



## **The CUE Equity Model: Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the CUE Equity Model?**

*The CUE Equity Model is a collaboration between CUE researchers and practitioner-directed inquiry Evidence Teams comprised of faculty and staff using data analysis, institutional inquiry, and problem-solving to gauge the academic achievement of various student racial/ethnic groups and create benchmarking goals and informed interventions with the aim of improving a college or university's effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. The CUE Equity Model consists of four subsections: The Equity Scorecard, Data Prioritization, Institutional Inquiry, and Benchmarking.*

### **What do colleges engaged in the CUE Equity Model do?**

*Colleges engaged in equity-based assessment convene Evidence Teams of not more than ten campus practitioners to analyze accountability and accreditation data in more fine-grained ways. Data are disaggregated by race and ethnicity and student success rates are investigated in key points across the institution to determine where students experience unequal outcomes. Teams prioritize which findings to investigate further using inquiry methods such as document analysis, interviews, and observations.*

*Practitioners study and come to understand the need for change in their own culture during data-inquiry. These activities lead to an informed understanding of institutional processes and how they can be innovated and changed to improve equity.*

### **What does 'equity' mean?**

*Equity refers to achieving parity in student educational outcomes. Within the CUE Equity Model the word equity refers to our goal of reaching not just equal access, but equal outcomes among all racial/ethnic student groups in institutions of higher education.*

### **What are equity-based assessment practices?**

*Equity-based assessment practices use rich quantitative and qualitative data to improve institutional effectiveness in promoting students learning and improve the racial-ethnic equity of*

*student outcomes. Assessment and rigorous evaluation are institutionalized as strategies to ensure student success.*

### **What is the relationship between equity and effectiveness?**

*Community colleges are the most common entry point into higher education for minority groups that have a long history of discrimination in higher education. A community college that serves a high percentage of minority students cannot be effective as long as there are racial inequities in student outcomes.*

### **What is equity-mindedness and how does it relate to institutional accountability?**

*Equity-mindedness refers to the outlook, perspective, or mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes, and are willing to assume personal and institutional responsibility for the elimination of inequity. According to Bensimon, Harris, & Rueda, "Equity-minded individuals are more aware of the socio-historical context of exclusionary practices and racism in higher education, and the impact of power asymmetries on roles they and their colleagues play and the responsibility they share for helping students succeed" (2007, pp. 9-10). As a result, equity-minded practitioners frame inequitable educational outcomes as a problem of institutional ineffectiveness.*

*As we use it in the CUE Equity Model, the concept of 'equity-mindedness' is distinct from prevailing ways of conceptualizing issues related to the participation of minority students in higher education, specifically deficit thinking and diversity thinking.*

*A deficit standpoint attributes unequal outcomes to the personal characteristics of the students who experience them. A diversity standpoint promotes inclusiveness, intercultural communication, and cross-race relationship as dominant concerns. By contrast, an equity-minded standpoint regards the educational status of historically underrepresented students in all types of institutions, not just those that are predominantly white and elite, as representing the greatest challenge facing higher education practitioners.*

*The critical distinction between equity and deficit thinking is in how the problem of inequality in educational outcomes is framed. In deficit thinking, the unit of analysis and intervention is focused on the students, who are viewed as having a learning deficiency that can be addressed with new teaching techniques, supplementary programs, and add-on academic support systems to compensate for the deficiency. In equity thinking, the points of focus are the practitioner-administrators and faculty alike- and the institution. Thus, from an equity standpoint,*

*practitioners themselves and institutions are viewed as accountable for the solution to students' learning problems.*

*- Excerpt taken from Pena, E.V., Bensimon, E.M. & Colyar, J. (2006)*

### **What makes the CUE Equity Model different from most projects that focus on “data-based” decision-making or “evidenced-based cultures?”**

*True, everyone from foundations to leaders in higher education and government is jumping on the bandwagon of “data” and “evidence.” Accountability systems, accreditation models, and various nationwide initiatives claim to be “data-driven.” But data-driven decision-making and evidenced-based cultures have not had the impact envisioned.*

*This is because institutions tend to enact data-driven decision-making as an assembly-like process. First, gather data; next, write a report, and last implement a “best practice.” However, often the data examined do not truly reveal the nature of the problem. The rush to adopt a “best practice” turns into a “wrong solution.”*

*Because problems can only be understood through ongoing assessment, the CUE Equity Model integrates data analysis, institutional inquiry, and problem-solving into a comprehensive assessment process in which data and institutional practices are questioned by cross-functional teams of faculty, administrators, and counselors who bring different perspectives to bear on the issues at hand.*

