Success by Design: Activating Hearts, Hands, and Minds to Develop a Male Success Initiative at Long Beach City College

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Success by Design:
Activating Hearts, Hands, and Minds to Develop a Male Success Initiative at Long Beach City College

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by

Eric D. Becerra

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

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Dedication

This capstone is for all the underdogs of the world. Not just those who arose victorious, but for all who have dared to step into the ring. I would be lying if I said that I always envisioned a doctoral degree, much less from an Ivy League School. I remember being asked during an admissions interview, "Is this like a dream come true?" After a brief pause, I looked up and confidently said, "No…because tragically, I had never dared to dream it." It had been positioned beyond my reach…or so I thought. This degree is for all those individuals who have the talent, potential, resilience, and leadership capacity to succeed in academia, but unfortunately, will never get the opportunity to sit in a college classroom. It is, therefore, my mission to push our current education system until all youth are inspired to dream and empowered to act…until demography is no longer destiny…until dreams go deferred no more!

To my father and mother, who despite possessing the most basic literacy skills, forged a new life in a different country. They were the walking embodiment of fortitude, resilience, determination, and sacrifice. My home became my first classroom, and through their example, they were my first professors. Una vez alguien describió el hecho de nacer como un albur. Una apuesta a siegas sin saber qué familia nos entregara el destino…como la lotería. Si fuese ese el caso, desde el día que me trajeron al mundo he sido millonario. Por su apoyo, ejemplo, amistad, e inspiración estaré eternamente agradecido.

To my daughters, Alicia and Dreya, although not bound by blood, we will always be bound by love. Alicia, as the first in your family to attend college, you have created a legacy that will reverberate for generations to come. I am incredibly proud of you and look forward to your many more achievements. Dreya, your reluctance to fold as the wind blows, and instead stand tall in your unique convictions, is something I deeply admire. Walk boldly in your purpose, and never lose that essence. I am forever grateful that my children can call you both their big sisters.

To my first-born daughter, Adelyn Tlaneci, you are well aware that your name means "Humble Sunrise." But it is more than a metaphor. Like a new day, through you, I was literally reborn. After spending so many years searching for something worth dying for, you gave me something worth living for. And like the sun, your light will provide sustenance, create brilliance, generate power, and guide the world towards a better tomorrow. Tu eres sangre de mi sangre, la esencia de mi ser. Eres mi más bello legado…eres mi Humilde Amanecer.

To my son Caín (**C**orazon **A**ntiguo **I**ncendiado **N**uevamente) Cuauhtémoc, you are an ancient heart reignited, a King reborn. Not in the European sense, but in our indigenous sense. As the Aztec term Tlatoani suggests, you are a speaker of the people. Your life will undoubtedly be marred by unique struggles, but hopefully different from those I encountered. Walk firmly where I have set a constructive path, and avoid tripping over the stones that made me stumble. Recuerda que la lucha sigue, y llevas en tus venas sangre de guerrero. Si vez en el mundo falta de justicia, eleva tu voz hasta crearla.

I hope you both forgive me for creating such physical distance while pursuing this degree. As my father helped me realize when I was faced with this tough decision, for many generations *Mexicanos* such as he, have temporarily left their loved ones behind and gone to distant lands for the sake of progress and prosperity. From the beginning, as in the end, it is all for you.

I'm certain you've heard that "behind every great man there is a great woman." Well, that was not my case, my great woman walked beside me through my residency journey. Abigail, you were my rock in the moments of struggle, motivation in moments of doubt, and thought partner all along. I hope to walk beside you as you pursue your doctoral studies, and continue to grow together. Thank you for seeing me through my virtues, and loving me through my flaws.

This is not my victory alone. It is the result of the manifestations of love, guidance, challenge, and support from all the individuals that the universe conspired to place along my path. There are many people in my heart and on my mind, but if I wrote about every individual, this dedication would be as long as the capstone itself. You know who you are…thank you for being my teachers.

Allow the limits of your imagination to serve as the only barrier to your success!
#Harvest2Harvard #TrustYourStruggle #StayHumble #RememberYourWhy

"To all the seeds that follow me, protect your essence…born with less, but you still precious, so smile with me now."
- Tupac Amaru Shakur

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I would like to acknowledge the many individuals who guided me, challenged me, and supported me through this 3-year doctoral journey and the completion of this capstone.

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Finally, to my LOTUS colleagues, Jamaal Williams and Tim Moriarty, thank you for your genuine friendship and mentorship. You have both earned permanent seats on my personal Board of Directors.

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Abstract

Higher Education has long been positioned as a viable vehicle to economic prosperity and insulating factor against crime and violence among traditionally underserved minoritized populations. However, commonly used school success metrics such as course completion, persistence, and degree attainment demonstrate inequitable success rates among many student subgroups, including men of color (MOC). For this reason, many institutions of higher education (IHE) have enacted targeted support services commonly referred to as male success initiatives (MSI). Due to many confounding factors, the community college is the most common destination for minoritized students in California, with 62% of all Black, and 82% of Black male college students starting their higher education journey at a 2-year institution (Harris & Wood, 2015).

This capstone explores the process of developing and piloting an MSI at Long Beach City College grounded in *Design Thinking* and Dr. J. Luke Wood and Dr. Frank Harris III's (2014) *Five Domains: A Conceptual Model of Black Male Success in Community College.* The goal was to enact an initiative that supports MOC success through multiple lenses by providing direct student services while cultivating equity-mindedness and encouraging change in institutional policy and culture. Driving towards equitable outcomes requires will, skill, and action. Working collaboratively to enact high-quality programing and cultivating equity-mindedness among educators must both be explicit goals. By holding the complexity of simultaneously being part of the solution and the problem, we can adopt new mental models and catalyze change to truly impact gaps in MOC student achievement.

Introduction

During the early 1990's, mass hysteria around the perceived increase in youth drug use, violence, and crime gripped the nation. News coverage of high-profile cases such as the "Central Park Five" and the murder of Robert "Yummy" Sandifer propelled a narrative of a generation of dangerous youth. On November 27, 1995, John Dilulio, criminologist and political scientist, wrote an article in the *Washington Examiner* titled "The Coming of the Super-Predators". In it, he asserted that countless youth of color were growing up without proper guidance and warned that "they are perfectly capable of committing the most heinous acts of physical violence for the most trivial reasons" (Dilulio, 1995, para. 29). It was this social climate that heralded zero-tolerance school policies, mandatory minimum sentencing, and *tough-on-crime* legislation that spurred the prison industrial complex, resulting in the largest prison population among any so-called developed nation and the disproportionate incarceration of men of color (MOC) (Statista, 2021).

