



PASSPORT TO EQUITY

By Amy Leonard, De Anza College

Is it equitable for your students to be up at 2:00 a.m. to hear your lectures? Is it equitable to assign articles from geo-blocked websites? Should you assign a movie that is not available to students because of geolocation rights? When you think of equity plans at community colleges, international students are probably not the first student population that comes to mind. In fact, your campus equity plan may not even mention your international student population.

However, the California Community Colleges' chancellor estimated that 20,000 students in the system are international and often these students are paying as much as three times the amount that local community college students pay, yet there is rarely a mention of them in campus planning and no clear path for these students to advocate for their needs; hence, it would seem like they are a population in search of a voice.

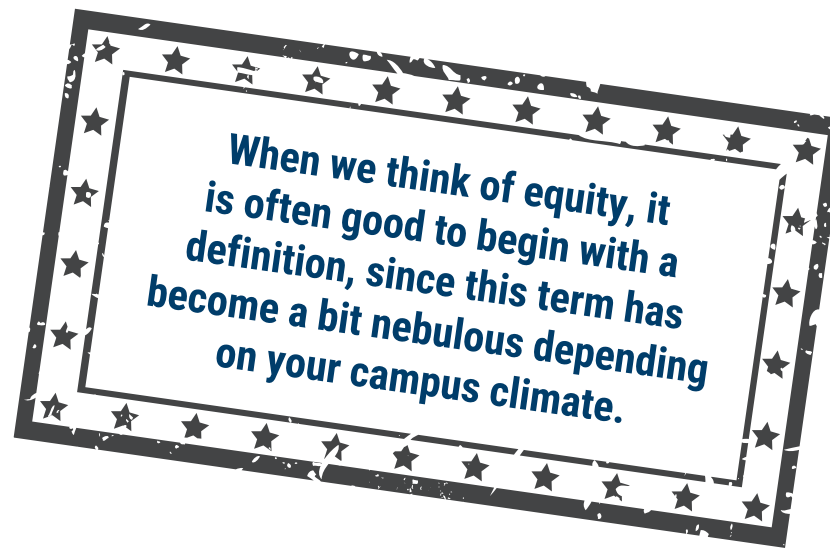
The political events of the summer of 2020 put a spotlight on the need for more international student advocacy because the Trump administration orders put in peril international students' ability to take classes while also threatening to expose them to in-person campus classes that may not have been safe for students or faculty. On top of that, the continued harassment toward Asian immigrants has placed international students at the epicenter of equity on college campuses.

To be fair, campuses with a high population of international students immediately jumped into action over the summer of 2020 to ensure that international students felt supported and safe while taking classes at California community colleges, as well as providing options to take online courses from their home countries. Jennifer Brook Beltz, director of international student recruitment and marketing for Foothill-De Anza College District, said her colleges took an active role to defend international students: "On the advocacy front, the administration supported ISP (the International Student Program) by providing a plat-

form for ISP staff to address student concerns with the campus community during weekly Zoom updates, and by joining in on the amicus brief in the Harvard/MIT case against the new immigration guidance impacting F-1 students in July. The administration joined individual campus and district international student town hall meetings, attended by as many as 200 or more current international students, held to address students' concerns. In addition, Chancellor Miner and Presidents Nguyen and Holmes offered public statements in support of Foothill-De Anza's international students. In fact, their public statements of support saw the highest engagement among posts in the past year on the district and colleges' international Instagram and Facebook accounts. Thanks to efforts like these, districts were able to mobilize and create a pathway for international students to continue at their community colleges and pursue educational goals. Yet, the question remains whether these overtures stop with students taking classes or whether they extend to truly integrating the concerns of this international student population into the equity framework of campuses.

When we think of equity, it is often good to begin with a definition since this term has become a bit nebulous depending on your campus climate. In "What is Equity," the National Association of Multicultural Education suggests, "Let's move away from a simple additive or subtractive understanding of differentiation to critically examine how the sociopolitical context of teaching and learning impacts the four classroom dimensions for multicultural learning: curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, and intellectual challenge. We then begin to see how culturally responsive teaching predicated on providing equitable opportunities to learn is able to support students' access to learning outcomes." When looking at the sociopolitical context currently surrounding international students on our community college campuses, we can see trauma from recent political actions by the Trump administration, as well as incidents of racism surrounding the spread of COVID-19 that are impacting the ways in which these students learn and how they feel in the classroom space.

