Using data for equity-minded teaching of management courses

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Abstract:

Issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are at the forefront of American social discourse, including academia. While there is great awareness of the importance of DEI issues at universities, faculty may lack professional development opportunities to learn about evidence-based best practices for addressing DEI issues in their classrooms. In this roundtable session, Cal Poly Pomona faculty and administrators will discuss their experience with the University of Southern California (USC) Race & Equity Center's April-May 2021 Mini-Institute for Equity. The focus is using specific classroom-level and institutional-level data to inform thoughtful, equity-minded interventions to reduce identity-based equity gaps in student progress and measures of achievement. We aim to engage participants in conversation regarding shared experiences, struggles, and progress in reaching equity in our courses.

Introduction:

On an institutional and system level, university administrators often present appeals to data that demonstrate equity gaps in students' classroom achievement and progress to degree, gaps that are related to differences in students' races, genders, socioeconomic situations, and

academic histories. The goal of the appeal to data is to convince decisionmakers, including faculty as they make decisions about their individual courses, to take institutional actions to reduce such equity gaps by supporting students, without compromising educational rigor or performance standards. Not infrequently, decisionmakers resist taking actions based on various reasoning: the methodology for gathering and interpreting data is debated; explanations of the gaps dislocate responsibility from university and faculty practices onto students; claims are raised that concern for equity is itself inequitable and racist/sexist/classist; proposals are proffered that a different group of decisionmakers must act first, etc.

We propose a roundtable to discuss the experience of Cal Poly Pomona faculty and administrators with the University of Southern California (USC) Race & Equity Center's April-May 2021 Mini-Institute for Equity. Through the mini-institute, 20 faculty (including the presenters) were trained on several issues and methods to make classrooms more inclusive, with a particular focus on using data to identify opportunities to address inequities in courses that lead to equity gaps in outcomes. We also considered the context of college-level and institutional efforts to close equity gaps through strategic action planning on student excellence & success, along with examples of system-wide and institution-level data available to faculty to engage in equity-minded inquiry regarding courses that have persistently high failure rates.

We, the presenters, are not experts in anti-racist scholarship or pedagogies, but fellow explorers who have had to work through our own resistances. The outcome of the session will be to identify strategies for faculty who want to engage colleagues in solving course-level equity gaps in anti-racist, anti-sexist ways. The target audience are faculty who teach high fail-rate courses with equity gaps, or who are otherwise concerned about such courses. We will challenge

participants to take equity gap data seriously and to enact change within their spheres of influence, most particularly in their individual courses.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications.

The concept of equity-mindedness in education holds that equity-minded practitioners 1) attend to patterns of inequity in student outcomes, particularly race-based inequities, 2) take responsibility for the success of their students, and 3) critically reassess their own practices (Bensimon et al., 2016). Equity-minded practitioners can clearly describe the patterns of inequity in their courses and curricula. They carefully examine those courses and curricula to determine what policies and procedures in their courses and institutions contribute to the patterns of inequity, seeking to understand equity problems as fundamentally the responsibility of the institution rather than the responsibility of the students who are experiencing non-equitable outcomes. They knowledgeably change their practices to see if different practices and policies can increase equity in student success - and they continually monitor and assess their progress toward equity. All of the above investigation, testing, and re-testing takes place in a context of race-awareness, not color-blinded-ness (Bensimon, 2018).