Recent data in California indicates that Black male students are much more likely to be suspended, with the most significant disparity evidenced in grades K-3 at a rate 522% higher than the general population, indicating what Dr. J. Luke Wood terms a culture of *disdain, distrust, and disregard* (Wood et al., 2021). The tragic truth is that young MOC are now more likely to set foot in a cell than in a college classroom. Commonly referred to as the *school-to-prison pipeline*, 68% of America's inmates lack a high school diploma, and 80% read at or below an 8th-grade level (Hanson &Stipek, 2014). For MOC, education represents more than an accumulation of knowledge; it is liberation from generational poverty, the crime, and violence that often come with it, and

quite literally, freedom (Person et al., 2017). The US Bureau of Labor projects that by 2022, 64% of employment opportunities will require at least an associate's degree, with an additional 27% requiring some postsecondary education (BLS, 2013).

Furthermore, there is a direct positive relationship between years of education and earnings (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). Students of color historically attend some of the lowest-performing public K-12 schools and are disproportionately suspended and expelled, creating inequitable access to selective universities, which helps explain why 62% of all Black and 82% of Black male college students in California begin their higher education journey at a 2-year institution (Harris & Wood, 2015). Currently, community college is the most viable path to a degree and financial stability for young MOC, making their role critical. So, what motivated the creation of the community college, and are they serving their intended purpose?

Brief History of California Community Colleges

The community college system was officially established in 1907 with the "California Upward Extension Law." One of the primary goals was to extend access to higher education for populations historically precluded from pursuing such an endeavor, focusing on vocational training to meet local industry needs. Furthermore, bifurcating the traditional system by founding a transitional institution (junior college) would allow only the intellectual elite to enter a specialized field of study at a university level (Drury, 2003). As such, their formation simultaneously expanded access to higher education for non-traditional college students and proliferated an elitist system designed to stratify our society. Community colleges continue to have a complex identity vacillating between meeting the vocational training needs of a global economy, preparing students for the

rigor of research institutions, and expanding access to non-traditional minoritized populations.

Long Beach City College

Long Beach City College (LBCC) was founded in 1927. It now enrolls roughly 35,000 students each year and is comprised of two campuses. Its student population is predominantly Latinx at 58%, followed by White at 14%, African American at 12%, and Asian at 8%. However, nearly half of all administrators and 60% of all faculty identify as White. Similar to national trends, while overall enrollment and achievement have increased, pronounced gaps in success among many minoritized populations at LBCC have persisted. One of the most evident is amongst MOC. In the spring of 2018, LBCC ranked 113th out of the 114 existing California Community Colleges (CCC) in course completion with a 4-year course level success rate of 65% for Latinx students and 55% for Black students, both falling well below the state average of 72%, and its own White students at 74%. These gaps become more pronounced when disaggregating by gender, with MOC, especially Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander, consistently achieving at lower rates across most success measures, highlighting the need to look beyond access.

Figure 1. Spring 2020 Male Course Success by Race/Ethnicity at LBCC
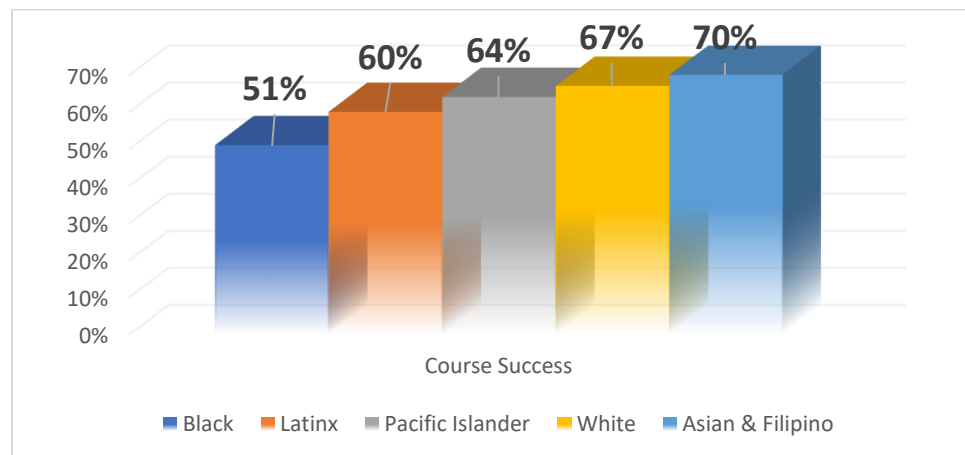
Notwithstanding, Long Beach City College has a history of leading equity-minded efforts within the CCC system. Dr. Eloy Oakley, who served as LBCC's Superintendent and President from 2007 to 2016, deliberately highlighted and addressed disparities made evident through the disaggregation of data. During his tenure, LBCC received accolades for its efforts to improve access among traditionally minoritized populations. One of the most notable developments under his leadership was the inception of the Long Beach College Promise (LBCP), a collaborative effort between the City of Long Beach, Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD), Long Beach City College, and Cal State University Long Beach (CSULB). Launched in 2008, graduating seniors who met eligibility criteria were guaranteed one semester of free tuition at LBCC, which has now been extended to one year, and a guaranteed seat at CSULB upon completion of transfer requirements in good academic standing (Mehlinger, 2018).

 In 2016, Eloy Oakley was appointed Chancellor of California Community Colleges and brought that model to a statewide audience in 2018 through Assembly Bill 19 (AB19), known as the California College Promise. Under AB19, community colleges who decide to participate receive additional funding to replicate LBCP by providing one year of free tuition and enhancing existing programming and services that aim to reduce or eliminate gaps in achievement for underrepresented students at California Community Colleges.

Equity at LBCC

In more recent years, efforts have moved beyond access to place greater scrutiny on course level success, retention, persistence, and completion. In response, LBCC has deployed an abundance of programs, student clubs, professional development, and

services designed to ameliorate the achievement disparities for minoritized populations but has struggled to see any significant change. Their 2019-2022 Student Equity Plan (SEP) includes the establishment of a Social Justice Inter-Cultural Center (SJIC) and the launching of a male success initiative (MSI). By leveraging funding provided by AB19, LBCC's MSI is to build off of existing First-Year Experience (FYE) programming to improve connectedness, retention, persistence, and success among first-time, full-time male students of color.

