

CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PRACTICES

REACH Collaborative Brief Three





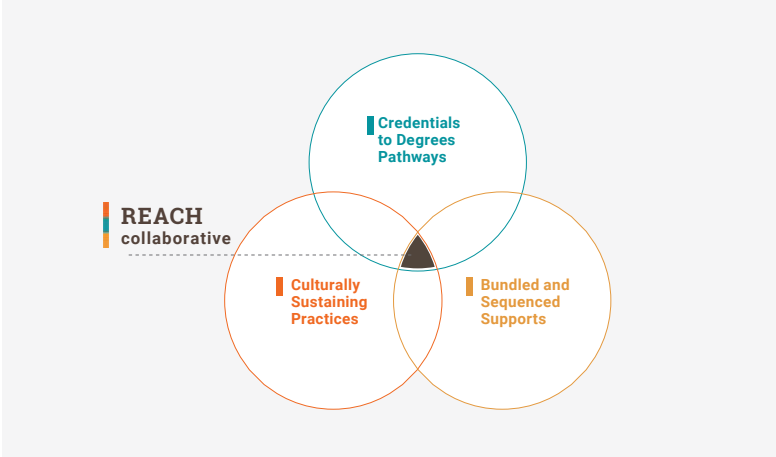
WHAT IS THE REACH COLLABORATIVE?

The REACH Collaborative is focused on creating clear paths for more Black, Hispanic, and Native American adults to grow their skills and advance their careers.

Nearly 140 community colleges in states including California, Colorado, New York, North Carolina, and Virginia are developing academic pathways of credentials in sequences that align with associate degree programs, making it possible for adult students of color to pursue better job opportunities in the short term and work toward higher aspirations in the future. Supported by Lumina Foundation, the REACH Collaborative has set the goal of a 2% increase in credential attainment for enrolled Black, Hispanic, and Native American adults, ages 25-64, at participating community colleges by 2023.

REACH’s three main components – Credentials to Degrees Pathways, Bundled and Sequenced Supports, and Culturally Sustaining Practices – are intentionally designed to work together to support adult students of color, addressing their specific needs and experiences.

This brief focuses on Culturally Sustaining Practices and the factors that should be considered when prioritizing adult learners of color.



It will look at:

- Redesigning Systems That Value and Empower Adult Students of Color
- Moving From Awareness to Action
- Analyzing Cultural Competency
- Representation
- Elevating Student Voice
- Engaging the Right Supports

REACH Key Terms and Definitions

These definitions were collected from multiple postsecondary education, workforce, and government sources.

Racial Equity: A process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone

Cultural Competence: The ability to understand and respect values, attitudes, beliefs, and more that differ across cultures

Racial Equity Consciousness: Dispositions, understanding, awareness and skills that empower individuals to contemplate and cultivate racial equity

Sense of Belonging: A human need to feel acceptance, inclusion, and connectedness

Inclusion: The practice or policy of including equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded and marginalized through active, intentional, and ongoing

engagement with diversity

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group that can intersect to create unique patterns of oppression

Culturally Responsive Advising: Advising practices that acknowledge implicit biases

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: An asset-based approach to teaching and learning that recognizes and engages with students’ cultural background practices

REACH COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS:



Education Strategy Group



POWERED BY





CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PRACTICES

REDESIGNING SYSTEMS THAT VALUE AND EMPOWER ADULT STUDENTS OF COLOR

Adult students of color in higher education face challenges connected with their racial identity which are less common for White, “traditional” aged students. For example, as students of color, they are more likely to experience racism, discrimination, and micro-aggressions, all of which can have a damaging effect on their mental health (Watkins et al., 2022). It can also impact their ability to complete their academic programs and earn credentials and degrees.

Less overt, but no less detrimental to adult students of color are systemic issues in higher education – policies, programs, and procedures which are inherently inequitable. While dedicated institutional leaders and practitioners across the country work to redesign these systems, it is often without acknowledging race as a factor. A growing body of research from organizations like The Education Trust points to the need for race conscious efforts to address barriers for students of color in higher education. They find that race neutral efforts fail to capture community cultural wealth, “the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by social marginalized groups that often go unrecognized” (Yosso, 2005).

