiteness and institutionalized racism are omnipresent in the curriculum, hiring practices, definitions of merit and quality, enrollment patterns by discipline, representation in prestige- and opportunity-enhancing programs and activities (*e.g.*, undergraduate research, honors programs), leadership, and boards of governance. Whiteness is not only present in predominantly white institutions; it is just as evident in minority-serving institutions like ours, because we, even with our very best intentions, have been socialized into an*

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> *academic culture that was borne out of the experience of white males. Even though higher education is no longer for whites and males only, their imprint lives on in our traditions as well as our definitions of collegiality, merit, and fit."*

Instead of saying that the racist incidents do not "represent our values," this president spoke candidly about "whiteness" as the condition that enables public and unabashed expression of racism. Most higher education leaders are white, and noticing the pervasiveness of whiteness is not normally expected of them. Understanding whiteness as privilege and power is not something they have been taught, and it is not a competency they are expected to demonstrate. In an interview for a higher education position, they are not likely to be asked how they guard against being blinded by white privilege.

To address racial inequity in higher education, whiteness has to be called out directly. Doing so requires a willingness to disrupt the "culture of niceness" (McIntyre 1997) and collegiality that faculty and others are expected to observe. It also requires that white colleagues do not resort to the tactics of white fragility (DiAngelo 2011) to avoid the discomfort of race talk.

In a predominantly white higher education system, the dismantlement of whiteness and institutionalized racism requires white people to feel anger, distress, and outrage with a system that unfairly advantages them (McIntosh 2019). Men, McIntosh observes, may be sympathetic to gender inequality; however, they rarely feel distressed about the unearned advantage and dominance they gain from it (McIntosh 2019). In higher education, the power to bring about change is mostly in the hands of white leaders,

trustees, and faculty. They may embrace the ideals of diversity, inclusiveness, and equity and commit to new initiatives to help "disadvantaged minorities." However, their good intentions and benevolence have not led to the dismantling of the structures and policies from which they benefit.

Below are examples, inspired by the work of Peggy McIntosh (2019), of the ways whiteness shapes the experience of white college students differently than for minoritized students.

- White students, leaders, and practitioners, for the most part, do not see whiteness as a racial identity.
- White students can take advantage of faculty office hours without feeling their intelligence or potential will be compromised.
- Most white students don't have to ensure that they are using "proper English" when speaking out in class to avoid being stereotyped.
- White students do not view group work with apprehension because they don't expect to be left out.
- White students can find off-campus housing without feeling scrutinized.
- White students often attribute their academic achievement to effort and hard work and rarely notice or acknowledge the assistance they have received from teachers and social networks.
- White students feel they are entitled to receive extra academic support and not feel stigmatized.
- White students can usually be sure they and their experiences will be reflected in the curriculum.

Obstacle 8 The Incapacity to See Institutional Racism in Familiar Routines

> *During a project supported by the Ford Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Center for Urban Education worked to implement the Equity Scorecard in Colorado colleges. Through the methods of participatory critical action research, the math department at the Community College of Aurora was engaged in a variety of inquiry activities to help them see that their practices were racialized. One of the inquiry activities focused on the hiring of math faculty. In answering the question, "How do you hire faculty?" and by breaking the routine practice of hiring into its most minute details, the chair of the math department, James Gray, realized that in the 10 years he served as chair he had not hired a single African American. Reasons for this included the structure of hiring (with explicit and implicit rules), the external community he relied on to identify candidates (which consisted of an all-white network of math department chairs), and the artifacts that were integral to the hiring process (such as interview guides). Through processes that he took for granted and had never examined through the lens of racial equity, James was effectively ensuring that there were no African American candidates in the candidate pool*
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> *(Felix et al. 2015).*

Racism is often thought to be an act that is committed by individuals; however, the most pernicious form of racism is routinely created and reinforced through everyday practices (Essed 1991) such as hiring, program review, what gets included in strategic plans, what data gets reported, tenure and promotion reviews, syllabi and curriculum, the agendas of boards of trustees, and even in the content of websites and other forms of communication used by institutions.