It is clear from these efforts at LBCC that the concepts of equity, race, and structural racism are pervasive. While these themes are prominently highlighted during college-wide events such as "College Day," a one-day mini-conference designed to set the tenor for the following semester, and the adoption of the Framework for Reconciliation (listening sessions), it is unclear if dialogue moves beyond these few calendared events. Furthermore, do the espoused values at this institution translate to widely embraced beliefs and actions? Student perception data gathered through the Community College Success Measure (CCSM) administered at LBCC during fall 2016 and Spring 2017 indicate there is still much work to do in this respect.

I entered LBCC during a tumultuous time in the country. Educators and families alike were grappling with the harsh reality of a global COVID-19 pandemic that brought society to a screeching halt virtually overnight. The uncertainty and mental anguish plaguing much of the country was intensified as we became engrossed by incessant footage of a White police officer holding his knee to an unarmed Black man's neck for more than 8 minutes until he robbed him of his last breath. The civil unrest that ensued was a symptom of a racial reckoning brewing for centuries but was amplified by the

racist rhetoric of White supremacists since the installation of Donald Trump as Commander-in-chief. As a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), in a county with a history of police brutality and racially charged civil unrest, LBCC's Vice President and the larger community were confronted with difficult decisions under circumstances that have only intensified gaps in access, achievement, and success.

This Capstone

In the remainder of this document, I will interrogate my leadership journey towards driving equity efforts in education and explore what is necessary to develop a male success initiative (MSI) grounded in a holistic approach that is data-informed, inclusive, collaborative, and provides a sample blueprint for addressing other equity gaps at Long Beach City College. Undergirding my leadership of this project will be literature regarding male success initiative common and effective practices, cultivating equity mindedness, and human-centered design, coupled with personal previous experience and expertise. I will chronicle how the project developed during my residency at LBCC while providing evidence from diverse sources, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and other pertinent qualitative artifacts. Through an analysis of this process, I will distill implications for my leadership development, Long Beach City College's efforts to build towards equity for MOC, and the California Community College system as it seeks to materialize its promise to eliminate achievement gaps by becoming student ready (CCCCO, 2021).

Review of Knowledge for Action

How does a community college support the success of its historically underserved and disenfranchised students, specifically men of color (MOC), by providing direct student services while cultivating equity-mindedness at an institutional level? My charge was to lead the design and pilot of a male success initiative to improve retention, persistence, and, ultimately, completion among Latinx, Pacific Islander, and Black male students. LBCC's history of leading equity efforts and existing robust menu of student support services focused my attention on creating structured opportunities for noncognitive and social development, including student sense of identity, self-efficacy, habits of mind (HoM), and connectedness among first-time, full-time MOC.

Upon entering my role as Director of Special Projects, I set out to explore how I could effectively organize and enact a process that would galvanize a diverse cross-section of educators to collaboratively develop a successful MSI. In my review of knowledge for action (RKA), I will:

1. Provide context regarding the formation of male success initiatives in institutions of higher education to elucidate common components, effective practices, and grounding frameworks (best practices for Male Success Initiatives).

2. Offer frameworks as a lens to view our practice as equity-minded educators (cultivating equity-mindedness).

3. Explore human-centered design to structure the development, implementation, and evaluation of an MSI (human-centered design).

4. Explore considerations when leading change efforts within an established organization (leading for change).

Given current inequities in our public education system, community colleges are often the most viable option for students of marginalized communities (Person et al., 2017). Yet current trends in success rates as measured by persistence, transfer, and degree completion indicate that institutions of higher education (IHE), by and large, have not been successful in meeting the needs of our most vulnerable populations, leading to pronounced gaps in equitable outcomes, or disproportionate impact (DI). Students of color are much more likely to begin their higher education journey at a community college, yet exhibit much lower achievement with Latinx and Black student completion rates at 15% and 12%, respectively, while their White counterparts complete at a rate of 59% (AACC, 2016). Moreover, these gaps are even more pronounced for MOC, with women of all ethnic groups achieving at higher rates in secondary and postsecondary education (Person et al., 2017). For this reason, many institutions have created focused efforts to address achievement disparities between young men of color, their female peers, and other racial groups. In most instances, these efforts aim to ameliorate the many disadvantages students bring with them when they walk through the door, demonstrating a baseline understanding that numerous factors, such as familial history, educational preparation, English language proficiency, and socio-economic status, provide valuable information that can aid in the development of support systems to eliminate gaps for DI subgroups.

Best Practices for Male Success Initiatives

In response to these disparities in achievement, many colleges have established what are now commonly referred to as Male Success Initiatives (MSI) or Minority Male Initiatives (MMI). They typically include the design and implementation of student

support programs explicitly intended to meet the needs of young men of color. To move away from deficit thinking and uncover institutional barriers, institutions must first understand how young MOC experience the institution. By doing so, students become thought partners in identifying underlying problems, thus informing the solution. To gather student perceptions, the Minority Male Community College Collaborative (M2C3) developed the Community College Survey of Men (CCSM) to capture data on factors that influence minority male students' focus and effort, and distill the most prominent predictors of success (Johnson, Williams & Wood, 2015). Results of the CCSM indicate that MOC place greater focus and effort in their studies when the following three factors are present: they receive validating messages from faculty and staff, campus services are easily accessible, and help-seeking behavior is encouraged and demonstrated by other MOC (Johnson, Williams & Wood, 2015).

Various qualitative studies have captured current practices among minority male success initiatives. However, it is essential to note that due to the relative nascency of such initiatives, there is still great need for research that can draw clear linkages between programmatic practices and increased student achievement. While correlations between participation and increased success indeed exist, establishing causality is extremely difficult in most real-world applications of academic interventions. Nonetheless, many MSIs have been deemed effective in improving success rates for MOC at community colleges, and studies have attempted to glean current practices to inform their design (Gardenhire et al., 2016). In a 2016 publication, Fnann Keflezighi and her colleagues at San Diego State University analyzed 129 existing MSIs at community colleges across the nation and identified common overarching foci. The most notable were: development of

professional skills, mentoring, college survival skills (college success), service learning, and tutoring. This wide range of foci seek to enhance not only academic and social skills, but increase motivation and navigational capital as well (Keflezighi, Sebahari & Wood, 2016). Institutions must then move beyond the design of boutique programs that provide technical information and assistance to address a narrow view of academic needs. Mentoring is often named as a viable modality of achieving this goal.

So, what is a mentor? "A mentor is a member of the college community who is committed to student success through structured dialogue and reflection with individual students. The mentor's hindsight can become the student's foresight" (Paulus, 2015, p.4). My Brother's Keeper (MBK), launched by President Obama in 2014, generated a lot of attention and excitement around mentoring as a primary lever to improve male-of-color success in education. A structured mentoring relationship can enhance connection, sense of inclusion, and provide guidance to better navigate academia, including avoiding and coping with potential challenges (Gardenhire et al., 2016). However, not all mentoring programs are created equally.

