

*Listening to Students
Who Ever Thought about Leaving College
or
Did Leave College and Came Back*

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**Listening to Students
Who Ever Thought about Leaving College
Or Did Leave College and Came Back...**

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Financial insecurity, did not know how to navigate academia, lack of diverse faculty

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Financial aid, access to virtual classes, EOP

Since I am a first generation student, I would like to have better guidance when it comes to the classes expected of me. I do not know how to navigate academia and would like more hands-on counseling. My program assigns me an advisor, but it is just a faculty member who does not seem too invested.”

—30 years old, Mexican, Junior, first generation college student, Spanish speaker

“I was young, and I changed my major three times. I decided to take a break until I figured out what I wanted to do. Then, I moved across the country for work and wasn't able to afford out-of-state tuition.

I've always wanted to get a degree in Theater, but I have kids to raise and wouldn't be able to afford the student loan payment on the amount I would likely make. By participating in the employee fee waiver program, I'm able to attend 3 classes per semester and work towards my dream of running theater programs for the neurodivergent population.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Push for more UDL, I'm currently taking (a class where) my professor is amazing, but the curriculum is a crime against UDL. It's not even accessible for disabled students.”

—I started college in my late teens / early 20's back in the 90's. I now take classes as part of the employee fee waiver program.

“I wanted to leave college multiple times due to lack income, no family support and/or guidance to encourage me to continue college. I found the strength within myself to continue college, while facing struggling times.

I wanted to stay in college because I wanted a better life for myself than the one I had growing up.

I feel CSU, Sacramento should be able to provide more support to former foster youth that are older. I struggled so many times finically because I didn't not qualify for financial aid or grants that are provided for former foster youth under the age of 25 y/o.”

—I am a former foster child, first generation college graduate, USAF veteran and current parent from a Hispanic/Caucasian cultural background.

“Although I want to pursue higher education, I lack motivation and drive. I did fairly well in school K-12, but struggled a bit in college because I didn't know exactly what I wanted. I also lacked a support system because I have young parents who also worked most of their lives and when they weren't working, usually prioritized their wants/needs, so they were emotionally/mentally, sometimes physically, unavailable and I felt I had no where to seek advice or help. As an Asian American, I also feel that it is hard to break down such a stiff family dynamic where you are expected to be ‘okay’ all the time. I struggled a lot with mental help from a young age and have still not gotten help because I'm afraid of ridicule. My parents will deny and dismiss my issues because they have a hard time dealing with the fact that they didn't do such a good job with parenting. Even though I don't hold anything against them and understand that there are many layers to this issue, they will still personalize and/or equate my mental health as an attack on their characters/competence as parental figures. To sum it up, I just have a lot of issues at home and with myself. I grew up with little guidance and support and find that it's easy to slack off or be indecisive.

I'm still continuing to get my bachelor's because that is what I want, it is my choice. I am trying to be better for myself, and also for my parents, despite having such a tumultuous relationship with them. I love them no matter what, but acknowledge that they hurt me too, so I have learned to distance myself and trying to heal and move on. I am also doing this because I will be the first in my family to get my bachelor's, and was the first to get my associate degree as well. I am doing this for my family- I want to create a path for my siblings, letting them know that it's possible and that they can do it too. We have always been a low-income family and we grew up in poor areas of Stockton, and our parents advocate for higher education but aren't involved at all. It's easy to stay down once you've fallen because it takes more energy to try to pick yourself back up, and I don't want that to happen to my siblings or cousins. We are more than what people think of us, and what we try to convince ourselves that we are/are not.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Since this is my first semester at CSUS, I haven't had the time to try out everything it has to offer, so I don't have any comments on this just yet.”

— I am Asian, specifically a mixed Hmong and Mien American. I am also second generation American, first generation college student, age 21 and this is my first semester at CSUS after transferring from SJDC.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Nothing, since education is a main way of building my future.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) The fact that education can help us fight the types of oppressions, make us not dependent on anyone and make a living.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Provide more financial support for first generation students.”

—Central Asian, first generation college student, multilingual, 18

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Financial needs: It's hard to dedicate most of my free time to school when I could be working and saving up. I'd like to be able to help my mom out more as well.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) 1. The fact that I am so close finishing and the desire to obtain a degree. 2. I acknowledge I am still at a good age to hold back on committing to a full-time career. 3. DACA financial aid is the most significant factor in my decision. Without financial support I would not have finished anytime soon.”

—23 y/o female Undocumented Mexican Senior First-gen Oldest sibling
Grew up with single mother

“In my first year of college (community college) I took a year to try living in a new town and soon returned to my hometown. The many years I've spent in college (community college) were due to simultaneously working and only attending school part-time, and then switching between degrees as I learned more about myself and of the world. An accident in 2021 presented the only year-long break from school, which led to my initial withdrawal from CSUS and delayed entry until 2022. This hiatus was the result of a brain injury that physically prevented me from functioning as a student.

My deeply held value of education has kept me in college for all these years, and my personal life and career goals involve the attainment of higher education. In a perfect world, I would stay in college to get my Masters degree, but I've been in college for too long (I'm exhausted!) and it would interfere with my plans for parenthood in the next 2 years.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Establish higher standards for students and (some) faculty. The scant expectations for our educational practices and scholarly performance really bog down my motivation.”

—Caucasian / Eastern European Age: 31 Year at CSUS: Senior First generation college student

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Professors not being understanding. Not offering classes that fit with my work schedule. Not offering more hybrid classes

I am too close to obtaining a degree to give up now.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more hybrid classes or late-night classes. The majority of my classes are only offered mid-day. These are times when I need to work to pay my bills. This school doesn't seem very inclusive not to provide alternatives to older people who are financially struggling to be here. Along with this, professors require attendance. How do you expect students to be successful if they will literally fail out for not showing up? I can prove my intelligence through a multitude of ways, and my attendance shouldn't be a requirement.”

—First gen return college student.

“I talked my way into an internship in PR and Awards at AMC Network and stated that I was finishing up credits. I used that experience from my 9-month long internship and turned it into a job at Turner Network where I worked on the PR team for Conan, Samantha Bee, and Seach Party. I went to multiple award shows, worked the Emmys and red carpets, FYC Events, junkets, I worked closely with the writers and executive producers as well as personal assistants for multiple A list talent. From Turner, I went to The NFL and joined the PR and Digital Media team. I stayed with the NFL for 3 seasons before realizing that I was not happy in TV and wanted to go into healthcare.

Two reasons keep me in school ...1. I want the diploma and 2. I want to work in neonatal nutrition.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) It needs a better older student transfer community. It was nice that there was a lunch meet and greet for mature students, but one lunch is not enough. With this being a commuter school, it would be nice to have more opportunities to connect with older students. I would like to have a transfer department dedicated to us, with counselors who are aware of our age and understand that we have partners, families, careers, etc. Going off that, I also feel that my academic counselors don't pay attention to my age and look at me as a 22-year-old student. I would like to be seen as someone who had an entire life and career in television and not as a young adult who is starting out for the first time.”

— I am 31 years old. Originally from Orange County. I grew up in a very Catholic household and went to 15 years of catholic school. I am not the first person in my family to go to college, my dad went to CSULB and works as an engineer.

“The high tuition fees for international students is sometimes making me think if I can come up with the tuition money semester by semester. Especially now that the school will raise tuition fees.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) Wanting to earn a degree and create a better life for me and my family.

Provide more financial help for international students! Or not charge the extra \$2800 international fee in addition to already paying more per unit.”

—International student

“The amount of stress i have to deal with on a daily basis and being mentally exhausted now is making me want to leave college.

Short commute and being able to live with my family is making me stay here.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Have better and more...professors.”

—26 year old Indian student. I am a senior

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Financial struggles and mental health struggles. It’s a lot on someone’s plate especially when classes take up majority of your schedule. I’ve considered leaving again this semester, but we’re halfway through the semester and I want to continue my education for myself.

My partner and I talked about it. He had me think of pros and cons of dropping out. I want to become a teacher and help the community and I can’t necessarily do one of them without an education. My partner made me realize this is a hurdle through the journey and it will pass. My hard work will pay off.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I think just being able to understand each student’s background: mentally and financially. Its hard trying to keep up with bills and going to school if you can’t work enough hours a week. Rent is increasing and so is food cost and other necessities. I wish some classes were offered at various other times throughout the week or even able to accommodate students. Also, class workload (depending on the class) can be a potential factor into how students plan out their schedule and be able to maintain a good balance between school/life/ and work.”

— From the perspective of someone who has been battling anxiety, depression, and financial issues. Being a Latina, my parents never really guided us or talked to us about mental health issues and its affected me throughout my educational journey. As for financial issues, I dug that hole myself and I wish I had the knowledge I have now about to maintain finances and be responsible with money. I left college for two years. I was able to figure out what I wanted to actually do and it shifted my perspective on a lot of things. I commend myself for going back to school, but because of financial struggles, I have thought about dropping out again to focus on making ends meet. Its been hard but I am pushing forward.

“I left college in 2021 when we were all evacuated from the dorms for the COVID-19 outbreak. Because of this sudden change and shift to online learning as an unprepared community, I fell into a deep depression. Having to move back to a toxic household and not be able to see my friends impacted my mental health greatly. Additionally, I was enrolled in (a) Sac State Program, and during my time in this program I felt discriminated against and not seen as a student of color. Many of my professors favored my white peers, and gave special attention and extended deadlines and perks to them, but not to me and my other peers of color. There were many instances where the topic of race was brought up and laughed at, this made me fear that the culture of Sac State and higher education was just not for me, and was not a safe space. This also made me fall into a deep state of insecurity and depression.

