



Post Webinar Plática* Q&A with Deputy Chancellor Daisy Gonzales, Ph.D.

* Plática = talk, or chat

CLP hosted a series of webinars to support student services faculty, staff, and administrators at community colleges across California as they re-orient to providing services completely online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Find information about the series (and additional materials) at <https://www.careerladdersproject.org/problem-solving-moving-student-supports-online-a-clp-webinar-series>.

[Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley](#) discussed the system's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and urged educators not to allow the current pandemic to deepen the divide between students who have opportunities within reach and those who do not. We followed up with Deputy Chancellor [Daisy Gonzales](#), about the challenges in maintaining an equity agenda to better serve students during this crisis.

CLP: Chancellor Oakley mentioned how important it is to have people of color represented in the classrooms and in administrative positions on California community college campuses. Do you have any advice to colleges as they press forward on hiring more diverse and equity-minded faculty and administrators even as we go through the COVID-19 pandemic?

Deputy Chancellor Gonzales: In September 2019, the Board of Governors adopted the diversity, inclusion and equity plan. This was developed by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force that included human resources managers, representatives from the Board of Governors, representatives from the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, trustees, campus presidents and Chancellor's Office staff members. The goal of the task force was to identify strategies to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of our community colleges. The task force made 55 recommendations that can be implemented with no additional need for funds, and that would help us make progress in diversity efforts. These recommendations are included in the [Vision for Success Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force report](#), which shows what we're doing to implement a framework for cultural change to increase faculty and staff diversity.

It's important to remember that what we're really talking about is the transformation of culture -- data doesn't drive change, people do. Districts already have to submit an EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) plan, where they need to describe how they are implementing equal employment

opportunities and creating an environment that promotes diversity and excellence. In this transformation, our colleges need to think of an EEO plan that engages the community. An EEO plan should be adopted in a public meeting, so people know what is being done to support equal employment opportunities and why this work is important to serving a diverse student population and communities. And furthermore, in creating a workforce that is welcoming to all individuals, we have to think about best practices and what barriers exist in our system that may have made some colleges inequitable worksites. For instance, we tend to hire based on prior experience in our community college system, but if the people who have that prior experience don't reflect the changing demographics of our state and student body, that's a problem. Work experience in other systems, working to counsel or mentor diverse student populations or teaching online are all relevant experiences to serve our students. What is clear is that we have to link policies and institutional practices to implement those policies. To change our culture to better promote and support diverse and equity-minded faculty and administrators, our policy implementation has to be rooted in equity, this is an issue that we have to navigate even during the current crisis. We have to make it clear that hiring diverse faculty and staff remains a priority even with the COVID-19 crisis.

CLP: Given that people of color are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and many students in the community college system come from impacted communities, how can colleges prioritize an equity agenda when so much outside of a student's academic life could be in flux and uncertain?

Deputy Chancellor Gonzales: Our students were already expected to live in that reality where they were impacted by things such as health disparities, inequities in public education, deteriorating housing conditions, etc. We cannot use this emergency as an excuse to not serve our students. We have always known that a student's life is intersectional. Our system has several different programs to better serve our students, even things like EOPS [Extended Opportunity Programs and Services] or loans for emergency housing for foster youth. Many different programs already exist. Now we have to be even more creative and engage in active problem solving to figure out what we need to do to move with more urgency, since so many services have moved online. The Chancellor's Office has been focused on flexibility for colleges and districts to be able to deploy student supports much quicker. This includes suspending maximum loan amounts, removing barriers to purchase technology and removing bureaucratic reporting.

We cannot afford to delay our actions. Yes, we have known this is already a reality for many of our students, coming from communities that are disproportionately impacted by crises like the pandemic. We have to remember that before this pandemic, we were in the middle of guided pathways implementation, which is a tool to continue to reorganize our institutions to better serve our students. As leaders, we should continuously ask ourselves, "How do our institutional structures and policies protect the status quo whether we are in an emergency or not?" We should continue to prioritize students' needs to help them achieve success.

CLP: When conditions are improved sufficiently so that students may physically return to their campuses (whether in Fall 2020 or sometime in 2021), can you give us a glimpse of what a return to campus might look like? How would your office help keep the students, faculty, and staff safe?

Deputy Chancellor Gonzales: It's important to acknowledge two things, there are staff, faculty and administrators who have continued to serve our students from brick and mortar campuses. As essential personnel, they have been ensuring that students get served and that programs that cannot go completely online like nursing or emergency first responder programs continue to train students to join our workforce.

But we need to be sober about our reality and the fact that the pandemic may still be an ongoing issue into 2021. It pains me to say it, but we have to continue to prepare and to improve our online delivery of course materials and student supports. While many programs can be offered online, there will still be some programs that need face to face instruction such as training for electrical pole workers. In that program, faculty need to evaluate a student in person. We need to ensure that our career and technical education programs can survive this crisis and safely return to brick and mortar campus. The Chancellor's Office is working on releasing a toolkit to provide guidance for our colleges. Many of our programs will also have to follow local county policies and precautions from their local health officials.

What is clear is that the majority of our students will be learning online this fall, and the challenge for us will be in how we innovate in the delivery of that content and provide student support, such as financial aid office hours, counseling, and tutoring online. We still have a lot to do in terms of making sure that students have all that they need with technology and digital tools. These changes can be hard, but it's not impossible. Our students do not have the luxury to not get an education. For many, these colleges are the only place they can go to get an education at an affordable rate. I don't want to see us lose students to for-profit institutions that may take advantage of our students, so we need to figure out how to successfully meet our students' needs during this time.

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