The aim for institutions should not be to ignore race; rather, it should be to create environments where racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and lived experiences are acknowledged and valued – where students of color feel they belong and can thrive.

Community colleges in the REACH Collaborative work to create and implement Credentials to Degrees Pathways designed for Black, Hispanic, and Native American adults with an intentional focus on embedding culturally sustaining practices in these pathways. These practices are integrated into every part of students’ experiences – from enrollment

to fulfillment of their academic goals – valuing the community cultural wealth students of color bring to college as assets that should be utilized, supported, and sustained.

MOVING FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION

Culturally Sustaining Credentialing Pathways, as defined by Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher, “reflect explicit race conscious policies, programs, and practices that actively address racialized inequities to ensure student access and success. As such, these pathways are not race avoidant or ignore ethnicity but rather engage at an individual, system, and structural level to interrogate and ameliorate inequitable experiences and outcomes among racially minoritized students” (Zamani-Gallaher, 2021). From selecting optimal pathways to determining the right supports for adult students of color in the college’s community, racial equity is at the core of the REACH Collaborative’s work. While viewing every aspect of the college experience with an equity lens is crucial to identify racial inequities at an institution, an actionable plan and a pledge to address the root causes of those inequities is key to producing equity-focused transformational change. Two fundamental aspects of ensuring there is both the will and momentum to implement culturally sustaining practices is developing a campus-wide culture shift and assessing the commitment of leadership.

Developing a Campus-Wide Culture Shift

While faculty, advisors, and student affairs professionals may have more direct interaction with students than other roles on campus, their departments are certainly not the only ones that impact a student’s perceptions and feelings of belonging or contribute to creating the conditions for success. All areas of the college and everyone working within those areas should feel a shared sense of responsibility for racial equity and creating



an atmosphere that welcomes and celebrates the cultures and lives of all students, specifically adult students of color. When thinking about how to shift the campus community toward this shared awareness and responsibility, consider these questions:

- To what extent is racial equity being named as a priority for the entire college? How explicitly has it been stated that all staff are involved in supporting and improving racial equity?
- Is disaggregated data being collected at the institution? Who is collecting this data? How is it being shared and with whom? How is the data being used to inform racial equity conversations and initiatives at the college?
- What kinds of professional development on racial equity and culturally relevant practices have been offered on the campus? Was this professional development offered to all departments or only a select group? How broadly were these opportunities communicated? Were they optional or was there an expectation that staff attend?

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, RELEVANT, OR SUSTAINING: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Like many related terms, culturally responsive, culturally relevant, and culturally sustaining are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean exactly the same thing. Culturally responsive pedagogy “demonstrates an understanding and appreciation of students’ personal cultural knowledge.” Culturally relevant pedagogy helps students “accept and affirm their cultural identities.” Culturally sustaining practices go even further to explicitly support and maintain students’ “heritage, values, cultural and linguistic pluralism” (Caldera, 2021). In short, culturally sustaining practices make the sharing and protection of cultures an essential component of learning.

Assessing Leadership Commitment

While equity initiatives don’t always start at the top, commitment from leaders at the institution, system, and even state level plays a significant role in determining their longevity and effectiveness. Use the following questions to identify where and how leadership can support culturally sustaining practices:

- Is a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) specifically called out in strategic plans or other guiding documents? Or is there a dedicated DEI plan? Are specific DEI metrics stated?
- Is there a dedicated DEI office or team? Is the person who leads that office or team considered a part of executive leadership? What part do they play or voice do they offer in decision-making about institutional priorities?
- If disaggregated data is surfacing outcomes gaps for specific student populations, are leaders working to figure out the “why” or root cause? Are specific action steps being identified and implemented?
- What kinds of pressures or influences, political or otherwise, may be affecting leaders’ ability to be explicit about racial equity? With this context in mind, to what extent have leaders shown a desire and willingness to embrace culturally relevant or sustaining practices?



ANALYZING CULTURAL COMPETENCY

To create Credentials to Degrees pathways that embed culturally sustaining practices, it is important to first analyze current practices across all departments, including recruitment, enrollment, advising, faculty, student services, and career services. This process should highlight successful efforts that can possibly be replicated. It should also identify growth opportunities and areas for professional development.