For this reason, MBK Alliance partnered with MENTOR, a national organization whose vision is to drive equity through quality mentoring relationships, to develop a model that explicitly acknowledges the intersection of race and gender, thus is custom-designed for MOC. In their "Guide to Mentoring Boys and Young Men of Color" (2017), they name Critical Mentoring as a way to develop critical consciousness in mentors and protégés alike, in efforts to not only recognize social, political, and economic oppression but also become equipped to act against them. This model moves away from the "savior complex" towards anti-deficit thinking that elevates youth's knowledge and capacity to

partner in crafting a brighter future (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). It melds elements of Critical Race Theory and mentoring to ensure that we are not asking youth to "fix" themselves as if that will insulate them from systemic racism, but rather acknowledge the context they are forced to navigate, and how identity impacts their journey. In doing so, we encourage students to embrace their voice, power, and choice (Weiston-Serdan, 2018).

Yet mentoring alone is unlikely to close gaps in outcomes (Gardenhire et al., 2016). In 2014, Dr. Wood and Dr. Harris published "Five Domains: A Conceptual Model of Black Male Success in Community College" (5 Domains), a framework utilized by many institutions to design and implement minority male success initiatives that suggests a holistic view of student support. In their article, they contend that in order to move the needle for Black and other minority males, institutions must deliberately focus efforts on the following five domains:

1. **Academic Domain:** faculty-student interaction, academic engagement, and clear course of study.

2. **Noncognitive domain:** validation, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and meaning-making through a psychosocial lens.

3. **Social Domain:** participation beyond the classroom, clubs, organizations, events, and meaningful peer interactions.

4. **Institutional Domain:** structures, policies, programs, and resources.

5. **Environmental Domain**: family, work, basic needs, and stressful life events (Urias, Falcon, Harris III & Wood, 2017).

It is critical to look beyond academic needs while recognizing that both race and gender impact student behavior. "Identity formation occurs in this intersection and

includes both what it means to be male and what it means to be a man of color"
(Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2015, as cited in Person et al., 2017, p. 67). Exploring
intersectional identity, privilege, oppression and implicit bias allows for a deeper
understanding of one's current conception of what it means to be a man of color, creating
space to apply a new lens. Fortunately, there exist many examples of MSIs at two-year
and four-year institutions that are perceived positively by their participants, center the
intersection of race and gender, and take a holistic approach as the Five Domains
framework suggests.

      The iFALCON program at Cerritos College in Norwalk, California, (5.6 miles
from LBCC) is an intervention that promotes the incorporation of HoM in curricular, co-
curricular, and student service activities to shift culture. Habits of mind address student
attitudes and mindsets necessary for success. The underlying premise is that "Before we
can even begin to focus on assisting them [students] with the traditional range of skills
needed for successful academic performance, we must engage in candid conversations
with students about what habits, behaviors, and attitudes contribute to college success and
how to cultivate them" (Hazard, 2013, p. 45). A longitudinal case study of students at the
same college showed that those who reported routinely using HoM inside and outside the
classroom reported higher academic confidence and grade point averages (Person et al.,
2017). The authors establish that one of the high-impact HoM that most stimulate
engagement amongst MOC is help-seeking behavior, as this runs counter to the way most
MOC have been socialized towards independence and self-reliance. A case study of the
Passage Program at Los Angeles Southwest College (18.5 miles from LBCC) and a
longitudinal study of men who participated in MSIs and/or the Men of Color Leadership

Institute (MOCLI) showed that engagement is crucial to student success. But this goes

beyond the classroom to include peer interactions, counseling, tutoring, and student

organizations designed for male students of color. Through these various activities,

students formed bonds with faculty and peers that provided a support system and

accountability. Creating opportunities for students to establish brotherhood with peers

and faculty increased motivation and engagement, which encouraged them to seek

information about, and take full advantage of, support services available to them (Person

et al., 2017).

Many studies focus primarily on the technical components of MSIs and validate

common practices known to benefit all students. The mindset of the adults implementing

these services is equally important as their technical application. Adult perceptions of

student potential and capabilities directly impact their ability to succeed in class. A 2019

study conducted by researchers at the University of Indiana found that a professor's

implicit biases about students of color and their ability to learn were the most significant

predictor of success (Gooblar, 2020). Findings from the implementation of the CCSM at

LBCC during fall 2016 and spring 2017 indicate that "Men and women across all

racial/ethnic groups demonstrated scores that need attention and are of immediate

concern on perceptions that faculty believe they belong in college" (CCEAL, 2017, p. 6).

More than 30% of men and women of all ethnic groups at LBCC expressed feeling that

staff did not believe they had the ability to do the work or succeed. In order for MSIs to

be genuinely effective, institutions must view student achievement from a holistic lens as

the 5 Domains suggest, provide direct student services to remove or ameliorate barriers,

cultivate anti-deficit thinking among administrators, faculty, and staff alike, and adopt HoM around their own practice.

Cultivating Equity Mindedness

Failing to recognize the institutional policies, practices, and beliefs that perpetuate gaps in achievement positions the problem entirely within the student. It is therefore necessary to move beyond deficit thinking to not only identify and address institutional barriers but also to honor the resilience and strength students bring with them (Urias, Falcon, Harris III & Wood, 2017). What we often call the *achievement gap* is merely a symptom of a wide-ranging lack of meaningful access to opportunities for students, and a gap in educator knowledge and skills, intensified by deficit-oriented beliefs about student potential that must all be addressed. While the capacitation of educators through structured learning communities, professional development, and targeted training to address knowledge and skills is common, beliefs have historically received less attention. Desegregation in public schools is an example of policy forcing a change in action. Despite being equipped with technical knowledge and skills, the predominantly White educator force continued producing inequitable results because educators' mindsets did not shift away from the commonly held racist and deficit-based views of students of color. Implicit biases regarding race are a primary factor that significantly contribute to inequitable discipline practices, access to courses, availability of services, financial resources, and quality education (Gardenhire et al., 2016). Beliefs are intrinsically linked to the way we act upon the world. When those beliefs and actions become widely adopted, they are codified through policies, customs, and expectations, intentionally or unintentionally, resulting in what we now know as systemic racism (Kendi, 2019).

Therefore, addressing educator's preconceptions of MOC, what I will refer to as mindset, is a necessary precursor to equity work (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). But how do we cultivate equity-mindedness?