I returned after a two-year break because I felt like enrolling in college would help with my sense of direction. In the two year break I became an educator and youth mentor, and while I was preparing my students to enroll in college, I felt inspired to do the same.”

—I am a 22 year old African American and Fijian woman, who is currently a junior. I’m also a first generation student and creative.

“I've left college in the past due to financial pressures, and almost considered leaving sac state so that I could attempt to find additional work had financial aid fallen through

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) At it's core, financial aid. Without that, I would be dead in the water and possibly physically dead due to a dead end in my path.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) First and foremost, have classes on weekends and evenings to make it possible to work and go to school at the same time since the costs associated with attending school outside of tuition are not something I can absorb without working. Secondly, would be the removal of class requirements from degree programs where they are unnecessary and irrelevant to their respective fields due to their bloating effect that they have on said programs.”

—Comes from a family who historically lacked much in terms of means and had to pay their own way through much of their education and work for a vast majority of their higher education life, an asian american who has to consistently hide their ethnicity to avoid getting filtered out due to "quotas," a person who is in their late 20's and entering into a very difficult job market with very little to show for their time at Sac State due to the lack of available relevant classes, a person who had to leave their tech job to unlock further growth that may never manifest due to a lack of flexibility on the part of the school

“Classes feel useless, professors are scatterbrained and unhelpful when asked questions. 6 years is too long to earn a 4 year degree. It's expensive.

I stay because I need to finish my degree to get a job

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Lower tuition, improve faculty, streamline degree process”

—23 years old, in my 6th year

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Racism.

I am transferring.”

— I am currently a Black veteran of the United States Marine Corps, senior, enrolled and attending classes in Europe as a part of the Study Abroad program of CSUS, with a 3.95 GPA, numerous scholarships, and Honor Society memberships. I am leaving CSUS because...I reported the misdeeds (of an employee) to several of his superiors and yet they collectively decided to allow him to retain his position.... I will simply transfer to another institution of higher learning and make my decision to leave and why known to media outlets.... It is time to put an end to "the good old boy" practice of retaining "White" employees that had it been reversed and I a "Black" employee had been guilty of, I would have been removed as soon as the facts were presented.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) Due to the professors discriminating and stigmatized against me due to my disability and learning disability. Professors telling me they will only do the bare minimum of their requirements to meet my needs equitably in the classroom per my legal accommodations. When a professor told me, I did not look or sound deaf; singled me out in the classroom. Professors refusing to do what I request per the approved accommodations for my disability. Students refusing to work with me because I have a captioner and told me I do not belong in the classroom. Professors purposely singling me out and letting me know I do not belong in their classroom and that I need to adapt to them not the other way around. The professors retaliate against me when I am self advocating for myself.

I stayed because I had to find my voice and self advocate for myself. I stand and fight for myself and other students with disabilities that no one gets to tell us we do not belong. I fought, stood up against the professors and students who told me that I do not belong. My education is more important, I can't let anyone tell me I do not belong and I have a right to an equitable education. I have a legal right to learn and I will not let anyone tell me I can't.

The services, administrators, and faculty can do better by putting into action steps of making sure that in their hiring contracts that are required to attend diversity, equity, and inclusion training. When completing this training there needs to be more direct follow up from management and president of the university following through with discipline action when administration and faculty members violate students with disabilities educational rights in the classroom. The university can do better by making more university events and clubs on campus enforcing inclusiveness with the disabled student population. Currently the university and clubs are discriminating against people with disabilities and their race. Take action by posting helpful information of how to interact and ask people with disabilities what their needs are. Educating that not every person with a disability needs the exact same accommodations and everyone with a disability has different needs.... Now that you know, now that you are aware, it is time to make a choice to do better. Thank you for listening.”

—Hello, I am a student living with a disability, I am a parent of three children, first generation college student, multiracial, European and currently waiting to be approved as indigenous to the Cherokee Nation tribe, and transfer student year Junior.

“Currently thinking of leaving: No financial sources to pay college tuition. I was dependent on my Calgrant to pay my tuition, but had found out the last week ... that it was taken away from me according to Sac state requirements. Now I cannot register for classes not unless I pay out of pocket (subsidized and unsubsidized loans are not enough).

I'm waiting if my financial status will improve or at least change a little bit for this semester and the next.

I hope that sac state would at least send out emails in a timely manner or actually try to reach out to the student via call or text, especially when they decide to take away their financial aid. Doing so would have given me enough time to prepare or gather money to pay off the tuition fee.”

—3rd year transfer, middle class, no financial aid assistance from parents.

“It takes too long to graduate. A lot of courses the student will not need in the real world experience. Maybe a few core classes and internship but that is about it. Most of the junior college courses are I feel are irrelevant. Those years could be working on your job making money not paying for college. In my case I feel the first 3 years were a waste of time. I am over 50 years old so the argument about people need to have experiences doesn't work for me. I traveled the world in the military and I know exactly what field I want to belong to. Someone that is straight out of high school that could be the case but people over 30 in my opinion do not need the first 2 years of college except maybe writing or math only if you're going into that field. I am thinking about leaving however I only have 4 classes that is what making me stay.

I am staying because I have come this far why stop with such few courses to take.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Really nothing unless they can change the way the college system works. The way it should work is that students could intern or work on the job like an apprentice. Then take only the classes need to learn in that field. For example if I want to be a computer engineer why do I need history class, political science etc. It has nothing to do with the field I am in. The college has plenty of ways to make money why leave a student with so much student loan debt that takes years if not decades to pay off. When I first joined college it was only 11 dollars a unit. So what happened the courses cost so much now?”

— Age 53, US Army veteran, super senior, Multi-racial

“I left due to financial issues which caused major mental health issues

I came back because I wanted to finish and change the college system to make to more accessible for students

Sacramento State can do all it can to be more accessible for students and support students of underserved backgrounds in their educational journey.”

—African-American Male mixed race who us a first generation working class student

“I recently been deciding to leave college because it feels like the teachers don't care about the students well being and retract their statements often to contradict the narrative that they care.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) I don't want to struggle in life and be poor.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Take into account that life happens and some teachers shouldn't be teaching. Actually use the rate my professor scores to evaluate teachers.”

—I am a 19 year old Female Black, Cuban, and Punjabi student at Sac State. I am a first generation college student. My father is a Veteran, so I am a dependent that doesn't know how to access my benefits.

“I actually left college in 2018 because I had to work full time & I also attended school full time. All the while being a supporter of my family. So I had to take care of my siblings as well, meaning schooling & work schedule will have to align well with my siblings’ school schedule. This meant I had to work nights & do hw around the small window of opportunity during the day or weekends.

I had to get my financial situation settled so I wouldn't stress so much on that. Also, I was taking care of my siblings until they were able to take care of themselves. So when I finally felt ready to add school back into my life, I did in 2021.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) I would say, just be supportive & understanding because there's so much that goes on in life that can't be controlled. Also, focusing on accommodating more than harsh deadlines helps a lot.”

—I am a 24 year old girl. I am asian, specifically hmong. I am bilingual, this is also my 3rd year of college.

“I entered Sac State in 2014 and my major was undeclared. In the year of 2017 I left and was out of school for a year. I left because 1.) I was lost and did not know myself and was having an identity crisis such as who was I? What was my purpose? Though these 2 questions were simple, to me it was actually not simple because at that time in my life my parents had divorced and so I was left with a lot of things in my life that I had to either define or redefine. 2.) I was also experiencing a toxic environment at home due to my mom's emotional projection onto me towards my dad after the divorce. This really affected me and my performances in my classes. I felt that no one could help me because I knew that a lot of people were not in my shoes and therefore lacked the experience of what I was experiencing and therefore would not be able to help me in the way I needed help.

I came back because I knew that I was taking time off to recuperate and heal. While taking a break, I worked at Taco Bell. Unlike how others may have felt about fast food jobs, I actually really enjoyed my time there. However I knew that I did not want my career to end there and that I was capable of doing more. Therefore, I knew that going back to school would allow me to find what I was passionate about because I had resources that could only be accessed if I was a student there whereas at Taco Bell, I could only access resources that built that restaurant chain. Knowing this, I enrolled at a community college and reflected on what I was good at which was consoling people. Through this, I talked to some counselors and took some intro Psych classes in which I decided that this was the major for me.

Sac State does a great job at being inclusive and promoting resources. However, though the resources are there, a lot of the times when students are in vulnerable situations that make them want to leave, it feels daunting to reach out for help. My advice is maybe there can be a system that is set up so that students can share their stories anonymously (like this survey here) where others can read so that they do not feel alone and when they feel comfortable, they can then reach out.”

—27, female, Hmong, first generation college student

“I have thought about leaving college when I encounter professor who are racist and there are a whole lot of them at Sacramento State University. I thought about leaving when I had to take an incomplete, because I was experiencing homelessness and covid came about and I lost a lot of family member and friends. I explain it to my professor and he told me, if I do not complete the incomplete assignment. I will receive a ‘C+’, but the following Spring came and I notice I had a F. He found every excuse to not change my grade. So, I went to the department chair. I sent her the emails he sent me and she changed my grade. I also, wanted to leave when I had to go back into the classroom after COVID.

I came back, because I need this degree to get a better job. So that, I can become self-sufficient.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Hire teachers who are not racist and get rid of the ones who are. Respect their students. Enforce the fact that Sacramento State is a place for higher learners. A place where students can have a voice even if they did not agree with what was taught. They should feel that it is ok to express themselves with out a teacher retaliating by giving them a grade they do not deserve.