Guiding Questions for Evaluating Current Cultural Competency Strengths and Needs:

While equity initiatives don't always start at the top, commitment from leaders at the institution, system, and even state level plays a significant role in determining their longevity and effectiveness. Use the following questions to identify where and how leadership can support culturally sustaining practices:

Recruitment & Enrollment

- How are different cultures and identities being represented in recruitment materials and on the institution's website?
- Is asset-based language used in materials and on the website when referring to students' cultures and backgrounds?
- What kinds of marketing strategies are we using to reach underserved students? Will we need to think about different techniques and approaches to promote the pathways to adult students of color?
- Do enrollment processes take into account different cultural preferences? Do they allow for different scheduling needs adult students of color may have due to work, dependent care, and other responsibilities?

Student Services

- How diverse are student events, organizations, clubs, and other non-academic offerings? Are there student populations that are being underserved or not served at all by these offerings?
- Are there opportunities to engage busy adult students who don't live on campus?
- Is there a campus cultural center(s)? How is or isn't this center(s) serving adult students?

Academic Advisors

- Are advisors participating in professional development about culturally relevant advising practices?
- Do they have current information available about which populations are underrepresented in specific academic pathways? How aware are they of how implicit bias in academic advising can perpetuate this underrepresentation?

Faculty

- Are faculty participating in professional development about culturally sustaining pedagogy?
- Are multiple engagement methods and examples from diverse cultures used in the classroom?
- Have faculty participated in a curriculum audit to assess cultural relevance? If so, what expectations are there related to audit results?

Career Services

- How aware are they of the ways in which implicit bias in career advising can perpetuate populations being underrepresented in certain high-demand fields?
- How informed are they about the effect of gendered and racialized cultures on hiring and advancement opportunities in specific career pathways?



ELEVATING STUDENT VOICE

Answering the guiding questions in this brief, as well as others that are more specific to institutional context and selected pathways, is a starting point for a list of actionable steps that can be taken to implement culturally sustaining practices. Another vital input in the process should be the students themselves. Who better to provide feedback and help co-design solutions? A couple of ideas for gaining student perspectives are:

- Surveying current and formerly enrolled adult students (age 25+) that identify as Black, Hispanic, and Native American to get their impressions of the campus culture, ensuring questions cover all areas of the college and parts of the student experience; and
- Convening focus groups of adult students of color in programs that have been selected for the Credentials to Degree pathways to gather firsthand accounts of what is working well in those programs and where there is need for improvement.

Whether engaging adult students of color through surveys or focus groups, it is important to acknowledge their intersectional identities. For practices to holistically support this population, they must address the needs of adult students and students of color.

REPRESENTATION

A key factor of students of color feeling like they belong at college is how much they see — or don't see — themselves reflected in the people there. In addition to underrepresentation of Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous students, many institutions are trying to address an equal if not greater lack of diversity in staff, particularly faculty. While 20% of undergraduate students are Hispanic, only 5% of faculty members are Hispanic, and Black faculty members account for 6% of all faculty, compared to 14% Black undergraduate students (Davis and Fry, 2022). Colleges designing Credentials to Degree pathways for adult students of color should look at the racial diversity of who is teaching these programs. More broadly, they compare the racial makeup of their faculty body to the student population and to the demographics of the communities they serve. Finally, they review and revamp hiring practices to attract a more diverse pool of applicants for staff and faculty positions.



ENGAGING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

➔ Equity-focused Community Organizations

In addition to helping promote pathways through their channels, local chapters of the Urban League, NAACP, and other racial equity-focused organizations can help to inform and support culturally sustaining practices. Their proximity to the adults of color that the pathways are intended to support and knowledge of the ways in which their customs, values, and beliefs are too often treated as deficits is invaluable.

➔ Employers

In addition to engaging employers in the sectors aligned to the selected pathways to establish internship and work study opportunities, helping them see how cultural bias may be impacting their hiring processes can produce equitable changes and enlighten institutional staff about the barriers adults of color face in the workplace. Workforce entities and partnerships that have an expressed focus on racial equity should also be part of these discussions.

Set Up for Success

There is no one standard solution for community colleges serving adult students of color; however, the shared vision of creating a campus environment where they feel seen, valued, and supported allows institutions to look honestly, investigate thoroughly, and act with intention. The following prompts supplement other guiding questions in this brief in identifying first steps for implementing culturally sustaining practices.