*The emphasis is on the learning that happens among the participants as they go about the activities of observing their own college culture and practices, interviewing peers and students, and collaboratively making sense of their findings. Problem-solving is possible through the new knowledge that enables practitioners and leaders to change practices, structures, as well as values in their daily work.*

### **How does the CUE Equity Model differ from other accountability tools?**

*The CUE Equity Model:*

- *Views inequities in student access and success as a problem of institutional performance and accountability rather than as a problem due to student deficits.*
- *Actively engaged faculty, staff, administrators, and students in an on-going process of institutional assessment and change that is uniquely tailored to the institutional context.*

- *Provides institutional know-how for continuous improvement that fosters accountability.*
- *Includes inquiry methods that are aligned with the WASC accreditation process, and findings that can be incorporated into accountability reports.*

### **What is the relationship of the CUE Equity Model to accreditation processes?**

*The processes used in the CUE Equity Model augment the practices delineated in the standards of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. For example, the cross-functional inquiry teams and methods in the CUE Equity Model are consistent with the recommended practices for Improving Institutional Effectiveness, Standard I, section B of the standards which states that the institution:*

- *Maintains an ongoing, collegial, self-reflective dialogue about the continuous improvement of student learning and institutional processes.*
- *Sets goals to improve effectiveness consistent with its stated purpose.*
- *Assesses progress toward achieving stated goals.*
- *[Conducts] evaluation based on analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data.*

*The CUE Equity Model assessment of institutional effectiveness aligns with the requirement that institutions evaluate courses and programs through on-going systematic review of learning outcomes and future needs and plans (Standard II on Student Learning Programs and Services). The assessment of transfer services and resources aligns with the requirement that institutions provide accurate information.*

### **Why do institutions decide to implement the CUE Equity Model?**

*Racial/ethnic disparities in student outcomes are a reality at most colleges and universities in the United States. We believe that the intellectual capital and resources that are necessary to respond effectively to this unfortunate reality are often situated within institutions. We also believe that compensatory programs that aim to eliminate racial/ethnic student deficits alone are not sufficient to bring about equity in student outcomes. Alternatively, the [CUE Equity Model] has proven to be an effective institutional learning and change intervention.*

*Applying Harper and Bensimon's concept of color consciousness (2003), responding to the realities of race requires institutional leaders to focus purposefully and intentionally on equity in*

*student outcomes to ensure that their institutions are welcoming, affirming, and responsive environments for groups that historically have been denied access to the benefits of higher education. The [CUE Equity Model] provides the means and the context for institutional leaders to develop color-consciousness and thereby build their capacities to assess and respond to race-based disparities in student outcomes*

*- Excerpt taken from Harris and Bensimon (2008)*

### **What are the benefits of the CUE Equity Model?**

- *The CUE Equity Model succeeds in overcoming the obstacles that prevent most institutions of higher education from making good on their claims to being data-driven.*
- *The inquiry paradigm that we have pioneered includes investigation methods that provide participants with a structure- the practitioner-as-researcher model- that enables them to engage in data mining and sense making productively.*
- *Faculty members use the data to reflect on their teaching, program improvement, and assessment.*
- *Participating institutions develop self-assessments of their courses, processes, and activities that lead to detailed knowledge and provide the impetus for improvement that data by itself cannot.*
- *Participating institutions demonstrate an increased capacity to make sense of institutional data.*
- *The CUE Equity Model can be empowering for participants and contributes to their feelings of self-efficacy. The process also reveals facilitators of and barriers to institutional responsibility for equitable educational outcomes.*
- *Participating colleges build engaged communities of practice to improve student outcomes, particularly for historically underrepresented and underserved groups.*

### **What results or changes have other institutions done as a result of using the CUE Equity Model?**

- *One team discovered that some straightforward questions about transfer had never been asked. They found out that 20% of transfer-ready students had not transferred, and that the majority of students who could have transferred to a four year institution did not.*

*They also identified several hundred students who were one course short of being transfer eligible.*