I don't think a teacher should express the sexual preference in the classroom. If they is of the LGBTQ community that is their personal preference and it is ok. To each his/her/him/her/they/them own. But what does it have to do with the classroom, I do not know. I had a professor wrote ther sexual preferenc on her syllabus. On the first day of class while going over the syllabus she mentioned it. I asked why she put that on the syllabus. What do it have to do with the class. She said, well I put it there just in case someone in the class want who may be experiencing the same thing could come talk to me if they want. Well, I felt a certain kind of way, because it made me feel like I could not come to her it I had a issue. However, I been saying yes ma'am all my life to those who are women and of age. Now, I say it, out of habit and the professor gets offended. I working on changing it, but in the midst of me working on it ... I do not want to have my grade lowered”

— I am 56 years old African American women. I have been taking classes all of my life while I raise my children as a single mother. For ever learning. I am a first generation college student.

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) The demands on my time for classes, commuting to and from school, the availability of classes that fit my work schedule.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) A desire to finish my education and to utilize my degree and knowledge.

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Offer more hybrid classes that take into account students who are working or are parents.”

—I am a white male, 33 years old, in my senior year. I am a first generation college student, I work full-time, am married and have three children. My oldest son is 13 years old and I have twin 6 year olds.

“I want to leave college during my time in community college because I was dealing with a death of a family member and financial hardships, and we had to move several times because we could not afford rent raise. My grades also dropped and I have several w, d, f grades on my transcript- I feel disappointed in myself because I could not keep up with school. I felt hopeless....

What made me want to leave college again happened when I transferred to Sac State - during my first semester in fall 2021 when I encountered a biased teacher in an online class who told me to reflect on my culture and upbringing and they never have anyone has asked as much question as I did.

When I encountered biases in class at Sac State, I do feel like no matter how hard I tried I always going to fall behind, I felt insignificant and I don't see opportunities for someone like me anywhere. I want to leave again but when I looked at how much I went through and how many times I have tried to build a path for myself I could not give up halfway. I come back but it doesn't mean I stop dealing with self-doubt. It's an ongoing battle.

I don't feel I receive enough support from the school as a transfer student and I feel very overwhelmed with the future as I started to get close to graduate time.”

—female, 28, Asian, in a senior year, first-gen, a transfer student from a community college, an immigrant, ESL speaker.

“I left because I thought I had completed the curriculum but that turned out to be not true and was miss led. I was 3 units short but the university made me take 6 and cost me a lot of money and time to do this

(What can Sacramento State University do better for you?) Be very clear about graduation and checking that all classes are done if students are in senior year. Be more understanding of situations and offer a discount if it was at the fault of the school.”

—Hispanic First generation 30 Final semester

“(What made you or is making you want or need to leave college?) I am government employee and my work schedule conflicted with my school schedule.

(What kept you here or is keeping you here taking classes—or what got you to come back, if you did leave college?) I believe in higher education. I love the support of the staff and the amazing programs that have empowered me as a student at Sacramento State University. I am currently enroll this spring semester in my last class to complete my B.A in Ethnic Studies.

Sacramento State University has provided awesome support to me as a student. I hope that that more service and programs continue to be available to more students of color.”

— I am a Afro-Latina that was born in Chetumal Mexico and was raised in Belize City. I migrated to the United States when I as sixteen years old. I enrolled at Sacramento State fall 2013 as a part time student while working full time.

Introduction

Millions of students enroll in higher education in the nation each year. Some will complete their educational journeys, yet many may struggle to stay and still others will go.

Those Who Leave College

The number of Americans with some college but no completion of a credential or degree (SCNC) rose to 40.4 million, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) for the most recent academic period studied. This growth of 1.4 million students “is due to a lack of re-enrollment among the 39 million previously identified SCNC students and the 2.3 million new SCNC students (recent stop-outs).” By state, California has the highest number by far, at 6.6 million SCNC students, and the 6% rate of recent stop-outs of the national total SCDC population is also in the higher range.

Those Considering Leaving College

And many of the students who are enrolled in higher education are struggling. According to the Gallup/Lumina Foundation report, [“The State of Higher Education,”](#) based on a survey of students currently enrolled in college, 41% surveyed said that it was “very difficult” or “difficult” to remain enrolled in their program, up a bit from last year. When asked whether or not the student had considered withdrawing from their school for at least one term in the past six months, 41% of students responded yes, a number that has risen steadily in the past few years the survey has been done.

The Risks of Stopping Out

Once a student stops-out, they are statistically less likely to come back—and those who do are less likely to complete to degree. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center report, [“Some College, No Credential,”](#) notes that fewer SCNC students re-enrolled than in the previous year (down 8.4%, totaling 864,800 students) and fewer SCNC students persevered into their second year of re-enrollment (down 4.3%, totaling 508,700 students) from the previous year.

A student may discontinue college for any number of significant reasons, especially in the wake of a global pandemic, continuing economic uncertainty, and mental health epidemic, and all of this in addition to the problems long associated with college enrollment, including cost, time, and competing work and/or family responsibilities. Yet research tells us that for the student, achievement of a college degree means more career paths and promotions available, greater likelihood of financial prosperity and security, and better health and quality of life. The nation needs its most educated workforce to maintain its standing in the world economy and for its judicial, political, healthcare, and education systems, and other important sectors of society. And we, as an institution, need our fullest, most diverse student body for the betterment of all our campus experiences, learning, and scholarship.

This Project—and Our Work

Listening to Students Who Ever Thought About Leaving College or Did Leave College and Came Back is the unfolding of survey responses from students on this campus this year, centering on the different factors in their difficulty in enrollment and consideration of leaving or actually leaving—and what gets them to stay or come back. Each section of the project will focus on one key aspect of keeping students on-track and successful in college life through to completion.

This section, Part 10, focuses on the need for diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice on campus.

Part 10: The Need For Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

As the preceding section notes, too many students leave their higher education, some never to return, and so many students currently enrolled in college consider leaving academia, at risk of not returning once they do so. Research tells us that many are students of historically marginalized groups who experience myriad barriers in society and its institutions, including education.

This is the fundamental reason why diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice are core principles and practices in higher education.

Diversity

“In diversity there is beauty and there is strength.”
—Maya Angelou, author, poet, and activist

Diversity refers to differences amongst people, such as those based on race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic level, abilities, national origin, ancestry, language speaking, family situation, employment, military service, immigration and citizenship status, spiritual and religious beliefs, and political views. In higher education, diversity can encompass more, including first generation college students, rural students, and nontraditional students, and each year, the diversity of the student body increases and is projected to continue to do so.

The benefits of diversity have long been documented. Different types of people from different backgrounds and with different experiential knowledge and insight enrich discussion of issues and subject matter and create greater learning for all. When we are exposed to diverse views, values, and life-worlds, this broadens our perspective and knowledge base, deepens our understanding, and offers new ways to think about and see things. Research shows that diverse groups and organizations typically show greater critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and decision making, significantly benefitting our many societal institutions, the workforce, and the nation. Greater exposure to diversity also develops our abilities to interact and work with, lead, and serve different types of people, positioning all—students, faculty, and staff—for greater fulfillment and success in an increasingly diverse society.

Equity

*“Treating different things the same can generate as much inequality
as treating the same things differently.”*
—Kimberle’ Crenshaw, scholar, writer, and activist

Equity means everyone is given what they need to have equal opportunity. Equity acknowledges that some are at a greater disadvantage than others—it is not a level playing field. Different groups of people encounter different barriers and challenges in life, and in higher education, experience different struggles on campus, and have different resources, tools, abilities, and levels of preparation for college. Equity is not equality. Rather, different groups need different things to level the playing field and provide fair opportunity for all. For example, students with a learning disability like dyslexia may need more time to take an exam, students from a lower-income background will need greater financial aid and scholarships, students for whom English is not their first language may need more academic support in reading and writing, and first

generation college students may need more assistance navigating college life than students with parents who have gone to college and can better assist them. Equality is about giving everyone the same resources, but equity is when everyone gets the resources they need to succeed.

We cannot just have a diversity of students without the corresponding diversity of support measures for different student needs. Decades of research highlight disparities in the outcomes and experiences of many student groups in higher education, and there are equity gaps on our campus, as well. Research also shows that equity practices work. Equity is important because it is the wise and right thing to do, in acknowledgement of the unequal barriers and biases that different groups face, and in pursuit of academic achievement for all and the greater financial stability and quality of life that comes with this. And equity not only benefits the groups the equity efforts are meant to serve, but all students, potentially. For example: Zero-cost and low-cost textbooks and open educational resources are now far more prevalent in classes due to the need to make college more affordable for students of lower-income households. Captioning or transcripts for recorded class lectures are utilized by far more than the students with hearing disabilities these accommodations are implemented to assist.

Inclusion

“We will all profit from a more diverse, inclusive society, understanding, accommodating, even celebrating our differences, while pulling together for the common good.”

—Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Supreme Court Justice

Inclusiveness is when all people on a campus feel that they belong, matter, are free to be themselves, and that their voice counts. Differences are acknowledged and affirmed in campus spaces, structure, policies, norms, and communication, and no one feels excluded, disrespected, or discriminated against because of their background or identity.

We cannot just have diversity without creating the culture and practices of inclusion for all students to feel welcome, safe, and valued. Research has long shown that a sense of belongingness increases student learning and academic performance, engagement and fulfillment in their studies and campus life, and persistence in classes through to graduation. All students benefit from a sense of belongingness, but some more than others, including: Older reentry students, who may feel that generation gap with younger classmates; students with disabilities, who may feel greater separation from their classmates without disabilities; students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, who may feel a steep divide in way of life from students without financial struggles; students coming here from around the world, who may be experiencing culture shock and homesickness; students feeling alone in their classes due to underrepresentation in their fields of study, such as female students in STEM classes; first generation college students, who are typically going it alone in college life without benefit of parents or family members who have gone and can knowledgeably support them; and students of color, who may feel greater isolation in academia or may have been treated as if or told that they weren't cut out for college in their prior schooling.