Equity-Minded Response: Self-Remediation of Routine Practices

> *By holding a mirror to the hiring practices and examining them from the standpoint of racial equity, Gray came to the conclusion that the hiring system he maintained for ten years was perfectly designed to not hire faculty of color (Felix* et al. 2015*). The process of studying hiring as a racialized structure enabled Gray to make major changes that resulted in the hiring of black and Latino faculty. One of the changes was to ask all candidates to demonstrate how they would explain the syllabus on the first day of class. This simple exercise made it possible to differentiate among candidates that explained the syllabus as a contractual document and those that would use the syllabus to connect with students and reduce their fears about math.*
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> *(Felix et al. 2015)*

Gray was able to remediate hiring practices because he admitted that they were designed to advantage white candidates. As the math department chair, he was willing to bring about changes that many others in higher education are afraid to try because they fear violating the norms of collegiality and civility. Rather than saying he had not hired African American faculty because they did not apply or because the pool was limited, he admitted to relying on an all-white network for potential candidates. Gray became an equity-minded leader because he did not reject the concept of whiteness and did not attempt to justify his decisions.

McIntosh's (1988, 2019) analysis of whiteness offers important lessons for all higher education leaders and practitioners, particularly for whites who aspire to equity-mindedness. We have been taught to understand racism as "something that puts others at a disadvantage" but, as discussed above, we are not taught to see how the privileges accrued by whiteness produce advantages. At times, equity

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talk in higher education is centered on remediating racial inequities in educational outcomes. We want to close equity gaps in math for black males. We want more women of color to succeed in STEM fields. We want more Native American and Hawaiian students to transfer to four-year colleges and earn bachelor's degrees. These are worthy and necessary goals. However, framing equity exclusively as a project to remediate the disadvantages experienced by minoritized populations (e.g., closing gaps) falls short of equity-mindedness. The higher education disadvantages accrued by minoritized populations cannot be remedied without leaders and practitioners seeing whiteness as a problem that has to be addressed. Inequity in educational outcomes for minoritized students is a disadvantage they accrue as a consequence of a system based on conceptions of academic achievement that advantage white students and impose a cultural tax on minoritized students (Dowd and Bensimon 2015).

Obstacle 9 The Myth of Universalism

The president of a Hispanic-serving institution community college with a student body that is 60 percent Latinx was excited to announce that the college received a $2 million grant to implement adaptive learning technology. "This grant will enable us to help all of our students by providing them with the tools and resources to complete their course work in a timely manner," the president said. "I am confident that with this grant we will be able to ensure success for all students, erase equity gaps, and increase transfer rates to four-year colleges." When he asked if there were any questions, the chair of the Chicano and Chicana Studies department stood up. "Congratulations on getting this

grant for our college," he said. "I am sure it will help many students. But I have a concern. It sounds as if 'adaptive learning technology' is being presented as a solution that is good for 'all' students. We seem to be ignoring that our students are not all the same. It strikes me that 'adaptive learning technology' is a solution focused on the reality of white students who have easy access to the internet. In the past, we have tried many other 'solutions' to address student success and most have had limited impact. The common element among these solutions is that they have been designed by well-meaning innovators who don't realize that their way of understanding student success is not the universal understanding."

Universalism is a prominent characteristic of whiteness (DiAngelo 2011) based on the assumption that a white person's view of the way things are is objective and representative of reality (McIntosh 1988). Universalism is also a prominent characteristic of the ways that higher education achievement is theorized, measured, and portrayed. The most obvious example of universalism in higher education is in the propensity to speak of "all students" as if their status as students makes them all the same. Examples of universalist reasoning include a faculty member asserting, "I care about all students"; a president repeating the adage, "A rising tide raises all boats"; or a policy maker saying, "We are all humans" in defense of a race-neutral position. For example, trending higher education initiatives such as pathways, predictive analytics, intrusive advising, dual enrollment, and promise programs assume that they will benefit all students. They fail to see that they might be harmful and worsen disparities. According to Robin DiAngelo, "Universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white. Further, universalism

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assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts (i.e. I feel comfortable in this majority white classroom, so you must too), the same responses from others, and assumes that the same doors are open to all" (2011, p. 59).