- What kinds of professional development on culturally sustaining pedagogy and practices have been offered to faculty and staff? Where is there a need for more learning opportunities? Who will lead them?
- Are there political pressures that could impact this work? How might those pressures be mitigated or neutralized?
- What relationships with current partners and equity champions can be leveraged?



STATE HIGHLIGHTS



Colorado

Two Colorado colleges in the REACH Collaborative are using mini-grants awarded through the initiative to fund pilot programs focused on better supporting Hispanic adults of color. Front Range Community College (FRCC) will host two events to promote Credit for Prior Learning/Prior Learning Assessment (CPL/PLA), with a particular focus on engaging Hispanic students. From analyzing internal data, college leaders determined that the Hispanic adult learner population underutilizes CPL/PLA. They attribute this access issue to three key institutional barriers: lack of awareness, cost of utilization, and staff knowledge gaps about CPL/PLA. At the events, a group of advisors and faculty will answer students' questions about CPL/PLA options and help them navigate the process, providing any materials offered in English and Spanish. To address the other barriers, FRCC also plans to use grant funding to waive assessment fees for any students participating in one of the events and hold a large training event for faculty and staff to build awareness and understanding of CPL/PLA.

Arapahoe Community College (ACC) is working to increase enrollment and support for Hispanic adult students by offering more Spanish-language materials and translation support. ACC leaders identified a lack of resources and documents at the college available in both English and Spanish. Additionally, very few staff are bilingual Spanish-English speakers, and translation services are limited.

The college plans to contract with on-demand, live translation services to enable real-time conversations with prospective students, and it will engage a translator to create Spanish-language versions of documents across multiple departments. ACC will measure any increase in Hispanic student enrollment and survey students on how they perceived these efforts to gauge their effectiveness.

“CCCS is committed to the success of all students and has invested millions of dollars in initiatives in closing achievement gaps. FRCC’s and ACC’s efforts focused on enrollment, retention, and completion of Hispanic and Latinx students aligned well with CCCS goals. For many of our Hispanic and Latinx students, the decision to attend school is family-based. The student’s immediate and extended family’s support is essential to their success. Developing accessible information in Spanish allows students and their families to be more involved in their educational journey. These and other efforts focusing on Hispanic and Latinx students already show results; from AY21 to AY22, adult Hispanic/Latinx learners are the only group that increased their credit enrollment.”

Dr. Ayelet Zur-Nayberg,
Director of Adult Student Success,
Colorado Community College System



New York

An existing relationship between Finger Lakes Community College and the Urban League of Rochester (ULR) has led to a community partnership that is supporting the college’s work in the REACH Collaborative. Finger Lakes’ chief diversity officer, Sim J. Covington, Jr., serves on the ULR’s board of directors. The Urban League of Rochester’s mission is to “enable African-Americans, Latinxs, the poor, and other disadvantaged to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights.” The organization serves over 25,000 members of the Rochester community through more than 25 programs focused on youth services, services for individuals with developmental disabilities, economic development, employment services, family and children services, education, homeownership, and entrepreneurial assistance.

The college has established four REACH Credential to Degrees Pathways: Advanced Manufacturing to Smart Systems Technologies, Certified Nursing Assistance to Nursing, Phlebotomist to Nursing, and Certified Teaching Assistant to Early Childhood Education. While ULR was not directly involved with identifying the specific programs selected, institutional leaders say pathways were developed

with the organization and others like it in mind. ULR will support the college’s outreach and recruitment efforts by communicating the pathways opportunities to its program participants. Through this partnership, more adults of color in the community will gain exposure to the REACH pathways at Finger Lakes Community College and be directly connected with someone who can help them get enrolled.

“As Vice President of the Board for the Urban League of Rochester, the REACH program at Finger Lakes Community College provides a wonderful opportunity for adult students from diverse backgrounds to tap into the transformative power of higher education. In support of town/gown relations, REACH is an excellent step in the right direction. As the partnership moves forward, we are excited to see what becomes of this exciting endeavor.”

Dr. Sim Jonathan Covington, Jr.,
Chief Diversity Officer, Finger Lakes Community College

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