Taking the Lead on Equity and Opportunity

Equality is about sameness; it focuses on making sure everyone gets the same thing. *Equity* is about fairness; it ensures that each person gets what he or she needs.

This distinction is especially important in education, where there are visible gaps in opportunities and outcomes for large numbers of students. Historically, low-income students and students of color have been excluded from too many opportunities in higher education, and today's policies, expectations, and unspoken rules perpetuate the problem.

To effectively educate today's students, higher education must focus on both equity and quality—to make the most empowering forms of college learning available to *all* students. Such an approach begins with *equity-minded leaders* who make it a priority to build new opportunities for low-income students and students of color.

Equity-Mindedness[3]

Equity-minded leaders are aware of the historical context of exclusionary practices in higher education and recognize the impact of this history. They recognize the contradiction between the ideals of democratic education and the social, institutional, and individual practices that contribute to persistent inequities in college outcomes.

Equity-minded leaders also reject the ingrained habit of blaming inequities in access, opportunity, and outcomes on students' own social, cultural, and educational backgrounds.

Most important, equity-minded leaders use this mindset to act for change. They recognize the need for systemic transformation, starting in school and continuing in higher education, to make quality learning for the nation's underserved students a shared priority. They invest their time, effort, and political capital into discussing these issues and mobilizing institution-wide efforts and community partnerships to address them.

EQUALITY　　　**EQUITY**
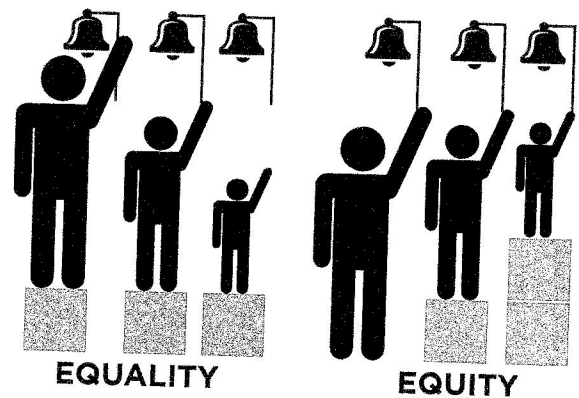
What Does It Mean to Be Equity-Minded?[4]

Equity-minded practices are created through

1. Willingness to look at student outcomes and disparities at all educational levels disaggregated by race and ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status.

2. Recognition that individual students are not responsible for the unequal outcomes of groups that have historically experienced discrimination and marginalization in the United States.

3. Respect for the aspirations and struggles of students who are not well served by the current educational system.

4. Belief in the fairness of allocating additional college and community resources to students who have greater needs due to the systemic shortcomings of our educational system in providing for them.

5. Recognition that the elimination of entrenched biases, stereotypes, and discrimination in institutions of higher education requires intentional critical deconstruction of structures, policies, practices, norms, and values assumed to be race neutral.[5]