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (2019) makes a distinction between being "not racist," a personal commitment to act from a colorblind perspective, and being "anti-racist," a personal commitment to name and act against racism. As LOTUS Strategy Group (2020), Tim Moriarty, Jamaal Williams, and I offer a three-step conceptual model grounded in research, professional experience, and personal knowledge, "Shifting Mindsets, Driving Change," that depicts how individual beliefs become systemic oppression and provides a roadmap of the journey from silent complicity, whether conscious or unconscious, towards equity through active antiracism. Our model consists of three components which we term *Check, Shift, Drive.* It contends that to operate as a champion of equity, individuals must first explore their own identity, beliefs about members from their own and other racial groups, what has influenced those beliefs, and how said beliefs motivate them to interpret the world. This allows individuals to identify and embrace their implicit biases to appreciate their impact (Check). Once we have grappled with our own identity, we can begin to understand where we hold privilege and become open to listen and empathize with those who do not. Recognizing differences in positionality creates space for reflection that can lead to new mental models (Shift). Once awareness about our own experience and that of others has been established, we begin to recognize our silence as complicity, which in turn encourages us to speak out against inequity, identify how we can influence change, and stand in solidarity with oppressed groups as we move towards "antiracist" action (Drive) (Kendi, 2019). It is, however, essential to note that this

relationship is described in a linear way to simplify how systems of oppression are shaped and so too can be dismantled. Reality is much more complex; therefore, the connection between these three elements is not one-directional. A shift in policy can force a change in behavior, which over time can produce a change in beliefs.

Figure 2. Drivers of Systemic Oppression, LOTUS Strategy Group, (2020, October, 17)
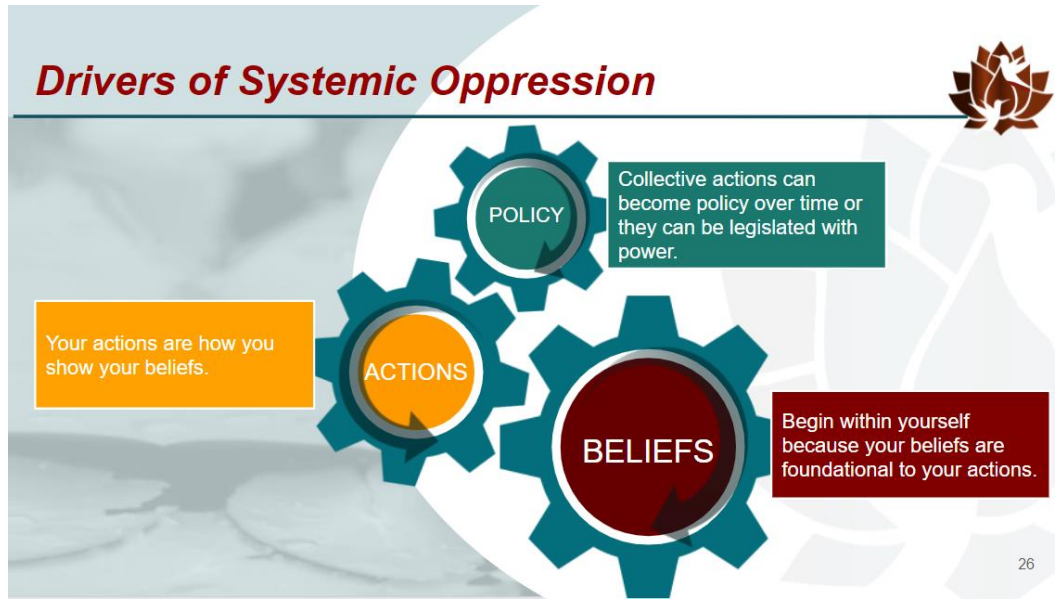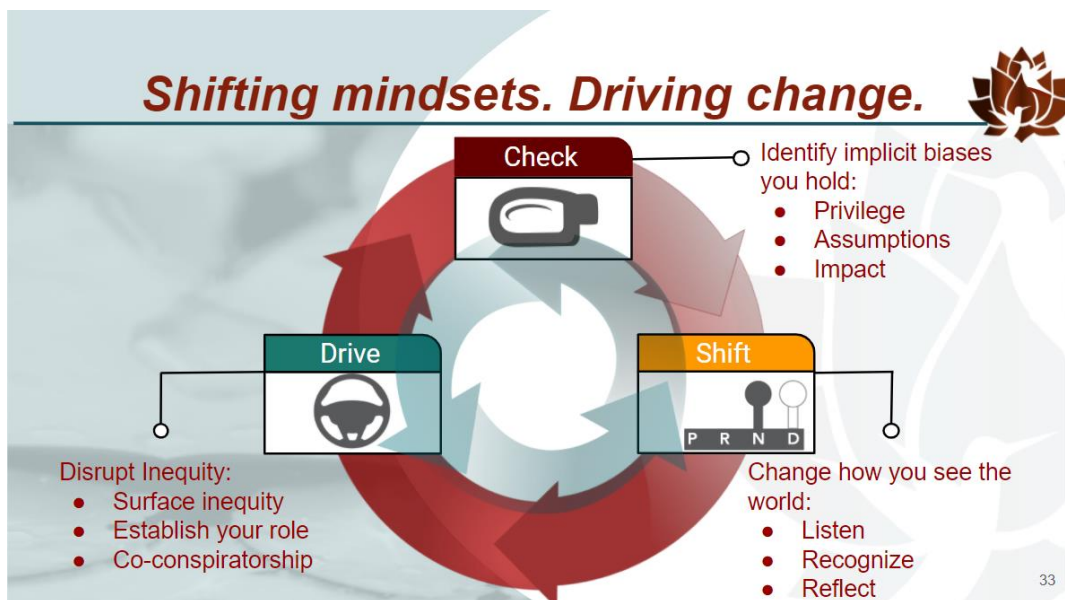

Figure 3. Shifting Mindsets. Driving Change, LOTUS Strategy Group, (2020, October, 17)

Men of color benefit greatly from access to institutional agents who view them through their strengths and resilience, offer support, provide services, and bolster their identity as scholars. Once educators have learned to see themselves in their students, it is increasingly easier to establish positive and fruitful relationships with them. It is strong positive relationships with institutional agents that are most often named as the foremost contributor to increased motivation and engagement. In this sense, it is people, not just programs, that truly impact student success (Urias et al., 2017).