Equity-Minded Response: Being Critically Race Conscious

*Azul State College is considered a national leader for incorporating racial equity as a key element of its dual-enrollment program. However, Azul's dual-enrollment program was not always critically race conscious. Like most dual-enrollment programs, Azul's administrators assumed that if they put it in place then local high schools would take advantage of it. At the end of the first two years of implementation, the chair of African American Studies asked for data on who participates in dual enrollment. The data was a shock. None of the neighboring high schools with predominantly black and Latinx student bodies participated. The majority of the participating students were at a suburban high school in a working-class neighborhood that was predominantly ethnic white (*e.g.*, Italian American and Irish American) and had a growing East Asian population. The data was a catalyst for infusing racial equity into the dual-enrollment program. The key practices to accomplish this included setting dual-enrollment goals by race and ethnicity based on the minoritized population at each high school, identifying and hiring high school teachers of color to teach the dual-enrollment courses, a comprehensive review of the syllabi used in dual-enrollment courses to assess them as exemplars of cultural relevance and inclusivity, a required training on equity-minded teaching for all dual-enrollment instructors, and an annual report detailing the state of equity in the dual-enrollment program.*

Being critically race conscious means reminding oneself and others that when the reference point is all students, it is much more likely to conjure the image of white students than students from minoritized groups. Being critically race conscious means interrogating phenomena from the standpoint of race:

- In what ways could this practice, program, or policy disadvantage minoritized students?
- Who, by race and ethnicity, is most likely to benefit from this practice, program, or policy? Why?
- How did the architects of this practice, program, or policy take racial equity into account?
- Who, by race and ethnicity, might not meet criteria that determine who qualifies (to be hired, to be accepted into an honors program, or to receive promise program benefits)?

Obstacle 10 Seeing Racial Inequities as a Reflection of Academic Deficiency

When asked by a researcher at the Center for Urban Education why more Latinx students were not being successful in STEM fields, a STEM professor responded by describing Latinx students: The students don't have much education background and they don't know what college is like; they think college is an extension of high school, so they don't realize how much work they need to put in.

The Center for Urban Education researchers have observed that practitioners, like the professor above, are far more likely to hold minoritized students responsible for

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worse outcomes than their own practices and biases. When instructors see data that show minoritized students, particularly black, Latinx, and Native American students, performing poorly in the courses they teach, they will say things like, "They were not expecting the course to be rigorous," "They were unprepared for college-level work," "They don't know how to study," "They are not motivated," "They don't value education," and so on. The Center for Urban Education labels these attributions as deficit-mindedness, meaning that instructors view students as lacking the essential skills and attributes they associate with academic success, motivation, self-efficacy, individual effort, and academic integration (Bensimon 2007).

Deficit-mindedness can be detected in comments that practitioners and others make about the perceived shortcomings of African American, Latinx, Pacific Islander, and Native American students, such as having attended poorly resourced schools, growing up in low-income communities, being raised by single-parent households, coming from families that do not value education, and the like. That is, these shortcomings are a "natural" outcome of these students' backgrounds, and addressing attendant inequities requires compensatory programs that "fix" students and teach them how to assimilate into the dominant college culture. Focusing on student characteristics can make it seem as if higher education's policies and practices have played no role in producing racial inequities.

There are many code words for deficit-mindedness:

- Students are underprepared.
- Their culture does not value education.
- Their parents expect them to work.

- They don't know how to be students.
- They don't know how to study for a test.
- They read the book, but they don't understand it.
- They lack self-regulation skills.
- They got by in high school and don't realize college is different.
- They have no idea what it is to be a college student.
- They may say they aspire to transfer but have no understanding of what it entails.
- Their language arts skills are lacking.
- They do not know how to read or take notes.

A deficit-minded perspective of student success can also be evident in the language of syllabi, particularly in open access institutions that attract large numbers of first-generation minoritized students. Syllabi may adopt a tone that anticipates students to be low performers. Instructors who have acquired a deficit mindset also tend to write rules and expectations that come across as cold, uncaring, and even dehumanizing. For example, some syllabus statements – "If you cannot dedicate at least two hours of study for each hour of class then you should drop the course" – do not create a positive or welcoming learning context. Even if it was intended to be helpful, it sounds reproachful, uncaring, and indifferent. Deficit-minded instructors often write their syllabi in ways that tell students the many ways in which they can fail the course rather than succeed.