At Foothill College, Lark Cratty, supervisor of the International Student Program, took steps to create an



inviting online space for students, especially targeting certain populations that need extra support: "International Students Program...[offers] extra engagement by connecting domestic students with international students through events and extracurriculars like the Student Ambassadors Program. Some of our students come from countries that have different LGBTQ views, so it's important to provide LGBTQ resources to international students and connect them with groups on campus." Foothill's approach shows how a campus can focus on equity concerns within a targeted population to successfully serve that population's needs and provide online campus support.

At the Peralta Community College District, Thomas Torres-Gil, director of international services & student support, asserted his teams focus: "Our international student program is centralized at the district office with a satellite office at one campus: Berkeley City College. We have dedicated advisors for our F-1 students who have engaged in outreach efforts throughout the pandemic to ensure that they have resources, information, and appropriate guidance. The campus staff and administration have been fully supportive as it relates to mental and physical health, USCIS policy updates, status concerns, and other resources such as laptops and food." Peralta's approach shows how you can use existing programs to meet the targeted concerns within the international student population, such as food insecurity and mental health.

Likewise, involving faculty and staff in better understanding the needs and struggles of international students that have moved online and are often taking

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classes during COVID-19 from their home countries is essential. F-1 and J-1 international students must maintain a specific minimum credit load each semester in order to maintain immigration status. Falling below these minimum requirements can lead to a student falling out of status and the termination of their I-20, which is certainly an equity concern that faculty should be aware of before dropping a student for not attending class that is at 2:00 a.m. in their home country with no alternative way to access the lecture.

At Foothill and De Anza College District, Jennifer Brook Beltz, director of international student recruitment and marketing, asserts her team worked to create solutions with the campuses: "ISP staff worked as a team to collaborate with colleagues from multiple departments across the campuses, and even across the District, to develop more accessible, student-friendly services. These initiatives included an online Canvas orientation, live online and recorded registration and immigration workshops, online assessment, online appointment scheduling, and new policies and procedures related to health insurance and other requests."

Additionally, problematic for international students taking classes online during COVID-19 are geographic restrictions, or "geo-blocking," which is a process many websites use to restrict certain content based on your location.

Geo-blocking is built into the copyright or licensing of the item itself, which frequently happens with YouTube videos, journal articles, and streaming content (e.g., Netflix). Furthermore, government censorship is pretty rampant in China, but also happens in Russia, Turkey, parts of the Middle East, and Indonesia, and it's a bit of a moving target. An example of this is China, which blocks many sites; a few examples: all Google products, Microsoft OneDrive, Dropbox, Wikipedia, most U.S. new media, most U.S. social media sites, and new sites are added somewhat regularly. While this information might seem like a lot for faculty and staff to take in, Thomas Torres-Gil believes that in the Peralta District, "Faculty and staff have already been supportive of our students—and all students. In many ways, I believe their support and understanding of our student needs has increased during these times." Ideally, all

faculty and staff can benefit from learning what works for students studying abroad, since it will be an opportunity to strengthen each campus' online community and curriculum.

The pathway for international students to have greater equity and advocacy on campus does lie with the students taking initiative to be active on campus. Chigusa Katoku, director of international student programs at Mission College, says, "Two students engaged in Associate Student Government, which helped integrate their concerns in the campus engagement and strategic planning. Also, last year our student trustee was an international student, which allowed her to be at board meetings and advocate for international student concerns." Allowing international student voices to have a say in campus planning is essential to creating advocacy and equity for this group of students going forward. It will be interesting to see in this time of affinity group representation if campuses will start reserving spots for international students or international student programs in campus governance and planning.

Ultimately, the disruption of COVID-19 recent political actions on international students can provide an opportunity for state and federal advocacy. Thomas Torres-Gil believes: "At the state level, I think one of the biggest pieces that can help is enhanced technology. Open CCC International is available but not every college has "activated" it. Many community colleges would benefit from a statewide license for SEVIS (Student & Exchange Visitor Information System) batch processes and a better tracking system. We are using a software that has been incredibly helpful, but not every institution was set up for what occurred. At the federal level, there should be a thorough review of the proposed policies by the Trump administration and removal of administrators who are not qualified. Any proposed policy should be put on hiatus and past ones should be reviewed. Ideally, policies related to international student programming should be done in collaboration with NAFSA leaders and educators in the field." With advocacy like this, hopefully international students and their programs will find themselves with a voice in equity conversations and a seat at the strategic planning table. ■