Genuinely embracing equity requires the right mindset or belief system, representing an adaptive challenge (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). An important prerequisite is abandoning a scarcity mentality, a belief that helping the "other" gain something must represent a personal loss (win/lose), and instead embracing the idea that our progress is bound together (win/win) (Covey, 2003). Pulling from the indigenous Aztec term Teyaotlani (teh-yao-tlaw-knee) that loosely means warrior, but literally translates to "guardian of the sacred energy" (culture, family, community, relationships, and interdependence), LOTUS Strategy Group (2020) calls this "The Warrior Way: EVERI Student, Every Day" (EVERI). We developed this framework focused on interconnectedness and centered around the Mayan concept of In'Lak'Ech (you are the other me). The Mayan symbol known as the Hunab Ku at the center of figure 4 reminds us of our individuality and intrinsic interdependence, as each side is an identical yet opposite version of the other. The emphasis is on embracing both an individual and a collective identity. Through this lens, we arrived at the following five core principles, our charge as equity warriors in education: Engage, Validate, Empower, Relate, and Inspire. Below I will briefly describe each principle:

Engage: We must allow students to move from being passive recipients of education to active participants in it (Freire, 1970). One of the key ways to do this is by creating learning experiences that directly activate prior knowledge and allow students to engage through different modalities. Moreover, educators should discover and hone students' natural talents by allowing for multiple ways of representing and demonstrating their learning (Pilgrim, 2017). Often, poor achievement is less an indicator of a student's ability and more so a symptom of a fractured relationship to schooling (Andrade, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999).

Validate: The privilege-centric perspective evident in most textbooks is seldom acknowledged and instead accepted as impartial truth. Failing to recognize and name the ethnocentrism of our educational institutions creates an ethos that there is only one lens through which to view and act upon the world, resulting in the conception of normality and aberration. This explains why so many students of color feel disconnected from their education, as they resist what Angela Valenzuela (1999) refers to as "subtractive schooling," a process by which students are taught that they must abandon their worldview, their language, their music, their folklore, their identity for the sake of conformation. By honoring and holding students' experiences, culture, and prior knowledge as valuable, educators can share power and avoid positioning themselves as the sole keepers of knowledge (Valenzuela, 1999; Freire, 1970).

Empower: Rather than pushing for assimilation (subtractive schooling), educators should explicitly teach students to recognize the dynamics of power and

how to effectively navigate between dominant and non-dominant culture (Delpit, 1988). Moreover, only by overtly teaching about power dynamics and providing navigational capital can we prepare students to act upon the world as it exists, envision it as they wish it to be, and equip them with the tools to change it (Hooks, 2014; Freire, 1970).

Relate: At the core of powerful education is connection. Cultural relevance in the curriculum is vital in ensuring that students can relate to the material, but it is not enough. Caring relationships are central to the work of education. All students deserve access to institutional agents who look like them, understand their lived experiences, and genuinely care for their well-being. As Dr. Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2009) suggests, educators must act as ethnographers and bring the context of students' daily life into the educational setting in a meaningful way, one that recognizes the diversity of the communities we serve and the complexity of culture beyond race and ethnicity. The relationship between educator and learner should be fluid, not a one-directional stream of knowledge (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999; Freire, 1970). Furthermore, creating cross-cultural learning opportunities allows students to make better sense of their own identity while developing a deep appreciation for diversity.

Inspire: For students to achieve, they must first own the belief that they can. Educators must actively build what Dr. Duncan-Andrade calls critical hope (2009) and resilience by espousing and demonstrating a genuine belief in every student's infinite potential, actively and intentionally bolstering a growth mindset by embracing learning as an iterative process, seeing errors not as failures but as

growth opportunities (Dweck, 2016). Educators must complement growth mindset with high expectations to establish a deep sense of *critical hope* through empathy, challenge, and support. This is a stark distinction from sympathy, often coupled with lowered expectations motivated by misguided attempts to be trauma-informed (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). Through *critical hope,* educators can craft learning experiences that encourage students to meld elements of "mastery, identity, and creativity" to not only experience deeper learning but also discern the passions they want to explore further (Mehta & Fine, 2019, p.6).

Figure 4: The Warrior Way, EVERI Student Every Day, LOTUS Strategy Group, (2020, March 7).
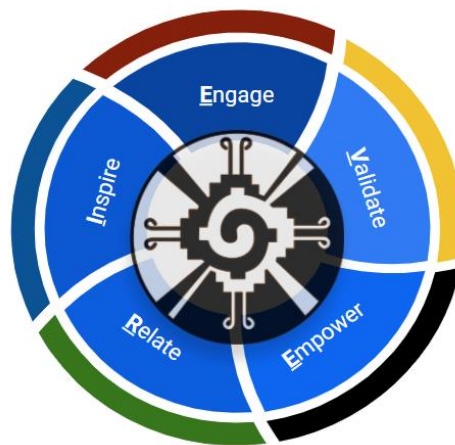
Like the EVERI framework, there is ample literature elevating pedagogical practices that narrow gaps in achievement, yet governance structures and institutional cultures often hinder the adoption of these practices at scale (Gooblar, 2020). If MSIs truly seek to close achievement disparities, they must view student success as an institutional endeavor that bridges student services and academic affairs, cultivate growth mindset in students and faculty alike, and deconstruct the inviolability of the classroom to allow for the interrogation of pedagogical practices that create artificial barriers, while also proliferating high impact student services. A pivotal precursor is developing a deep

understanding of how students, as the end-users of our services, experience the institution. They must be thought partners in developing innovative and effective solutions.

Human-Centered Design

The multitude of competing priorities, coupled with the sense of urgency that achievement disparities induce often lead educational leaders to take swift and decisive action without fully exploring the root cause(s) of the undesired outcome. Moreover, these decisions are frequently made in isolation or by groups of people far removed from the student experience. It is, therefore, understandable why many so-called "solutions" produce lackluster results. Human-centered design emphasizes the importance of understanding how the end-user of your solution experiences the problem. While human-centered design is a common practice in the private sector, it is less prevalent in the educational sector. As Albert Einstein once said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that creates it." Hence, I sought to look outside the educational canon of solution crafting. Design Thinking is one of many human-centered frameworks popularized at the D School at Stanford University in the 1990s. Its core principles have been employed to address a wide array of problems in fields ranging from engineering to healthcare (Banter et al., 2020).