Equity-Minded Response: Examining Why Practices Work So Much Better for White Students than for Minoritized Students

A first-generation Latino STEM professor at a flagship public university noticed that his colleagues were not likely to select Latinx students to work in their labs. He said,

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> *"They get impatient because the students went to high schools without science facilities, so they have not learned the basics. Getting into a lab is really essential to pursue a career in STEM. It is the best way for students to develop a science identity. So . . . on my own time, I started a lab boot camp in the summers to get the students ready to work with my colleagues. It has worked well so far. We are a Hispanic-serving institution, and I just wish my colleagues would be willing to invest more time in our Latinx students. I see myself in the students, and in them I see the future faculty.*"
>
> *(Adapted from Bensimon et al. 2019)*

Equity-mindedness upends the analysis of racialized patterns of inequality. From an equity-minded perspective, questions such as these are rejected because their framing situates lower performance on Black, Latinx, and Native American students: Why are the grade-point averages (GPAs) of black students the lowest? Why do so many Latinx students fail college-level math? Why are Native American students' relationships with faculty so weak?[1] The framing of these questions encourages "solutions" that aim to fix minoritized students by providing them with add-on, compensatory services such as intrusive counseling and remediation.

Equity-minded practitioners shift the attention away from the student onto themselves and their practices, reframing racialized gaps in performance as an institutional dysfunction stemming from underpreparedness to perform as effectively for black, Latinx, and Native American students as for whites. From an equity-minded perspective, racialized gaps are a catalyst to ask questions such as: What courses contribute to the lower GPAs of black students? What causes

[1]These questions were inspired by deficit-oriented questions in Shaun Harper's "An Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Research on Students of Color in STEM" (2010, 68).

these courses to underperform for black students? How many sections of college-level math are offered? Which among these sections perform well or underperform for Latinx students? Why do they have differences in performance? Why are faculty members more likely to establish relationships with white students? What can they do to establish relationships with Native American students? In what ways do faculty discourage Native American students from seeking them out?

Establishing a culture of equity-mindedness depends greatly on leaders who go beyond rhetorical praise for diversity, inclusiveness, and equity. It requires leaders who model the tenets of equity-mindedness in language and action. Below are some examples.

Modeling equity-minded data interpretation	
A community college president looking at the latest report on transfer patterns to four-year institutions . . .	
DOES NOT SAY: International students have over-the-top transfer rates. Latinx students just don't transfer.	DOES SAY: What is it about the way we "do transfer" that makes it work so much better for international students than for Latinx students?
DOES NOT SAY: International students come here motivated to excel and transfer to the best institutions.	DOES SAY: Is it possible that faculty are biased toward international students because they are from high-income backgrounds? Is it possible that faculty may feel they have more in common with international students than with first-generation, low-income Latinx students?

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DOES NOT SAY: We need to recruit more international students because they really make our transfer rates look great and it will help us move up the rankings of good transfer colleges.	DOES SAY: We need to hire faculty and staff who identify with Latinx students, including faculty from this community who may have been successful transfer students themselves. We need to learn if and how faculty and staff develop transfer aspirations in Latinx students. We need to learn how we develop transfer knowledge among Latinx students.
DOES NOT SAY: Latinx students are not interested in transfer. They want well-paying jobs as soon as possible. They are expected to help their families.	DOES SAY: We need to treat every Latinx student as a transfer student. Every department will be asked to create a plan for enhancing Latinx transfer. We will initiate a comprehensive year-long seminar to teach everyone the competencies needed to be an equity-minded institutional agent for transfer.

What Should Institutions Do Next?

Experience has taught us that equity-mindedness does not come naturally. It requires a knowledge base. It takes a lot of intentional practice. It is impossible to craft an agenda for racial equity in higher education without acknowledging that, with the exception of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, most colleges and universities in the United States since the founding of Harvard University in 1636 were created for whites. Many of the universities that represent the greatness of US higher education were built by slave labor, among them the University of Virginia, Georgetown University, Yale, Harvard, and many more (Wilder 2013).

We recognize that even when terms such as *institutionalized racism, whiteness, race-neutral, color-blind,* and *equity-mindedness* are understood in theory, it is far more challenging to identify them in our own actions or the

actions of others, in our routines or the routines of our colleagues, departments, and institutions.

We could say that learning equity-mindedness is like learning a new language, but that would be too simplistic. Learning a new language entails repetition, memorizing rules, mimicking intonation, and pronunciation. Learning equity-mindedness is much more complex. It requires that we (particularly those of us who possess the privileges of whiteness) realize that our actions – despite our best intentions, despite not being overtly racist, and despite our commitment to treating everyone equally – may still be harmful to minoritized students.

Being equity-minded does not come naturally. One strategy to move toward equity-mindedness is to evaluate one's work against the following questions:

- In what ways could this practice, program, or policy disadvantage minoritized students?
- Who, by race and ethnicity, is most likely to benefit from this practice, program, or policy? Why?