- *On another campus, the Basic Skills unit was reorganized and the team leader from Equity for All was appointed as director.*
- *Equity for All was the theme for College Day and for Flex Days (professional development days) at four campuses.*
- *Some Campuses have used CUE Equity Model data as the foundation for Title V and Title III grants.*
- *Equity has become one of the four Master Plan goals for one campus.*
- *The cultural and discourse practices that characterize “equity” have become more common in the participating colleges.*
- *One anonymous Faculty member summarized his new understanding “that the students are not the problem” and has re-thought his teaching style. The Center for Urban Education’s field notes are full of self-reflective comments such as the one made by this faculty member.*
- *Institutions demonstrate highly productive collaboration among members of the Evidence Teams, e.g., joint conference presentations; speaking about the CUE Equity Model in important campus events; and being invited to collaborate on grants.*

### **How long does it take to conduct the CUE Equity Model?**

*The CUE Equity model typically takes about 15 months, although Evidence Teams work at different paces. Most of the individuals who participate in the Evidence Teams are not accustomed to working with data or institutional inquiry activities. It takes time for them to learn how to identify patterns, frame questions, and define the problems represented in the data and findings. Furthermore, the CUE Equity Model requires practitioner collaboration and discussion to create the transformative learning that leads to institutional change.*

## **Can the CUE Equity Model be used in any type of institution? For example, at 4-year, 2-year, private, public, larger or smaller colleges and universities?**

*Yes, the CUE Equity Model can be used in any type of educational institution. The two predecessors of the CUE Equity Model, the Equity Scorecard and Benchmarking Process, have already been used in a large variety of institutional types across the country.*

## **What considerations should we have when creating Evidence Teams?**

*We have learned that the characteristics of effective Evidence Teams have:*

- *Team leaders who understand the goals and principles of the CUE Equity Model and who emphasize the transforming value of the process rather than focusing on producing findings for its own sake.*
- *Support from the President and academic senate.*
- *Diverse teams with 'boundary spanners'- Individuals who serve on important campus-wide committees and who are well situated to spread what they learn in the CUE Equity Model to other initiatives.*
- *An instructional researcher who accepts the precept that inquiry (rather than data) best drives the CUE Equity Model.*
- *Teams that understand they are engaged in a reflective process and are not simply constructing a report.*

## **What is Benchmarking?**

*Benchmarking is a process to evaluate performance in relation to a standard of excellence or 'best practice'. Although benchmarking initially began as a business practice, a variety of benchmarking efforts and practices are widely used in higher education today. According to Dowd (2005) there are several common traits shared by campus benchmarking activities, including the desire to assess a college's achievements, shortcomings and environments and to determine strategies for improvement and innovation. There are different types of benchmarking, including performance, diagnostic and process benchmarking.*

*Performance benchmarking, also known as metric benchmarking, is a process of comparing performance data, such as retention, transfer or graduation rates. Diagnostic benchmarking analyzes performance and identifies practices that need improvement. The third type, process benchmarking, brings two or more organizations together to examine and compare specific practices (see Dowd, 2005).*

*The CUE Equity Model initially focuses on performance benchmarking, as we ask campus teams to analyze their own performance data to gain greater understanding of the gaps students experience at their institution. Once teams further analyze their institutional culture and they take inventory of the information and services they offer to students, they are practicing diagnostic benchmarking. Once a campus team establishes improvement goals and initiatives they begin to extend their practices to process benchmarking.*

*It is important to note that the term ‘benchmarking’ refers to more than just setting performance standards in the CUE Equity Model. Our benchmarking process is a continuous learning process that calls upon practitioners to use measurement, comparison, and critical reflection. Practitioners also create goals that prompt action and self-improvement to promote the educational success of minority and at-risk student groups. Finally, our benchmarking process emphasizes equity-mindedness and uncovering inequities in student achievement through the disaggregation of student data by race and ethnicity.*

### **What about data security and privacy concerns? Will data and findings from the CUE Equity Model be shared beyond our institution?**

*Securing our partners’ nonpublic institutional data is very important to CUE. Several measures are taken to protect institutional or identifying information from misuse or alteration. Likewise, findings are never shared by CUE outside of the Evidence Team without the express permission of the institution to which it belongs.*

### **The Vital Signs<sup>1</sup> sometimes include data that are not statistically significant. Does this mean that the findings are compromised?**

*The question of statistical significance is a non-issue in the CUE Equity Model because institutions are looking at whole populations (e.g. the 2005-2006 entering cohort). It would be an issue only if they were to take a sample of a population and try to generalize their findings to the whole population from which the sample was taken.*

### **How do we deal with issues regarding small sample size?**

*When an institution has a small sample size in a particular category, for example small numbers of African American students enrolled in a predominantly white institution, it may be useful to either combine data for multiple cohorts or combine data for several semesters. For example, you could combine African American entering cohorts for the years 2001-2006.*

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<sup>1</sup> Disaggregated institutional data collected for the first step of the CUE Equity Model and organized in a CUE designed template.