One of the central premises of human-centered processes is designing practical solutions to meet societal needs. This challenge is especially palpable in the educational sector, as strict adherence to the scientific method by creating randomized controlled trials (RCT) can present ethical implications when deciding who gets the treatment and who does not. Furthermore, in the traditional sense, RCTs are structured around a

hypothesis rather than collaborating with their intended "subjects." It is therefore necessary to remain creative and agile when developing solutions for achievement disparities. Embracing a philosophy of continuous improvement to prototype, pilot, and adjust, allows for a timely roll-out of services and precludes "perfect" from becoming the enemy of "good." Design typically starts as a vague idea of what the end product should accomplish and perhaps look like. However, it rarely resembles the initial idea (Razzouk & Shute, 2012). As complex systems that serve human subjects, we cannot solve inequitable outcomes in education from one vantage point and expect immediate results.

The process of designing is generally characterized as iterative, exploratory, and at times chaotic (Braha & Reich, 2003). In this sense, it requires that implementors adopt a growth mindset and embrace failure as an opportunity for learning (Dweck, 2016). Design Thinking suggests a five-stage process to developing solutions. While they are distinct from one another, they often overlap and may require several iterations. Below, I will briefly describe each stage and how they complement previously discussed frameworks for cultivating equity mindedness:
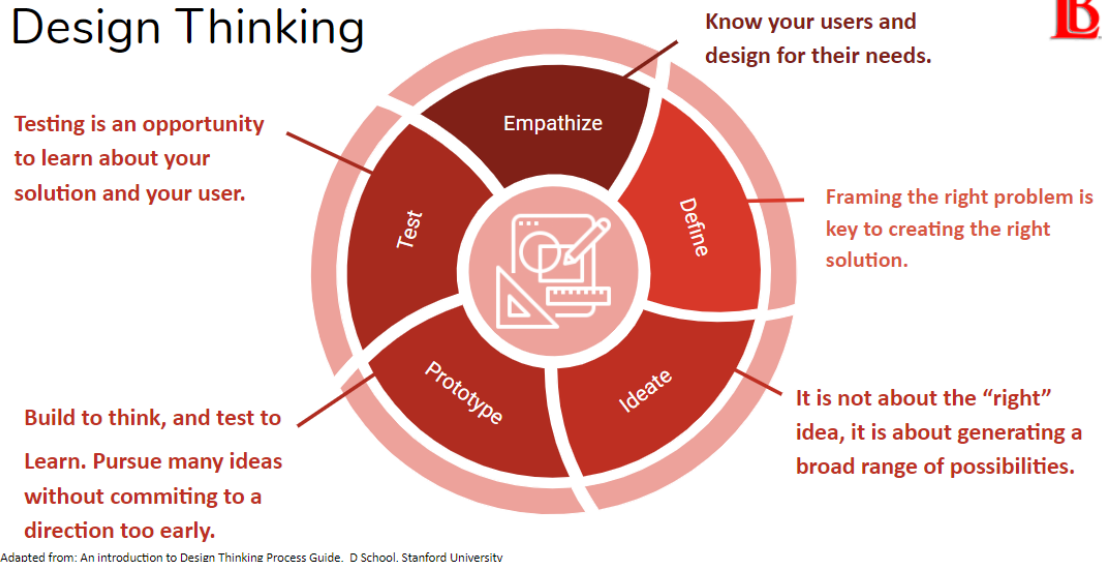
1. **Empathize:** Before even attempting to create a solution, we must first gain a deep understanding of the problem through the lens of those experiencing it. It is, therefore, necessary to engage the target audience to gain crucial insight. This process can take many forms but generally consists of interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations. This stage serves as a vehicle to engage and validate student experiences while checking our own biases (Check, Engage, Validate).

2. **Define:** Once enough data has been captured through the empathize phase, one can begin to explore several factors that contribute to the problem. By considering the knowledge

acquired about the intended user, and the context, one can better situate the problem within the current setting to arrive at a meaningful and actionable problem statement, or problem of practice (POP). Through this process, we can better relate to the student population and begin to shift our thinking towards anti-deficit, student-centered solution making (Relate, Shift).

3. **Ideate:** This is the part of the process where one begins generating ideas about how to solve the identified problem. The goal is to create a wide range of possibilities, not arriving at a single and best solution. Through this process, we generate a theory of action (TOA), what we need to do to create the desired outcome. Based on our learning, or new lens, we can surface inequity, situate our (the institution's) role in the problem and become co-conspirators in designing a solution (Drive).

4. **Prototype:** Grounded in our problem statement and theory of action, begin developing our program, intervention, or product with the end-user in mind. This should also be a fluid process allowing for multiple ideas of how to operationalize our solution (Engage, Relate, Drive).

5. **Test:** Implement the prototype, preferably with the actual target audience, with an explicit focus on learning. This is the opportunity to refine our design and improve our solution through iteration. Collecting participant perception data through surveys, evaluations, and focus groups allows students to assist as thought partners in the process of continuous improvement (Engage, Validate, Empower, Shift, Drive).

Design Thinking

Know your users and design for their needs.

Testing is an opportunity to learn about your solution and your user.

Framing the right problem is key to creating the right solution.

Build to think, and test to Learn. Pursue many ideas without commiting to a direction too early.

It is not about the "right" idea, it is about generating a broad range of possibilities.

Empathize · Define · Ideate · Prototype · Test

Adapted from: An introduction to Design Thinking Process Guide, D School, Stanford University

Leading for Change

As leaders within organizations, we navigate a complex ecosystem of structures, policies, procedures, titles, politics, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and relationships. In their book *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (2013), Bolman and Deal contend that many leaders, and their initiatives, flounder because they fail to appreciate this complexity and instead view their circumstances through a narrow lens, or frame. To achieve a more holistic view of a problem and generate better solutions, leaders must adopt new mental models to view environments through multiple lenses. They dub this process *reframing,* or the "ability to think about situations in more than one way, which lets you develop alternative diagnoses and strategies" (2013, p.5). They offer four possible lenses through which one can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of a situation—the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame—and how these elements operate to produce success or lack thereof. The four frames can serve as an evaluative tool of previous efforts or action planning tool

for future endeavors. In line with the metaphor of tools, the authors offer that "Managers who master the hammer and expect all problems to behave like nails, find life at work confusing and frustrating" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 13). Skilled leaders must not only know how to use each tool (frame) but, more importantly, appreciate that they are all necessary, interrelated, and omnipresent. It is, therefore, difficult to consider any one frame in complete isolation, but rather how they interact to produce outcomes.

