AWARENESS. ACTION. ASSESSMENT.

Pasts, Presents, and Futures in the Making of the Peralta Online Equity Rubric

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In 2016, Sociology Professor Inger Stark took her first tentative steps into the pedagogical potentials of the Peralta online equity initiative. She took a leave of absence to research education gaps and discovered retention rate disparities for disproportionately impacted student groups and students from marginalized backgrounds through her data. As a facet of this research, Stark joined the Peralta Office of Institutional Research and was appointed chair of the Peralta Distance Education Committee where she pushed the development of initiatives to address equity gaps and assess how they grow in an online environment. It was this committee that proposed the first Peralta online equity initiative, the foundation for a constellation of ideas, criteria, teaching presentations, critical evaluations, and engagement that shaped what became the Peralta online equity rubric.

The Peralta online equity initiative helped subsidize research into a possible online equity rubric. Many of the core team members that developed the rubric and concomitant training seminar were former members of the Distance Education Committee for the Peralta Community College District—but not all of them. The faculty, staff, and one administrator who comprised this core team reached out to Kevin Kelly, a faculty lecturer in the Department of Equity, Leadership Studies & Instructional Technologies at San Francisco State University and education consultant. Kelly accepted the offer and organized a module that demonstrated his proposed parameters for online equity. The module included a rubric for evaluation of module assignments on online equity.

The core team provided feedback to Kevin Kelly on rubric content and requested a learner-centered framework for equity. Kelly then researched any

online equity rubrics to serve as a model for team goals—and found none. The team in turn decided to generate their own equity rubric model, composed of both novel and previous ideas. They tasked Kelly to focus on the latter, especially uncovering research on how equity impacted student retention and success. He separated previous research on online equity in instruction into two approaches and extrapolated equity criteria from categories such as access to technology, the ability to use technology, and online access to student services. He increased the number of criteria to eight, including a sense of belonging, connections with peers, and myriad typologies of bias.

Jason Cole, the Peralta Community College District's vice chancellor for information technology, helped fulfill the early goals of the core team. Cole allocated subsidies for the module, proposed courses via the Peralta online equity initiative, and allowed team members to draft a module rubric. Most importantly, Cole facilitated introductions between the core team and Kevin Kelly.

Cole did not make proposals for the module rubric criteria, but he provided support in myriad ways. For example, he periodically presented on equity and technology, emphasizing the ideas and research that resulted in the Peralta online equity rubric. In 2018, hundreds of faculty, students, and administrators learned about Peralta core team's proposals through a presentation delivered by Cole.

Ultimately, however, it was Kevin Kelly who engendered many of the ideas and drafted the module rubric that became the foundation for the Peralta online equity rubric. Kelly suggested the team present the equity rubric and module, as well as the idea for an online equity course, at the June 2018 Online Teaching Conference for California Community Colleges. Five of the core team members agreed to join Kelly at the conference and began to organize the joint presentation. During the ensuing meetings, participants focused more and more on Kelly's equity rubric. They decided to dedicate a sizeable share of the presentation to their revisions and expansion of this rubric. Stark recalled, "while we were drafting our proposal for [the] OTC, someone in our group said, 'Wait a

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minute! We should take this rubric and make it [into] a rubric for course design to be used in conjunction with the Peralta online equity initiative.'" The participants requested Kelly engage in further research on equity in online course design.

Kelly continued to research the webs of meaning entangling equity in online instruction. He concluded that the core team should conceive of "equity" as an idea more than a signifier, vested in "freedom from assumptions, biases, and institutional barriers that negatively impact student motivations, opportunities, and achievement."

During his research, Kelly examined the California Virtual Campus—Online Equity Initiative proposed by the Chancellor's Office. CVC-OEI faculty, staff, and administrators had already devised online training seminars and a corresponding rubric with four key areas of emphasis (A-D). Kelly and the core team "decided to brand our equity rubric as letter E, for what we hoped would be a companion document." In addition, the team designed an online course for equity training, assisting faculty who struggle "to identify what it means to increase the diversity in courses or manage instructional biases."