And when students feel a sense of inclusion, they're more likely to contribute and collaborate to the best of their abilities, and grow and flourish in their studies and campus life. This is what helps our institution to grow and flourish, as well.

Due to the ever increasing diversity on college campuses, equity and inclusion principles and practices are essential—these help students to stay and succeed in their studies, and help the institution to maximize the benefits of diversity for all. This is why equity and inclusion are typically central to the standards for accreditation that institutions of higher education are held to, including our own.

Justice

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr., activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner

Diversity, equity, and inclusion may have remained there with that acronym, DEI, a real movement in higher education, as well as the business industry, healthcare, and other sectors of society. Others, however, pushed for more, pushed for justice also as a principle, and so, with some shuffling of the terms, the acronym sometimes used then became JEDI for some institutions, such as our own.

A scholar and educational reformer, D-L Stewart, was one of the first strong voices in the DEI movement advocating for the inclusion of justice, as well as greater equity, in higher education, noting that diversity and inclusion by themselves do not identify or interrogate systemic inequities. Dr. Stewart notes: “‘Diversity asks: Who’s in the room?’ Equity responds: ‘Who is trying to get in the room but can’t? Whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?’ Inclusion asks, ‘Has everyone’s ideas been heard?’ Justice responds, ‘Whose ideas won’t be taken as seriously because they aren’t in the majority?’”

Justice is needed to challenge the status quo, to ask the tough questions about whether what we do, how we do it, and why we do it produce or reproduce power imbalances and marginalization or minoritization of groups of people on our campus and beyond, to strive for a better world for all.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

You will find reference to JEDI values in Sacramento State University documents such as [Strategic Planning](#) and [Strategic Action Items](#). And one of our Institutional Imperatives is [Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging](#).

There is our stated commitment to *“building a just, diverse, equitable, and inclusive community where everyone belongs.”*

And there is the charge for each of us to do our part: *“This work does not reside in a single office but is a collective responsibility for the whole of the campus community. An embracement of our diversity will increase the vitality of the campus and help the University foster and strengthen our commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion for Sacramento State and the Sacramento Region.”*

In this Document

To follow, you will find suggestions for students, faculty, and staff to further the important work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice on our campus.

For Students

Dear Students,

We hope you know just how much each of you is appreciated on campus!

All students are valued here:

Students of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest enrolled student, and with this, the differences in generations and life-stages.

Students of all genders, including those who identify as female, male, transgender, agender, and gender fluid.

Students of all cultures, races, and ethnicities, including those indigenous to this land, those who came or their ancestors came to make a life here in this country, those with citizenship or without, those who speak any language, and those who are international students and undocumented students.

Students of all sexual and romantic orientations, including gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual or pansexual, and asexual.

Students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, from those who struggle for food, housing, and the means to pay for bills and their education to those with greater access to needed resources for living and schooling.

Students who are single, dating, partnered, married, separated, or who have lost someone they love; students living alone or with roommates, the families they were born into, or the families they create; and students with responsibilities for the care of children, other family members, and/or loved ones in need.

Students with different personalities and abilities, and neurodiversity.

Students with disabling conditions, including those related to sight, sound, mobility, speech, health, pain, mind, emotion, and learning, whether visible or invisible.

Students of different religions, faiths, and spiritual views and practices, as well as students who are agnostic, atheist, or seeking.

Students of different political parties and views, from liberal to conservative to membership in other political groups.

Students who are employed in different fields and sectors of industry, working for gainful employment, experience, and/or internship, with part-time to full-time schedules.

Students who serve, in volunteerism, activism, or public service to our nation, including those who are or were in military service.

Students who come from different educational backgrounds, with varying degrees of academic preparation, and different learning styles, needs, and preferences.

Students who are majoring in any field of study, and students who have not yet decided.

Students in their first year of college to their last, and students with varying knowledge of college and with different entry points into higher education: New students, transfer students, students coming back to college, and first generation college students.

Realize the Power of Diversity

The diversity you bring makes our campus better in numerous ways. Each student brings unique strengths, resources, and benefits to our classes and campus—and that diversity is what makes us a better place and better people. Research shows that diverse groups and organizations typically show greater critical thinking and creativity, and more effective problem solving and decision making. This means each of our classes, campus programs, committees, and clubs is made better by you—and that Sac State University is made better by you being here!

We know, as well, that discussion and interaction with a variety of people helps each of us to grow in our ability to communicate and interact effectively with others. This means students gain the competency skills necessary to successfully working with different people and groups in the business world and the civic realm. *And we all—students, faculty, and staff—strengthen in our awareness, understanding, and communication with others, making our campus, as well as the broader community and country, better.*

Employers seek college graduates with the knowledge of and communication competence with all types of people, whom you may work with in terms of colleagues, customers, clients, constituents, and more. Research shows greater profitability in business and industry with a more diverse workforce, and greater recruitment and retention of talented employees. And our society and democracy need from us the ability to work through differences, now more than ever.

Understand the Value of Inclusion

When students feel a sense of belonging on campus, they are more likely to stay and succeed in college, and enjoy and engage more in their studies and campus life. Connections with others also provide helpful opportunities to learn from other students more about campus policies and procedures, classes, and majors in order to better navigate college life and courses. Connecting with others also helps to lower loneliness and sense of isolation, bring down stress, and help with mental health struggles, the U.S. Surgeon General has told us.

Sac State has so many groups and programs that can help to provide a sense of inclusion, as well as support and the opportunity for learning.

[Student Organizations and Leadership \(SO&L\)](#) offers close to 300 student-led clubs and organizations, including those that are academic, cultural, fraternal, honorary, political, professional, recreational, religious, service, social, sports, and special interest in nature.

There's also a number of programs and centers: The [College Assistance Migrant Program](#), the [Disability Cultural Center and Assistive Technology Lab](#), the [Dreamer Resource Center](#), the [First Generation Institute](#), the [Guardian Scholars Program](#), [International Student and Scholar Services](#), the [Male Empowerment Collaborative](#), the [Women's Resource Center](#), the [Parents and Families Program Successful Parents Website](#), the [PRIDE Center](#), [Project Rebound](#), and the [Veterans Success Center](#), [Air Force ROTC](#) and [Army ROTC](#).

There's also the [Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Center](#), the [Biracial and Multiracial Institute of Achievement](#), the [Black Honors College](#), the [Cooper-Woodson College Enhancement Program](#), the [Esak'timá Center](#), the [Full Circle Project](#), the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholars Center](#), the [Multi-Cultural Center](#), the [Native Scholars and Transition Program](#), [Project HMONG](#), the [Serna Center](#) and the [Southwest Asian North African \(SWANA\) Center](#).

Learn About Differences

One of the most valuable parts of education is learning about others different than you. This allows you to achieve that awareness, adaptability, and skill in effectively understanding, communicating, and working with all types of people. And human diversity is incredibly fascinating to learn!

Cultural humility is a term that is defined in different ways, but at its core means doing your most mindful and active listening when others share their identities, experience, background, or truth, in acknowledgement that there are different lived realities, and always more to be learned from others. You can learn further about diverse people and issues of diversity in other ways, as well, including whole classes or segments of classes in your studies, or learning more through the many different cultural centers and resources on campus, including the programs and centers listed on the prior page. Cultural humility also entails self-exploration: That we ask ourselves what our own identities and backgrounds are, which are most important to us and why, and how these shape our perceptions, feelings, communication with others, and ways of being and thinking about our world. Cultural humility is a lifelong journey. *There is always more to learn in our unfolding understanding of who we are and our dynamic, diverse world.*

Dialogue About Differences

Straight talk about differences can sometimes be difficult, especially discussions related to race, sex, disability, LGBTQ+, immigration and citizenship status, and other identities. It can be awkward and uncomfortable. It can leave people feeling confused, saddened, guilty, hurting, angry, or exhausted. *But it is the way we open our eyes and hearts more fully to groups other than our own, and learn about the circumstances unique to each.* These are special discussions, requiring courage and honesty in sharing thoughts and experiences, as well as in asking questions and admitting what you don't know or understand. Responding with open minds and empathy is also essential, remembering that experiences disclosed are interpreted in different ways by different people, and helping someone to feel heard and understood is impactful. Missteps will likely occur as we learn about and discuss groups other than our own, and we have a responsibility to act at such times with grace and growth.

Discussion about differences can help us to explore more fully profound and complex issues—and if not at an institution of higher education, then where? This is why it is a part of the [Hornet Honor Code](#) to “*Value diversity and learn from one another.*”

Voice

For some students, speaking up about themselves or other topics is easy and enjoyable. For others, however, it is not. For those students who find speaking up difficult in interactions with others out on campus or in groups, organizations, or events in college life, please remember that the beauty of diversity stems from everyone sharing fully and freely their perspectives and ideas. *So let your voice be heard!* Please don't cheat others out of your great thoughts and ideas. We need to hear from you with regard to campus happenings and decision making, societal and political topics, matters of diversity and inequity, and so much more! It might not be easy at first or at times, but *voicing your perspectives, experiences, and thoughts can be powerful.*

We also need your voice in class. What we teach, traditionally, is very Eurocentric—the work of older white males of European descent—and all the other work of a field of study, too, is

inevitably restricted due to the limited number of identities of those or any scholars, simply because a human being cannot belong to all groups. This means we need greater diversity of perspectives and voices. The scholars who created most of the theories, conducted the studies, and wrote the academic articles or books need the scholars in the class to contribute their own unique insights and ideas in order to make all of our understanding of the work we are learning better and stronger. *We need you and all of the different thinking you bring for all of our best learning*—including that of your professors.