Figure 6: Overview of Bolman & Deal's Four Frame Model p. 19

Overview of the Four-Frame Model

	Structural	Human Resource	Political	Symbolic
Metaphor for Organisation	Factory or Machine	Family	Jungle	Carnival, temple, theatre
Central Concepts	Rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, environment	Needs, skills, relationships	Power, conflict, competition, organisational policies	Culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes
Image of Leadership	Social architecture	Empowerment	Advocacy	Inspiration
Basic Leadership Challenge	Attune structure to task, technology, environment	Align organisational and human needs	Develop agenda and power base	Create faith, beauty, meaning

Theory of Action (TOA)

Informed by the current body of knowledge codifying best practices for male success initiatives within institutions of higher education, frameworks for cultivating equity mindedness, design thinking, and leading for change, I arrived at the following theory of action (TOA):

If I
Enter the organization from a learning stance by engaging a diverse cross-section of stakeholders to ground my work in the local context and elicit diverse perspectives to identify existing assets and opportunities
Convene a core workgroup comprised of current students and diverse employees who deliver critical student support services
Establish relational trust and build on the national attention and momentum around racial injustice to garner support for equity efforts beyond direct student services
Intentionally structure a process that centers the end-user (students), engenders collective buy-in, and focuses on the technical and adaptive dimensions of improving student outcomes
And communicate our progress with pertinent stakeholders

Then
We will be able to design and pilot an MSI prototype comprised of collaborative efforts that create cohesion among, and supplement, existing services
Create meaningful experiences for male students of color that engender a sense of connectedness, identity, self-efficacy, and community
Equip students with the navigational and social capital necessary to seek and attain academic, social-emotional, and basic needs support
And leverage relational trust to build institutional knowledge about MOC student experiences and needs to engender support and action beyond student services

So That

First-time, full-time male students of color appreciate, embrace, and espouse a belief in their own infinite potential while feeling connected and supported

LBCC will espouse and truly embody a culture of acceptance, support, and love for POC (including MOC), leading to increased success (retention, persistence, and completion)

LBCC will have a model process to address a wide array of equity efforts

Achievement disparities among traditionally under-served students will be eliminated

Project Description

My relationship with Long Beach City College started while I was still Director of the High School Equivalency Program at Hartnell Community College (HC) in Salinas, California. During my tenure there, the California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) rolled out the Student Equity Plan (SEP) and soon after the California Promise Program. Both initiatives were greatly influenced by Eloy Oakley, and modeled after his work while serving as Superintendent-President of LBCC. Because of this, HC Student Services looked to LBCC as a model to follow, and I grew to admire their continued leadership in driving equity efforts. I met Dr. Mike Muñoz, current Vice President of Student Services, in 2017 while I was in the National Community College Hispanic Council (NCCHC) Fellows program. Dr. Muñoz, Executive Dean of Counseling at Rio Hondo College at the time, had been a Fellow several years earlier and led a workshop for my cohort. The level of energy, passion, and commitment to student equity he projected was inspiring.

When the time came to start thinking about potential residency sites, I knew I wanted to continue my efforts at a community college level and reached out to several

NCCHC fellows. It was then that I learned Dr. Muñoz had become Vice President of Student Services at LBCC. Once I explained my intent for pursuing a doctoral degree, my "why" for becoming an educational leader, and what a residency entailed, he listed several high-priority projects that may align with my goals. Amongst these was establishing a male success initiative written into LBCC's 2019-2022 SEP plan. After discussing several options, we concluded that launching an MSI would be the primary project for whoever was selected as a resident. Fortunately, that was me.

My residency was slated to begin on July 1, 2020. However, I reached out to Dr. Muñoz in late May after the shameful murder of George Floyd. Seeing the coverage of the civil unrest that ensued in Long Beach, I was compelled to request that I be included in planning LBCC's response, and he acquiesced. From the first Student Services meeting I attended in May, it was clear that racial equity and social justice were deeply important to the student services team. By the time July 1st came around, I had received a warm welcome and established rapport with many individuals who would become crucial partners in launching our MSI.

During the first week of my residency, I met with Dr. Muñoz (the VP) and learned that while he would be my supervisor, I would be working most closely with Sonia De La Torre, Interim Dean of Equity at LBCC (the Dean). She and I began meeting weekly and formulating what was to become our proposed timeline for LBCC's inaugural Male Success Initiative (MSI). The development and launch of the pilot MSI were to be guided by the Design Thinking model and would consist of 3 phases that would overlap to some degree:

- Phase 1: (July – October 2020) Hit the ground learning to define the problem (empathize/define)

- Phase 2: (November - December 2020) Use what works to develop our MSI design (ideate/prototype)

- Phase 3: (December 2020 - March 2021) Pilot, evaluate and adjust (test)

Phase 1: (July – October 2020) Hit the ground learning to define the problem (empathize/define)

To gain a deeper appreciation for LBCC, its local context, faculty/staff/ administrator perspectives, and student perceptions, I began by compiling college success reports, and institutional artifacts (reports to the board, meeting notes, institutional planning documents, and student survey reports) provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Simultaneously, I consulted with the Dean and VP of student services to identify key personnel that could provide a fuller picture of what services LBCC was already implementing, to what extent, and identify potential gaps in services to subsequently schedule individual interviews. These semi-structured interviews served the dual purpose of eliciting critical information that would inform the diagnosis of the problem and individuals' current conceptions of the solution while providing a vehicle to build relational trust and collegiality. After conducting 12 interviews with key stakeholders, I noticed that while most responses focused on improving student services, many also mentioned the campus ethos as a barrier, corroborating what the CCSM results stated, elevating the need for adaptive change among faculty, staff, and administrators.

To build better awareness of the problem, I needed to gain insight into how the target users, LBCC students, experienced the institution. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we operated exclusively in a virtual environment; therefore, access to students

for observations and rapport building was nonexistent. Fortunately, LBCC had administered several student perception surveys in recent years, including the Community College Survey of Men, now the Community College Success Measure (CCSM) in 2017, and the California Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCCSSE) in 2018. They provided a baseline of knowledge in these regards until recruitment for student focus groups was feasible. After reviewing the literature for MSI best practices, conducting interviews with LBCC employees and external MSI Directors, reviewing institutional reports, planning documents, meeting artifacts, student perception data, and leveraging my personal experience serving MOC students as a Mexican male, I arrived at seven common themes mentioned as support factors. Utilizing those seven themes, I then developed the following table with three intended purposes:

1. Establish alignment (or lack thereof) between the literature, interviews, and student perception data (columns 3,4,5).

2. Begin consolidating existing programs and services that promote equity: *assets* (column 6)

3. Identify gaps in services: *opportunities* (column 7)

Figure 7. LBCC Asset & Opportunity Table

	Focus Area	Literature	Interviews	Student Data	Existing Activities and Programs @ LBCC (Assets)	
1	Academic Advising/ Counseling	X	X	X	• Promise • VSV/WD • