



Washington State Student Services Commission

MEMO

To: WACTC Critical Issues Committee
From: WSSSC (Student Services Commission)
Date: 15 March 2018
RE: Policies/Practices Equity Review

Thank you for your invitation to identify core system policies and practices that we believe to be a barrier to our college and system values of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The Student Services Commission (WSSSC) greatly appreciates WACTC's commitment to identifying the roots of systematic racism and oppression, has made a similar commitment and is structuring our work to respond, and is eager to support the work of the Critical Issues Committee (CIC) in advancing opportunities to eliminate that oppression.

During our last commission meeting, we "paused" our agenda to engage in a shared (small and large group) discourse about our values so that we could more fully adjust our frame of reference to respond to the request from CIC. Through that exercise and in subsequent conversations, the commission identified the following policies and practices to forward for your consideration.

- 1. System-level Online Admissions Application (OAA):** Due to the recent WACTC prompted work pertaining to the language of the application used across the system, the application was at the front of our minds. Interestingly, our conversations about language led us to even broader concerns with regard to the fundamental structure and technology of the application. In its current form, the OAA (specifically within the ctcLink platform) does not meet the system, state, or federal policy requirements for accessibility for students (and employees) with disabilities. Further, it is limited in its ability to be presented in languages other than English, and has proven difficult to navigate (which we assume will increase as more colleges go live with ctcLink). We believe these concerns present similar threats to our EDI work; indeed, some students may miss the opportunity to benefit from the recent improvements because the application's current structure is a barrier to access.

[Note: This concern was brought forward to both WACTC EdServices and WACTC Tech at the last WACTC meeting. It is our understanding that WACTC discussed this further, that the issues have been recognized, and that funds have been identified in the ctcLink "re-investment fund" to address these concerns. However, we felt it was necessary to include this as one of our fundamental policies/practices to review so that we assure that action follows commitment, particularly given the impact that an

accessible application/application process has to assuring equitable access and creating diverse and inclusive institutions.]

- 2. Eligibility Guidelines and Student Access for Ability to Benefit (ATB)(Option of Pell):** Through our work in admissions, financial aid, and Basic Skills, it has come to our attention that we, as a system and at our individual colleges, have not been taking full advantage of the financial aid benefits for some of our most vulnerable scholars (those without a high school credential that are fully capable of, and committed to, learning basic skills and job skills concurrently in a career pathway program). Our current practices appear to drive system inequity in how ATB is applied, advertised, and made available. For example, few if any college websites include information about the ATB option. What drives the system disparity in how this is applied? What are the checks and balances that need to be considered? How do biases show up in interpretation/application of policy and how do we meaningfully address these? This likely falls into the category of a practice, though policy could have a meaningful impact to improve/ignite our practice.
- 3. Structural Hiring Process Internal Bias:** As we have seen specifically within our recent focus to recruit and (fully) support faculty of color, we believe similar intentionality within our student services structures will result in meaningful outcomes for student success. Indeed, this goes beyond instruction and student services, and beyond intentionality for recruiting, to be instead about foundational structures and approaches to recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and supporting faculty and staff in institutions committed to EDI. Some institutions have made substantial progress in some areas; few have made meaningful progress that goes beyond a singular area/classification (e.g. faculty). However, we see great potential to build upon learning and practices that have been developed, employed, evaluated, and refined to be applied across our college units and across the CTC system.
- 4. Accommodations at System Meetings, Conferences, and Events:** Recently, WSSSC has made a commitment – both for itself and extended to each of its associated councils – to assure that we intentionally and effectively meet the needs of participants who need accommodations to fully engage in all planned activities. Too often in our own practice, we noted that considering and providing for accommodations is a procedural afterthought rather than an intentional action to support all students/faculty/staff. While we (as colleges and as a state system) have foundational policies and legal frameworks that set a minimum expectation for what our practice is, ultimately there are areas in which we either miss the mark in fully meeting those expectations, or where we know we could do more to advance equitable conditions in order to create truly inclusive college environments.
- 5. Vision for Equity Work Within the System:** As our system continues to grow and develop its competencies and approaches to successfully engaging in work to champion EDI, we have developed a mix of methods to accomplish these goals. One example of this has been the growing cohort of EDI officers, most of whom are

cabinet-level. This group has been an invaluable resource to helping guide and support the work. However, there is some uncertainty about the scope of work (i.e. they are not currently a commission or council, though we frequently engage them as if they are). Further, it is unclear, particularly on campuses with both a CDEO and a multicultural student services director (MSSD), how these two entities complement, reflect, and advance EDI work both at colleges and across the CTC system. WSSSC has identified a workplan goal to engage in conversations with the CDEOs and the MSSD Council to build understanding and collaboration. We believe that guidance from the WACTC Critical Issues Committee would also be beneficial.

Finally, an additional recommendation that surfaced from our conversation was to consider utilizing the Center for Urban Education's "Five Principles for Exacting Equity by Design" framework. This may provide fundamental guidance and/or a standard that can be consistently applied to aid in the assessment, shifting, and re-application of the policies and practices identified through this process.

Thank you again for the opportunity to consider and contribute to the important questions and subsequent action posed by the WACTC Critical Issues Committee.