Know Your Rights and Resources

All human beings deserve the opportunity to learn more about this world in which we live and others in it, learn a field or career to increase their ability to survive and advance in our economy and contribute societally, and learn about themselves and develop and actualize all the ideas, insights, abilities, and talents within, waiting to come out. And all people deserve a safe and accessible place in which to learn. In higher education, there are laws and policies in place for this purpose. For example: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act mandates the responsibility of colleges and universities to protect students' right to learn, free from discrimination, and the Americans with Disabilities Act mandates accessibility for students with disabilities in class and campus life. At Sac State, there are University policies to protect the rights of students, such as the [Religious Observance Policy](#) and [Pregnant and Parenting Students Rights](#), and practices to affirm identities, such as those for the use of [Inclusive Pronouns](#) and [Preferred Names](#).

For students wanting to report an incident of bias against themselves or observed that negatively impacted their sense of belonging, there is the [Bias Reporting Tool](#). Examples of bias to report include: Exclusion or microinvalidations, microaggressions, invisibilizing or silencing, prejudice against religion or disability, and unequal treatment based on socio-economic status, job classification, citizenship status, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or title. Note, too, that [Campus Counseling services](#), which are already paid for as a part of tuition fees, are available to students with struggles, including cultural adjustment, cultural and identity concerns, questioning sexuality and coming out, or experiencing negative treatment, threats, or subtler forms of oppression because of race or ethnicity, religion, country of origin, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other aspects of identity and would like support or assistance.

Fight for Greater Equity and Social Justice

Some students are already leading the charge, social activists who fight through words and actions, through music, art, and poetry, in forums, workshops, and campaigns. Other students may find themselves fighting for social justice in their near future.

College can be a time for many students of awakening and activism to bring awareness to or fight against stereotypes, stigma, and inequities, to bring about needed change. And the campus offers so many opportunities and resources to learn about the myriad issues of power imbalance, oppression, and marginalization of groups, ways to get involved, and the steps to take to do our part in the fight for social justice. The groups and organizations listed previously are also good places to learn more and do more with regard to social justice. College is also a great place to develop the skills needed in communication, leadership, and advocacy, and meet others to join forces, show solidarity, become allies, and work for the causes you believe in to make our world a better place.

For Staff and Faculty

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice require different, sometimes overlapping, things from us in our individual spheres of campus responsibilities. The work is needed, continual, and sometimes difficult, yet also transformative for us, our students, and our institution.

Diversity

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) provides a way to look at different types of student engagement at individual institutions of higher education choosing to participate in the survey, such as our own. The survey goes out to first-year students and seniors on campus and asks questions to measure a number of aspects of student engagement, including diversity. In the [NSSE Report on Inclusiveness and Engagement with Diversity](#), when asked how much the institution demonstrates commitment to diversity, these are the responses of Sac State students:

“Very little” was the response of 3% of first-year students and 3% of seniors.

“Some” was the response of 18% of first-year students and 15% of seniors.

“Quite a bit” was the response of 43% of first-year students and 39% of seniors.

“Very much” was the response of 36% of first-year students and 44% of seniors.

Being committed to diversity means we first truly see all of the diversity on our campus. Students come with many differences, challenges in their lives and education, the nuances and ramifications of intersectionality, and the strengths forged thereof, all of which are important to understand.

Being Aware of Differences

There are well-documented differences among groups in ways of perceiving, thinking, communicating, living, and more. Very broadly, for example, people of collectivistic cultural backgrounds differ significantly from the individualistic culture of the United States where they may have grown up or come to live, and hold other cultural values, as well. Children of varying socioeconomic levels learn different ways of thinking and communicating from their parents that they can carry with them into adulthood. Members of different generations vary in views and values. Women typically communicate and learn in ways more cooperative and personal than men. People with disabilities may navigate the world and live their lives very differently. Our awareness of the myriad specifics of such differences enables us to interact and work with students more effectively.

Preventing Misperceptions

Awareness helps us to avoid misinterpretations of our students. For example, in terms of class participation: We may think that a student who isn't contributing in class either doesn't know or doesn't care about the material, when instead they may be hesitant to speak up due to English speaking difficulties or speech, language processing, or hearing disabilities; they may be of a culture or from a country where adults older than themselves are not interrupted or questioned or the students' sole role in class is to listen to the lecture and not talk; or they are a student of color who may not want to speak up for fear of being wrong and conforming to inaccurate stereotypes regarding the intellect of their cultural group in the eyes of others, or even themselves. In terms of writing: We may receive responses to written essay exam questions with a number of spelling and grammatical errors and assume the student, who is typically well-spoken in class, just was not prepared or knowledgeable on the exam questions, not realizing that basic conversational

English is developed much sooner than written academic English for multilingual learners, or that the student has disabilities related to reading or writing. Then, too, some students with vision and learning disabilities may be using adaptive speech-to-text or Braille translation software, and these methods are not fail-safe in terms of writing mechanics. In terms of attendance: We may notice a student with inconsistent attendance and assume our class or appointments made with them must not be a priority, when the student may have been really looking forward and/or needing to be there, but their caregiving responsibilities, cultural traditions, work schedule, lack of transportation, physical health conditions, and/or mental health struggles prevented them from coming.

Understanding the Challenges

Awareness helps us to understand the considerable challenges some students face coming into and during their college education. For example, students with disabilities may come into a new class wondering where they will sit, how the instructor will react to the need for accommodation, or how they will learn and communicate in the course. Student veterans may experience difficulties transitioning into civilian and college life, as well as physical or psychological injuries, yet be reluctant to seek help, given the “warrior” mentality instilled in military service. LGBTQ+ students may come from a home that rejected them or a background of being bullied, feel anxious when a teacher takes roll that first day in class if they are transgender or nonbinary, or reluctant to speak freely about the people they love if they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or pansexual. Students of color may come from cultures of generational historical trauma, experience bias in daily life and stereotype threat in class performance, or feel the apprehension of language difficulties or undocumented status. Understanding the life-worlds and academic challenges of our students deepens our empathy and enables us to better anticipate their needs and assist them in their education. This makes continual learning about our students essential.

Seeing Students Beyond One Identity

Further still, awareness of all of the identities of an individual is needed. Human beings are hard-wired to see someone whom they don’t know or don’t know well in terms of the most recognizable categories, and we often stop there. In academia, for example, we may see the student primarily through discernable identifiers such as race or accents, or through what we learn about identities via such things as student accommodation forms for disabilities, or self-disclosure of LGBTQ+ or veteran status. Taking care to see more, see beyond, the immediately known categories means that the student feels acknowledged beyond any one demographic, and in knowing them more fully you will be able to better communicate with and understand the person sitting in front of you in class or across an office counter or desk.

Seeing Students for More of Who They Are

Then, too, we must look at how identities may intersect. The principle of intersectionality asks that we look at the multidimensional, interacting components of a person’s identity, rather than any one aspect exclusively, in order to most fully understand and support each student in their journey on campus and in life. For example, a Latinx person born male and identifying as female may be especially rejected by family and friends of a culture more traditional in masculine roles, with the cultural value of machismo. An African American male with some forms of autism may have been more strictly penalized in schooling for communication or

behaviors typical to his condition, misperceived by school staff through the lens of racial bias. A younger female Hmong student, taking care of small siblings, running the household, and working to help support the family, may well find herself struggling in coursework, yet be held to a minority myth standard in the eyes of others, resulting in the student not being offered or given the academic support she needs. A Native American female student with a learning disability enrolled in public school may have had her intellect especially discounted and dismissed by staff subscribing to cultural stereotypes—supported and encouraged far less academically, making her college enrollment even more of an achievement.

Seeing Students for All of the Assets They Bring

Last but by no means least, students bring with them significant strengths, some of which were forged from their backgrounds of challenge. This means that we don't see historically marginalized or minoritized students from what has been termed a "deficit view," but instead see all of the special "cultural capital" they bring, including the ability to overcome tremendous hardships and persevere in an academic world not designed for them. Take to heart what educational reformers have noted: Students bring valuable experience, perspectives, and skills from those backgrounds that faculty and staff should recognize as such—*as assets*—and strive to draw upon and support, because students are empowered with these forms of cultural capital. The important principle of intersectionality, too, asks that we honor and appreciate students in the fullness of all they are. Sometimes the metaphor used for intersectionality is that of a multi-faceted jewel, and like a gem created by nature, each student is unique. The exact nexus of their many differences makes each student unique in knowledge, skill, experience, goals, dreams, insights, ideas, capacities, and so much more, making each student a treasure to this world and to this campus.

Continually Learning about Diversity

Awareness of diversity, in sum, helps us to better understand what we need to better serve and teach our students, to honor and appreciate all they are and bring to our institution and this world, and to support them in achieving their college education and achieving their fullest potential. Awareness of diversity requires continual learning. Those who teach intercultural differences will tell you that the field of knowledge continues to increase and group identity names and other terms sometimes change, and there is always more to learn. Learning opportunities about diversity, as well as equity, inclusion, and justice, abound on our campus, including through the [Division of Inclusive Excellence](#), [Center for Teaching and Learning](#), and various [campus presentations and events](#) scheduled throughout the semester.

Continually Reflecting on Self

In addition to learning more about others, we need to examine ourselves. What are our own identities, which are most salient, and how do these shape our work and interaction with students and colleagues? We also need to assess our experiences with members of other groups and what we have been socialized to see or expect in identities other than our own, including identifying the implicit biases we hold, and how this may impact our teaching and work, and what steps we must take for improvement. It's also helpful to consider the learning or training in diversity you have done—and need to do—and ask yourself how you can best use your awareness and knowledge in your campus work.

Equity

Understanding the different needs of our students helps us in our efforts to make education more equitable for all. Some of the more common equity measures needed encompass the following broad areas of accessibility, cost, academic preparedness, and mental health.

Accessibility

Accessibility on-ground and in online campus spaces, in communication and information, is needed for students with physical, health, sight, sound, speech, learning, and psychological disabilities or difficulties. This means as great as some online applications, resources, or websites are, if they aren't fully accessible to every student, then some may be cheated out of full learning, ease of use, and sense of belonging. Alternate text for images, proper headings for documents and slides, captioning and transcripts, extended time and/or a reduced distraction setting for exams, event interpreters or physical space arrangements, and more, ... accommodations ensure all have equal access to class learning and campus life.

It should also be said that accessibility benefits more students than those with accommodations for disabilities. The National Center for Health Statistics of the CDC reports that 32.2 million people in the country have vision trouble (12.9% of adults), 41.3 million people in the country have hearing trouble (16.5% of adults), and 40.7 million people in the country have a physical functioning difficulty of some type (16.3% of adults). The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders reports that in our nation, 7.5 million people have trouble using their voices, and 6 to 8 million people have some form of language impairment. This means that even though not all who are enrolled in college will seek accommodations or in some cases even qualify for accommodations, there will likely be a number of students who have difficulties seeing, hearing, navigating, processing, or communicating in relation to coursework, college life, or campus events and communication.

Accessibility practices can even benefit students without the disabilities or difficulties noted prior. For example, providing oral and/or written descriptions of visual items or demonstrations in a class lecture or campus presentation makes things clear for students with vision disabilities, but also clarifies the material for all students (and sometimes the instructor or staff member presenting, too!). Captioning for recorded lectures, live Zoom classes, or clips shown in class benefit people with hearing disabilities, but also benefits many other students, including multilingual students (who often can follow written words better than speech), students with learning disabilities and ADHD (who can then both see and hear the words), students who are trying to follow an online lesson in a loud or distracting place (so they can at least see the words, even if they can't fully hear them), and students who are at work or home where they need to be quiet (and so they can follow the lesson captioning no matter how low or muted their volume need be). Even students without these limitations may also choose to view recorded class lessons with captioning enabled, because the oral instruction is reinforced visually.

To increase accessibility for all students, we can ask questions such as: What might be accessibility barriers for my office, program, or service, event or workshop that I am planning, or course that I'm teaching? What might be physical barriers in terms of location and room, communication barriers in terms of spoken, written, or visual communication, or learning barriers with regard to class content and assessments, on-ground and online? What more can I do with regard to accessibility? The campus IRT [Accessible Technology resource page](#) is helpful for further learning.

Cost

The costs of a college education and living can be steep. So many students struggle to make ends meet, maintain their means of transportation to school or work, and, even, find a place to sleep for the night and food. Research tells us that when lower-income students stop out of their studies, they are less likely than their peers to come back to college. Some now worry that this may create a “*lost generation*” of lower-income students, many of whom are students of color and first generation college students, who may never return to their higher education.

Staff and faculty can help with financial burdens by spreading the word throughout the semester about the valuable resources on campus for students in financial need, including [Financial Aid and Scholarships](#), the student [Food Pantry](#), and opportunities for employment, transportation and housing assistance, and emergency assistance through [CARES](#). In teaching, we can make textbook decisions with expense in mind, considering no cost/low cost textbooks or putting course textbooks on Reserve, allowing or facilitating older, lower-cost editions of the textbook to be used, or offering an extra desk copy to loan students. We can also keep required supplies or other class expenses to an absolute minimum and be mindful about assignments or extra credit opportunities tied to anything that would incur direct or indirect costs (e.g., advanced technology, event admission prices, transportation and/or parking costs off-campus or on campus on days that the student wouldn’t typically come to school).

To lower costs and ease or eliminate basic needs gaps for our students such as food insecurity or housing insecurity, key questions to ask ourselves in our various spheres of responsibility include: What might entail less expense to the student? What resources can we add, expand, and/or better promote to help lower or offset costs for students? What obstacles or barriers can we remove or mitigate for students to decrease their time-to-degree so that they can finish faster, be done with tuition fees, and obtain that better-paying work that a college diploma helps them to acquire?

Academic Preparation

Some students are likely to come to college with less academic preparedness, including students from lower income families and students of color, research shows. Contributing factors include: Lower socioeconomic backgrounds putting them in schools with less funding and less experienced teachers and counselors; being taught and assisted by school staff with cultural norms or languages that may be different than their own; less assistance with their homework from parents who may be working long hours to pay bills and put food on the table; and less time for school work as the student may have to work more around the house or in caregiving with siblings or working outside the home to help with household income. Many, too, are first generation college students, moving into the world of college often all on their own. Some will be English language learners, as well, who may struggle with academic reading or writing. Moreover, while most students incurred loss to their education during the pandemic, more so for students of lower economic status, rural students, and students of color, due to a number of barriers, including those described prior and that Digital Divide limiting technology access to course lessons and learning. *All of this means that students may really struggle in college.*

We can help by continually reminding students of all of the campus academic support they have available to them—the [Peer and Academic Resource Center \(PARC\)](#), the [Reading and Writing Center](#), the [Math Lab](#), and [Smarthinking](#), and all of the tutoring centers in the many departments and programs of study. We can take a moment to teach the basics to a student in need, such as

giving advice on how best to take notes in class, study for tests, research a topic, cite sources, practice a speech, or structure a paper. And we can inform students of and build within them academic self-efficacy and growth mindset.

In teaching, we can set up on-ground and online courses with clear structure, create low-stakes assignments to assess students early in the semester to see where they're at and what they need to succeed in the course, scaffold larger assignments and build rough drafts or peer review into the process, consider adding a supplemental instruction leader or embedded tutor from PARC, allow choice of assignment topics and formats as much as possible, create thorough study guidelines for tests and facilitate creation of student study groups, and maintain best practices for clear and compelling teaching. We can continually invite students to our office hours, and work one on one with students in need. We can also keep an eye out for students and check in, especially when they appear to be struggling but don't come for help. You may also refer a student struggling in your class to any number of campus resources, such as those listed previously, as well as the [DEGREES Project](#), which serves as a safety net for all students from their first year through to graduation, with student success support including early intervention, academic advising, and connecting students to valuable campus resources.

For greater academic success for our students, the questions we can ask in our campus work include: What academic support can we create, implement, strengthen, and/or better promote to help students? What in our academic policies create barriers to student success? What are policies we could change or create for greater academic equity? In teaching, we could ask: What are common roadblocks, mistakes made, or points of confusion for students in our assignment descriptions, testing, and instruction, and how can we prevent or minimize these? What challenges might different types of students have in learning this area of study, completing this type of assignment, or learning in this type of class modality or course design, and how can we offset or prevent these? What in my class policies for late work, attendance, and more might create inequitable obstacles for students?

Mental Health

Mental health struggles are gravely on the rise in society and on college campuses across the nation, especially for younger people. Yet some student populations are even more prone to distress and mental health challenges: International students typically experience culture shock and homesickness. First generation college students may feel intense pressure to succeed for their families, the isolation of "going it alone" in academia, the difficulty of straddling two worlds, and/or imposter syndrome in their classes. Many nontraditional students feel the stress and overwhelm of the multiple, often competing role responsibilities of breadwinner, parent, and student. Students fighting for basic needs such as food and housing experience anxiety and depression. Student veterans may struggle with trauma. Women have greater rates of anxiety. LGBTQ+ students are at greater risk of mental health struggles and suicidality. Some disabling conditions co-occur with mental health disorders, and some physical health disabilities, including those creating pain and lessening mobility, can be the cause of mental health struggles. Students of color face implicit bias, microaggressions, and discrimination, resulting in what has been called "racial battle fatigue," with symptoms the heightened stress of ongoing racism encountered, where one must fight, fend off, or otherwise cope with stereotypes and stigma in daily life, all of which can take a terrible toll on physical and mental health. Trauma can include historical trauma, in general, and oppression and bias in daily life against students of color, as well as identity-based discrimination against other marginalized groups in society.

We can help by recognizing the signs of psychological distress, reaching out to students in need, listening with care and compassion when they share their struggles with us, and getting them the support they need. We can remind students again and again of the importance of wellness and the availability of [Campus Counseling](#) that is already paid for as a part of tuition. We can be especially mindful of peak stress times in the semester, including midterms, class registration, and the end of the term. We can also keep more of an eye out for students mentioning stressors in personal life, such as loneliness, homesickness, or difficulty adjusting to college life; pressure to succeed or the rigors of academia; illness or injury of themselves or someone close; a bad situation where they work or live, in a class or relationship, or in family life; a painful break-up, falling out with friends, or ongoing roommate conflict or workplace strife; financial stress or legal difficulties; or loss of their job, home, or someone they love. We can use trauma-informed practices to help to build a sense of safety, trust, connection, hope, healing, and empowerment for students. In teaching, we can additionally show flexibility and grace to students who cannot complete an assignment at all or to the best of their ability due to mental health struggles, and allow late work and revision. We can also incorporate wellness resources and practices into our classes and mental health topics into our course content, when possible.

To lower stress, support students with mental health struggles, and increase wellness, we can ask ourselves questions such as: In our various roles at the university, what unnecessary stress, confusion, inconvenience, or hassle can we eliminate in policy making, protocols, and practices, and in programs, services, campus life, and course design and teaching? What are common stressors for students in college life, and stressors specific to different student groups, and what can we do to minimize these? What can we do to better support students with mental health struggles, inside and outside of the classroom? What can each of us do to better spread awareness and support for mental health struggles in our work on campus?

Equity-Mindedness

Being equity-minded means we are intentional about implementation of equity practices. It also means we critically assess what we do and how we do it to see what we can do better for all students to have equal opportunity to progress through college and succeed in their studies through to graduation.

This means we ask ourselves such questions as those regarding the areas of equity previously described in this section—and broader questions, as well. For example: What challenges might different types of students have in awareness or accessing of this service, applying for or utilizing this resource, attending or learning in this campus event or workshop, following this campus policy or procedure, succeeding in this department's curriculum and processes?

When considering different aspects of college life or learning, we can ask where might there be barriers to: First generation college students? Students of color? Students who are undocumented? International students or students who recently came to the country? English language learners? Students from lower-income families or households? Students with disabilities or difficulties related to health, pain, sight, sound, speech, mobility, learning, or attention? Students with mental health struggles? Students who are older or younger (than the traditional age of 18 to 24 years)? LGBTQ+ students? Student parents? Student veterans? Full-time working students? Students currently or formerly in foster care? Students formerly incarcerated? Students underrepresented in a specific field of study (e.g., women in STEM)? Any other student group (e.g., student athletes, commuter students)? *Questions such as these spark needed improvement and change.*

Inclusion

There is much work to do to be inclusive. We want to create good and safe classes and campus spaces for all learners to thrive, model the practices of inclusivity for our students, and teach in ways inclusive of a diversity of learner needs, preferences, backgrounds, and challenges.

While there are any number of strategies for creating inclusion, here are a few key ways:

Honor Identities

A fundamental aspect of feeling a sense of inclusion is identity. Using the preferred names and pronouns for individuals shows respect for who they are, and correctly pronouncing names, as well, is important. Really take note of how a student wants to be addressed and how they say their name in introductions to you in interactions, on that first day of class, or in online class getting-to-know-each-other videos, and any pronouns the student provides. Online or paper questionnaires asking for this information, name tents in class, and/or the resources online for pronunciation of names can also be helpful. Getting to know students, too, before or after class, in interactions, advising, or office hours, also helps us to better put a name to a face. We also want to be inclusive more broadly of identities. To do so, be sure to use the contemporary terms for various identities in relation to disability, neurodiversity, culture, LGBT+, and more—and, more specifically, the terms preferred by the individual, when we can. We can also share our preferred pronouns, acknowledge the land on which we work and reside, thank active military service members and veterans for their service, display our PRIDE Center Safe Zone sticker or digital undocu-ally decal that we receive after training in our email signature line, and make sure our first generation college students know that with their presence here in higher education they are blazing the way for their other family and community members and their generations to come.

Be Inclusive in What We Say

We can show inclusivity by including in our syllabus, class, department, or campus work in written or oral statements welcoming diversity and expressing commitment to inclusion. We can also be sure to use inclusive language in what we say more broadly, meaning wording that pertains to all or almost all people, so as not to exclude anyone. For example, beginning a workshop or class with a “good morning, everyone” rather than “ladies and gentlemen,” wishing students a wonderful holiday or winter break instead of (just) Christmas break, referencing a house of worship rather than church, and so on. We also want to avoid saying or doing anything carrying inaccurate and alienating assumptions, such as all people are male or female, heterosexual, have citizenship, grew up in or have now a traditional family household, have sufficient economic means for good food and stable housing, and are neurotypical or of equal ability of sight, sound, speech, mobility, and health and energy. Avoiding assumptions that all students are of younger age, without children, and don’t work much or at all, is also important. Such assumptions are, for many of us, easier than we might realize to lapse into, but can create a real sense of divide, diminishment, or erasure for our students.

Create Belongingness

Belongingness is a part of our stated University [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging Imperative](#), calling for a campus community “where each member feels a sense of belonging and a responsibility to foster that belonging.” Students need connection with you and connection with their peers, inside and outside of the classroom. Icebreakers and introductions in class can help students to feel more comfortable and open up conversation with their peers.

Introducing students to one another in casual conversations in departments, offices, or out on campus is also helpful in forging connections. Highlighting the unique qualities, interests, and achievements of students, academic or otherwise, also offers a way for students to learn more about their peers, creating conversational openers and connection. You can provide further opportunities for students to continue to talk to one another and work together in campus workshops, events, and in the classroom, through discussion, pair or group learning activities, team projects, and more. We can also take the time to introduce the student to colleagues, and announce campus events and extracurricular activities for students to further engage with the campus community and build connection with others. We can also apply to serve as a mentor to a student through the [U Mentor Program](#) or other campus mentoring opportunities, or invite students to work with us on projects, research, or writing, or in organizations, events, services.

Let Students Know You Believe in Them

It's hard to feel a sense of inclusion if you don't feel you fit in the world of academia. All students benefit from a faculty or staff member's clear and strong belief in them, but especially students of color who, statistically, struggle more in higher education, particularly young men. Research shows that Black students, Latinx students, and Native American and indigenous students from kindergarten on up face the stereotype of lower academic ability and, thus, lower expectations from teachers, staff, and peers in their earlier education, which has documented detrimental and long-lasting effects. Students who are English language learners and students with physical disabilities or learning disabilities also may experience much the same. Some students may have now come to doubt their abilities, as well, and may even feel, as others have suggested to them, that they are "not cut out for school," "not a good student," or "not college material." This makes showing faith in our students' capabilities and potential so very necessary and incredibly impactful. Students will often say this was a defining moment or turning point, how you stating belief in the student got them on or kept them on the path to college success.

Let Students Know You Care

An instructor's heartfelt, caring attitude is one of the most important factors in student retention and success. This is especially for students who come from a background of low trust or rapport with past educators, even shaming experiences with ignorant or biased teachers or staff, such as students of color and students with disabilities. Other types of students may hold distrust for strangers or adults more generally, such as students with some types of past or present trauma, students currently or formerly in foster care, students formerly incarcerated, and undocumented students. Caring comes out head-to-toe in our voices, faces, demeanor, words, and actions: Through giving a smile, using a warm tone of voice, or looking with respect or affection at a student; giving a student the gift of your time, intent listening, and genuine interest; offering practical assistance, psychological support, academic encouragement, and personal inspiration; and reaching out, keeping in touch, not letting go, nor giving up, on a student. This comes from deep commitment to the students—doing your best and going the extra mile to make sure they have everything they need to succeed in their college education.

Let Students Know Their Voice Matters

Inclusion means students feel acknowledged and affirmed, so that they feel free and empowered to share their perspectives, experiences, ideas, and insights with their peers, faculty, and staff, inside or outside of the classroom. This desire and choice to share their thoughts may be the ultimate sign of a sense of inclusion for so many students. And it is in the fullest of dialogue,

discussion, and deliberation that the true benefits of diversity are realized—that deeper and broader understanding of an issue, that greater, more active learning. To foster greater student voicing, we can create, promote, and/or attend more events that feature student voices, facilitate opportunities in our own spheres of work for greater student voice, and encourage and invite student voices at every turn. And when students speak, we can give our utmost attention—that fully present and active listening—to let them know they were heard and their voice valued, and following up and following through, whenever possible.

Use Inclusive Teaching Practices

In teaching, there are a number of inclusive and equity-centered pedagogies ever growing in use and advocacy in higher education, such as Culturally Responsive Teaching, Universal Design, and Inclusive Teaching. Here are a few key principles:

Let Students See Themselves in the Learning

Keep in mind that many of our students, including students of color, women, LGBTQ+ students, and those with disabilities, are much less likely to see themselves represented in the course material they are studying—and consider the impact this may have on their sense of inclusion in academia and learning. Try to use demographically diverse subject matter, references, and examples in what you teach, clips or images you show, exercises you create, and reading and other materials you assign. This can provide badly needed connection to what students are trying to learn in the classroom and the place they see for themselves in the realm of college, as well as increase pride in cultural and other identity groups, which protects against the harmful effects of bias and depression. It's also better representative of the world and a more well-rounded, accurate account of subject areas. This also means acknowledging other ways of knowing, being, expressing, and scholarship in academia than the traditional Eurocentrism and western canon of most disciplines, and holding discussion about why all diverse perspectives weren't traditionally included—and all they add when they are included.

Let Students Be Themselves in the Learning

Whenever possible, give that space and freedom for students to share their own knowledge, understanding, perspective, or experience in relation to the topic at hand. Integrating opportunities for students to apply and draw upon their personal backgrounds, lived experience, and identities in course assignments and class discussion gives a space of belonging in the learning, while also expanding and enriching learning for all—including the instructor. This may include use of whole assignments or class discussion prompts specifically asking students to share how a course concept, theory, or reading connects (or doesn't) with their lived experience or background and why, or for a student to state their opinion on a reading or prompt and why they hold this view, based on their experience, background, and/or class content. This all can send the message that *who you are belongs in and is valued by academia, increasing a sense of inclusion.*

Give Students a Say in the Learning

Much or all of course design and content is decided solely by the instructor, but giving students a choice in aspects of the class invites them to feel more a sense of co-creatorship in their own learning. Faculty can, for example, ask for student input on topics to teach or give students (individually or as a class) their choice in ways to learn course content, assignments to complete, and due dates for these. Faculty can also invite

students to share readings or resources corresponding to course content or offer feedback on their teaching, course policies, content, and assignments. Further opportunity for students to actively shape the class experience can include asking students to create their own community rules for in-class or online discussion interaction, encouraging or acknowledging student roles taken in class (including, for example, time-keeper, group project or class discussion leader, volunteer for demonstrations), or inviting students to add songs to a class playlist during the break.