## **What type of graphs work best for reporting the different types of data findings our team develops?**

*Bar graphs work best for reporting rates. This holds true whether or not the numbers are low. If you are reporting shares, the pie graph works best. A table works well for reporting both rates and shares.*

## **Should the CUE Equity Model be shared with campus stakeholders? If so, when?**

*In addition to working collaboratively to learn about the state of equity on behalf of their institution and examining institutional data and findings, team members are charged with disseminating their findings to the campus. Throughout the first phase of the CUE Equity Model, the Equity Scorecard process, the team should share its findings regularly with its senior leadership, and decide at what point to disseminate their learning and findings to a larger campus audience by way of brief and easy-to-disseminate reports. At the end of the CUE Equity Model the Evidence Team will create and disseminate a comprehensive report to the president/chancellor and stakeholders of the institution. In the report, the team discusses the data that served as the focal points of its analysis, the gaps and inequities they discovered within each perspective, their findings from Institutional Inquiry, and recommendations for benchmarks, informed interventions, and further inquiry.*

*Moreover, throughout the process, the team may choose to disseminate its findings by making presentations to Deans, Department Chairs, and other stakeholder groups that shape and influence campus policies and practices with a direct impact on equity in student outcomes.*

*Finally, team members take their new-found knowledge and awareness of inequities in student outcomes to other committees, task forces, and other groups in which they participate. We ensure that the learning that takes place among the members of the Evidence Team is diffused throughout the campus by including team members who are “boundary spanners,” serving on institution-wide committees which have access to multiple audiences.*

## **How was the Equity Scorecard developed? How was the Benchmarking Process developed? How were the two processes combined to create the CUE Equity Model?**

### *The Equity Scorecard*

*The Equity Scorecard was developed at the Center for Urban Education (CUE) in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California (USC) with grants underwritten by the James Irvine Foundation. The Equity Scorecard’s core premise is that evidence about the state of equity in educational outcomes for underrepresented students presented in the form of graphically displayed quantitative data can have a powerful effect in mobilizing institutional*

attention and action. The Equity Scorecard was modeled after the Balanced Scorecard for business (see Kaplan and Norton, 1992) and the Academic Scorecard for Higher Education (see O'Neal, Bensimon, Diamond, and Moore, 1999).

By 2001, the Equity Scorecard had been field-tested in 14 institutions in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The 14 institutions included two and four-year public colleges, as well as independent institutions. Institutions that were not struggling to diversify their student body were purposefully selected because CUE wanted to concentrate on outcomes for historically underrepresented students rather than on simply the achievement of a diverse student body. Since 2001, researchers at CUE have continued to work with colleges and universities in California as well as Colorado, Washington, and Wisconsin.

-Excerpts taken from Connell, 2008

### The Benchmarking Process

In 2006, nine community colleges in California and other institutions across the country were using the Center for Urban Education's Equity Scorecard to document racial-ethnic inequities in student outcomes at their colleges. In many cases, the Scorecard revealed that the colleges were not serving their African American and Latinos/as students effectively. Troubling disparities in outcomes were evident to the groups of administrators, counselors, and faculty who had met over the course of the year as Evidence Teams to investigate equity at their colleges. Looking closely at the data through a sustained inquiry process led many team members to agree that the college had a problem that needed attention. The process raised two important questions: 'What do we do about it?' and 'How do we share what we have learned with other important stakeholders on our campus?'

To address these questions, the Center for Urban Education, with funding from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Ford Foundation, developed the Equity-Based Assessment Toolkit and the California Benchmarking Project. Together these processes comprise the Benchmarking Process, which provides processes that help administrators, faculty, and staff understand how to locate, uncover and reflect on what institutional practices can address identified gaps in outcomes to enhance institutional effectiveness, efficiency, and equity.

### The CUE Equity Model

The CUE Equity Model is the combination of the Equity Scorecard's data inquiry and the Benchmarking Process's analysis of institutional practices and benchmarked goal. The blending of these processes facilitate the Evidence Team's inquiry into inequities experienced by at-risk student groups, as well as the creation of informed interventions and benchmarking goals to address the inequities. While the combination of the Equity Scorecard and Benchmarking Process is relatively new, the two processes have often informed and contributed to each other throughout their development.

## Resources

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