For example, say that student success data from a course reveals that Hispanic students have a final course GPA of 2.2 compared to white students' final course GPA of 2.9. The instructor delves into other classroom data such as course attendance, homework submission, and participation, finding that there is a pattern of Hispanic students missing 43% of homework submissions compared to non-Hispanic students missing 20% of homework submissions, and women Hispanic students miss 51% of submissions. The non-equity-minded instructor thinks that it's too bad that the Hispanic students, who are typically socioeconomically disadvantaged

compared to white students, can't spend enough time on course work. The equity-minded

instructor wonders what it is about the homework, the due dates, or other course-based decisions

that may contribute to this dynamic. Perhaps the late policy is so rigid that a student who misses

the deadline sees no value in completing the work at all, and students who have heavy family

responsibilities are preferentially disadvantaged. The equity-minded instructor polls their

students and finds that changing the due date to a different day would be much better for most

students and would not harm anyone. Upon institution of a new due day and a 15-minute grace

period for technical problems, the homework submission gap is reduced by 93%. The final

course GPA gap is reduced to 0.4 (2.5 compared to 2.9) -- better, but still concerning. The

equity-minded instructor continues their exploration of the issue and makes another careful

change the next semester.

Equity-mindedness and cultural relevance in the classroom is *not* an invitation to fail to

strive for excellence or to undermine the rigor and value of education (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

To misconstrue calls for equity-mindedness as a directive to "lower the bar" is, frankly, lazy (in

the opinion of the authors of this proposal). Instead, using an equity-minded approach to

classroom decisions requires deep understanding of the discipline, its values, the source and

history of those values, and an awareness of who benefits and does not benefit by the enaction of

those values (Keist & Dyer-Barr, 2020). Equity-minded practitioners reflect carefully about

every decision in their courses, choosing materials, activities, and assignments that reflect

students' realities and determining standards that most honestly reflect actual excellence rather

than reflecting practices rooted in unexamined hegemony. Equity-minded practitioners

determine what support their students actually need to meet high standards, and provide that

support within their sphere of influence (Pendakur, 2019).

But, instructors' sphere of influence is not infinite, and so equity-mindedness in the classroom does not locate all responsibility for equitable course outcomes upon the instructor (Pendakur, 2019). Where departmental or institutional policies and practices create equity gaps, the department or institution must act. In these cases, the instructor may be well-positioned to bring such problems to the attention of decision-makers at the appropriate level. For example, say that a curriculum path directs students with different sets of prerequisites into a single, pivotal course that favors students with a particular set of prerequisites. The instructor can contribute to a partial solution by providing review materials, supplemental materials, or other supports, but the instructor is likely not the locus of responsibility for a systemic solution. Instead, the curriculum planning group, whether departmental, institutional, or the accrediting body, may be a more appropriate locus of responsibility. Another locus of responsibility might be advising, if it is found that advising pathways tend to contribute to patterns of student participation in one set of prerequisites vs the other.

This session contributes to effective teaching and learning in management. A significant challenge in management of high-level knowledge workers is to identify genuinely useful and meaningful metrics or descriptors of performance rather than falling back on easily measured but ultimately counter-productive "widget"-like metrics such as seat-time (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2021). Management classes can face similar challenges in assessing student performance, confounding measurements of mastery with measurements of compliance. Using student success data to identify patterns of success that are unrelated to actual potential -- i.e., patterns of success that are more related to identity and less related to potential and mastery -- can help to illuminate whether grades and other measures of progress in a particular course genuinely reflect true student achievement (Feldman, 2019). In the hands of a particularly skilled faculty member,

ensuring that measures of student success reflect true achievement might even be a management learning opportunity itself, as students can learn how to identify and deploy meaningful measures of success in their own managerial roles.

Session Description

The session will present strategies for utilizing course level data regarding equity gaps, then move into facilitated discussion on how participants might themselves get their data and employ the strategies in their courses.

Amount of time requested: 60 minutes

- 10 minutes - Describe course-level data-utilization strategies
    - Identifying grade outcome patterns
    - Course activities heat map
    - Classroom discourse analysis
- 20 minutes - Provide breakout tables with guided questions and facilitators
    - Knowns, unknowns, and assumptions we make before data is gathered
    - Where to get data on our campuses
    - Using micro-case studies for focus, discuss objections to equity data results and productive answers to objections
- 20 minutes- Report out and large-group discussion
- 10 minutes - Participants individually identify next actions for using data to address course-level equity gaps

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