Let Students Do the Learning in Their Own Ways

Straight lecture is the traditional mode of college instruction, yet research tells us this is seldom the best way to teach for full and active learning, nor inclusive of different learning styles. In lessons, we need to use a variety of teaching methods to adapt to a diversity of learner needs. Offering multi-modal ways of learning effectively appeals to auditory learners (through lecture and class discussion), visual learners (through slides, handouts, demonstrations, and clips), and kinesthetic learners (through hands on learning activities, group exercises, role-play, simulations, and so on). We can also better address student needs when we know more what they are, which can be accomplished by asking students to complete a questionnaire, ideally at the start of the semester, asking questions such as how they learn best and obstacles they may have found in learning in prior classes.

Let Students Show You Their Learning in Their Own Ways

We often assign papers and presentations or give exams, which may not be the most conducive to all students showing you their learning. Papers require ease of English vocabulary proficiency and academic skills that not all students have developed, such as basic essay format, research, and source citation. Students with some learning disabilities or language processing disabilities may also have a harder time with writing. Exams require confidence in study skills and test taking ability, and comfort level with English vocabulary, and tests also aren't the best for students struggling with mental health or stereotype threat, which hurt concentration and focus. Giving a presentation can be terribly difficult for students with disabilities related to speech production, students with anxiety, and students learning English. Offering more of a variety of assignments (such as journaling, portfolios, creative expression or performance, group projects, and service learning) allows students greater opportunity to maximize their strengths and improve in other, less developed areas—and the former builds confidence to achieve the latter. This also may prevent students from being graded solely on the one or few methods of evaluation least suited to their less developed skills or any disabilities.

Reflect on Your Inclusivity

We also need be mindful in our development of inclusive practices, by reflecting on what we're doing to create inclusivity in one on one interactions, campus work, or the classroom. We can ask ourselves what else, what more, we can do to create belongingness, embrace and uplift diversity, and encourage greater student voice—and what our institution could do toward these same valued goals. Some also like to create surveys asking students about how well the class format, structure, teaching, content, class climate, and assignments created a sense of inclusion, or how well a campus group or event allowed for open exchange of opinion and ideas and fostered valuing of difference and learning from one another.

Justice

There are real costs to diversity for so many groups of people. This makes it imperative that we use the positionality and privilege we have to fight for justice in education and in life.

Help to Spread Awareness, Fight Bias, and Create Needed Change

Many students experience the cumulative effects of stereotypes and prejudice on the basis of race, ethnicity, language differences, immigration, sexual orientation, gender identity, disabilities, and more. Therefore, we need to work to create a safe place for every student to be and flourish—and, indeed, the entire campus community. This requires understanding what implicit bias is and the strategies to lower its occurrence, and then helping to spread awareness. Mahzarin Banaji, a leading researcher in this area and co-author of the book, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*, has called implicit bias the “thumbprint” of culture on our minds, meaning that society, media, family, and peers instill within us stereotypes and beliefs of groups. Yet while there are laws and organizational policies in place to guard against explicit acts of racism, sexism, homophobia, and the like, there are no such protections for the implicit biases that research shows we all hold until we educate ourselves and others. We must also understand what microaggressions are, and how to constructively address these when they are committed by others or even ourselves. Failure to address a microaggression is as harmful as the microaggression itself, the experts caution, and a lost opportunity for valuable learning for all. In the words of one of the principal scholars in this field, Derald Wing Sue, “*The first step in eliminating microaggressions is to make the ‘invisible’ visible.*”

It’s important to discuss these and other issues of inequity and injustice openly—any and all of the “-isms.” This means embracing spontaneous “teaching moments” which may arise from societal events or issues in the news or an unintended microaggression in class or campus life. This also means creating more campus events and course lessons about differences between people and the resulting barriers and bias for marginalized and minoritized groups. Such discussions can sometimes feel a little “thorny” for students, the discomfort of import, yet are also immensely thought-provoking and valuable.

We can also create greater opportunity and space for students to teach about issues of diversity and inequity, and share their experiences as members of different groups, whether as informal classroom talk or more formal presentation to the class or at a campus event or workshop. Students can teach their classmates in ways different and often better than their instructors—and, of course, students have so much to teach us, too! Those listening learn about someone different than themselves, and in a way that helps them to move beyond stereotypes and get to know the other as a person on a deeper level and the lived experience and challenges faced. This also allows more of an issue, a group of people, and the realities of our world to be known, creating greater awareness of social injustices, perspective taking, and empathy for others. Sharing lived experience can be empowering for the teller and helps us to see more clearly each other and the prejudice and injustice happening, in order to fight most effectively for societal reform.

We can also engage in that necessary self-reflection and ask ourselves the tougher questions: How might I or the institution be producing or reproducing inequity? What types of positionality and privilege do I hold? How am I leveraging this to advance social justice in my work or teaching—and how might I further do so in class, out on campus, or in the community and beyond?

In what we say, do, research, write, create, and produce in our roles on campus, we can increase knowledge and understanding to improve the lives of others, and show allyship and advocacy. In our work, service, teaching, scholarship, and creative activities, we can help to identify and overcome biases and barriers, and recognize and dismantle systems and structures of injustice. In the campus [Antiracism and Inclusive Campus Plan](#) you will also find many steps we can help the institution to take.

Standing up and speaking out in the face of injustice on campus or the community, joining organizations that fight for social justice or creating your own for a cause, participating in events, rallies, and marches, all can set change in motion and inspire further efforts for needed reform.

Help Students to Lead the Way

Students are the future, the vanguard, learning and leading the way to a more just society for all people. *And college is a great time and place for students to realize this and for us to help them to forge and foster the skills of advocacy and activism!*

We can help students to see the vital importance of social justice and nurture within them the communication and leadership skills needed to fight for societal reform.

We do this by teaching by example when we speak out clearly and constructively against any instance of bias or microaggressions that occur inside and outside of the classroom or office, or when we participate in the fight for equity and social justice for all on campus or in the community. Students watch and listen to all that we say and do, and sometimes we forget just how well-positioned we are to model the spirit and skills of advocacy.

We do this by creating greater awareness of inequities and opportunities to learn about and/or do social reform work through the lessons we teach, assignments we create, readings we give, and events we encourage students to attend to learn more or do more.

We do this by noting and cultivating the passion, skills, and drive within students for social justice, through simple statements of recognition and praise. They may not realize fully or at all the leadership they demonstrate, the commitment they show, or the talents they bring to the work toward greater equity. Helping students to see these qualities within themselves gives them greater confidence in who they are and what they are doing, so important in the often uncertain, daunting nature of activist work.

And we do this by supporting student activists. We can participate in their efforts by showing up to their events, working alongside them in organizations, or promoting or providing resources for their causes. We can lend an ear to a student who needs to talk through the experience, who needs to work through the emotions, the stress or exhaustion that can take a toll on student activists.

Preparing and inspiring students to activism and advocacy for social betterment is very much in keeping with our institution's stated mission: *"As California's capital university, Sacramento State transforms lives by preparing students to lead, serve, and succeed."*

Conclusion

This section of “Listening to Students Who Thought About Leaving College or Left and Came Back” highlights the need for diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice on our campus and offers suggestions for students, faculty, and staff to achieve more in these principles and practices.

Sacramento State University has been recognized as [the fourth most diverse university](#) in the west and [the tenth best university for veterans](#) in the west by U.S. News and World Report. We are a proud Hispanic Serving Institution and an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution. We have one of only about ten Disability Cultural Centers in the U.S. and the first in the CSU system, and are set to launch the first Black Honors College in the nation. Sacramento State University has also been at the forefront of state efforts to increase the number of often older, nontraditional students returning to college, and there are many other ways the institution has distinguished itself in its diversity efforts. *We have done well in so many areas, but there is still more to do.*

DEI offices, practices, and values across the nation have been under attack by some of late. This is truly a shame, given the extraordinary benefit it serves all students, faculty, and staff, colleges and universities, and, ultimately, our communities and country in innumerable ways.

Some have mounted lengthy and deserved defense of DEI, including clarification and correction of myths and misunderstandings ([“Truths About DEI on College Campuses,”](#) for example).

But for our purposes here, let it simply be said this: *Diversity is a profound aspect of humanity. Equity is needed for everyone to have fair and equal opportunity. Inclusion helps individuals to be and become their true and fullest selves. Justice strives to right the wrongs and create a better world for all.*

For more perspectives from students and information regarding this work, “Listening to Students Who Thought About Leaving College or Left and Came Back,” please see the sections:

- [“Part 1: The Pivotal First Year in College”](#)
- [“Part 2: The Need for Belonging”](#)
- [“Part 3: The Need to Do Well and Feel Confident in Coursework”](#)
- [“Part 4: The Need to Manage Stress and Cope with Struggles”](#)
- [“Part 5: The Need to Manage Costs and Financial Pressures”](#)
- [“Part 6: The Need to Finish Each Semester as Strongly as Possible”](#)
- [“Part 7: The Need to Return”](#)
- [“Part 8: The Need to Be Engaged in Learning”](#)
- [“Part 9: The Need for Greater Mental Health”](#)
- [“Part 10: The Need for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice”](#)
- [“Part 11: The Need to Find One’s Path”](#)
- [“Part 12: The Need to Graduate”](#)

This work is part of the larger [Listening to Students](#) project done at this institution.

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