Stark and Kelly both hoped that the purposes of the Peralta online equity rubric would entwine with the CVC-OEI rubric and its desired outcomes. A statewide cohort for equity, sponsored by the CVC-OEI, agreed

to host a presentation on the Peralta online equity rubric and posted a brief blog piece on the corresponding research. More than 170 faculty members attended that presentation, an important moment in the history of the rubric. Despite these efforts, the CVC-OEI classified the online equity rubric as an "optional" or "recommended" supplement to the statewide rubric.

Kelly next organized and compiled his research into the Peralta online equity rubric bibliography, allowing community college faculty who plan on incorporating the equity rubric into courses to peruse the research substantiating a given criterion. According to Kelly, "We've already heard from some people who have said thank you so much for providing this bibliography because we're going to need it to justify the use of this rubric. People don't trust a rubric on its own." The core team also wanted to ensure they could provide evidence to support generating an equity rubric in the first place.

In drafting the Peralta online equity rubric, the core team needed to balance precision with concision, overarching ideas, and applicability to both online and "ground campus" face-to-face instruction while fitting onto a double-sided document.

Once the core team drafted the first version of the Peralta equity rubric and addressed issues raised by the Online Teaching Conference, they decided on a framework to integrate inevitable updates and revisions. The team provided questionnaires to student participants at the Online Teaching Conference and instructors who completed the Peralta online training course—with the equity rubric. They also received feedback from faculty who attended additional presentations on the proposed equity rubric.

A similar process of feedback collection and rubric revisions took place in spring of 2020. These changes, however, were derived from comments by almost 75 instructors who had completed the Peralta online eq-

uity training. The core team now required instructors who completed the online training to, in the words of Kevin Kelly, "revise one course section and have it reviewed by one of the team members using a checklist, based on the equity rubric." This review allowed the core team to examine specific courses and open avenues for faculty to further equitable pedagogy. Faculty participants likewise assessed rubric criteria for vagueness and verbosity.

Certain respondents questioned similarities between the Peralta online equity rubric and the CVC-OEI rubric. Kelly revisited his research and added more sources to the bibliography. These assessments resulted in the second and third versions of the online equity rubric, which included frameworks for faculty to redesign courses for equitable outcomes. For example, the explanatory supplement recommended that, for images and representation (E5), instructors "find images and media that represent the diversity of students" at

a given institution and then "encourage students to analyze how specific groups are represented in images and media related to course topics." Similarly, the criterion for human bias (E6) compelled instructors to "start identifying potential human biases that may impact online students' motivation and persistence, both in the course and in the discipline." The explanatory supplement indicated that instructors "then begin crafting strategies for managing those biases and even asking students to discuss their impact."

The online training courses that accompanied the Peralta online equity rubric eventually transformed into workshops. During these gatherings, Peralta faculty discussed how to incorporate as many rubric criteria as possible into community college courses. Participants asked about centering equity in student discussion boards and exams, while still others inquired about situating equity in course conclusions and summations.

The core team traced patterns in the responses for application in updates to the online equity rubric. For instance, the explanatory criterion for content meaning (E7) counseled instructors, in a more precise fashion, to "create activities that require students to connect the course topics and course materials to different backgrounds, cultures and identities—their own and those of others." The final criterion, connection and belonging (E8), explicitly stated that instructors needed to "craft both text and video messages that communicate you care about each student's participation and success," in addition to creating "course activities that go beyond simple requirements like 'reply to two people' and deepen connections" among students.

The core team presented revised versions of the Peralta online equity rubric at more conferences, again resulting in more feedback and an unexpected award, in fall of 2018, from the national Online Learning Consortium. Inger Stark and Kevin Kelly had communicated to the OLC that the core team sought an opportunity to present the online equity rubric and training course. Stark also promoted the rubric to a student equity subgroup of the Academic Senate for California Community College (ASCCC). The subgroup distributed the rubric to key ASCCC leaders, sparking more and more discussion of the ideas and criteria contained therein.

Additional grants, particularly CVC-OEI subsidies, extended research endeavors by the core team. The purpose of this financial assistance was to "increase the equity of career and technical education courses online." Team members sponsored the redesign of courses by 15 faculty members at California commu-

nity colleges, hoping to craft curricula that aligned with the Peralta online equity rubric. The team then conducted more surveys of students in courses that included the equity rubric, prompting respondents to contemplate how the rubric impacted their respective learning communities. Chelsea Cohen, the distance education co-coordinator, also requested that a dozen CVC-OEI faculty, staff, and administrators review the rubric. Inger Stark noted that the CVC-OEI reviewers "made some really great suggestions about how to differentiate the Peralta equity rubric from the CVC-OEI rubric."

Equity-based grants to community colleges and universities, both in California and additional states, have created opportunities for the introduction of the Peralta online equity rubric. Woodland Community College, for instance, allocated subsidies from a grant to fund a five-week training course on online equity, instructed by Peralta faculty. Arizona State University adopted certain criteria from the online equity rubric and integrated research from the bibliography into program portals. The core team planned a statewide expansion of the online equity rubric across the California community college system, but COVID-19 and the transition to remote instruction disrupted these plans.

Members of the previous core team, in conjunction with the present Peralta Distance Education Team, envision a three-pronged future for the online equity rubric and training course.

First, they aim to shift the rubric and course from "optional" or "recommended" to a required component of course design in California community colleges. Faculty would become familiar with the various rubric

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criteria and understand how and why such criteria could potentially impact student learning and success.

Second, team members have hoped for their rubric to be formally integrated into the CVC-OEI rubric, rather than serving as an "Area E" supplement. According to Inger Stark, "We would really love to see that state standard course design rubric include equity criteria—if not ours, something similar to ours." She wants hundreds of community colleges across the state to become aware "of how important it is to use equity criteria" for online course design.

Third, team members can always contribute to online equity ideas in the Peralta Community College District, but they seek more funds to expand their mission across the California community college system. Inger Stark and Kevin Kelly hope to train faculty in equitable online course design. They then, in turn, would train additional faculty. The training includes self-reflection by participating faculty, particularly to comprehend the equity gaps and to understand the significance of race and ethnicity in shaping the online environment. This training for trainers could potentially result in the institutionalization of the online equity rubric and training course, furthering the first and second aims.

Kelly often refers to his intentions for the future of the Peralta online equity rubric as "the Triple-A: Awareness, Action, [and] Assessment."

Awareness includes promotional activities, distributing the online equity rubric to more community colleges, and helping faculty understand the importance of the research and data analysis. Kelly requests faculty in California community colleges take immediate action integrating the online equity rubric into course design. Finally, he anticipates a reconfiguration for the assessment of rubric effectiveness: "…when we look at retention, success, and grade distribution as our only indicators, that sometimes can be misleading because students have different goals for themselves. [For example], finishing a community college course may not be as important as preparing for a given certification, and so on." He concludes that awareness, action, and assessment frequently

generate the "hard data" administrators need for realizing equity goals with "budget dollars."

Kelly proposes the core team transform the Peralta online equity rubric from course design to institutional goals. That is, the team would revise the online equity rubric or generate another online equity rubric for the assessment of entire institutions based on parallel criteria. Technology services, admissions and records, financial aid, tutoring, and libraries all house staff that interact with students. Kelly contends that an institutional version of the online equity rubric could prompt staff to consider "the equity issues that they may need to manage biases or even the diversity of students represented on a college homepage." He has already begun to research online equity for an array of institutions in higher education, tailoring the eight online equity criteria to institutional settings.

The present Peralta Distance Education Team regularly updates the online training courses to support the third version of the equity rubric. The online equity initiative site now features a veritable library of specific courses that have previously adopted the online equity rubric. The library includes examples of syllabi, assignments, and discussion board activities that fulfill at least half of the rubric criteria. Team members do request faculty who matriculated from the online training course to donate examples. As a result, the library continues to grow, even amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. But, in a recent interview that coincided with the publication of his co-authored *Advancing Online Teaching*, Kevin Kelly admitted that "there's plenty more to do." Visions for the Peralta online equity rubric produce, as Kelly described it, a "pie in the sky." Amidst historical circumstances and remote learning communities, the sky's the limit for the Peralta ideas and initiatives that transformed and continue to change notions of online equity in California community colleges. ■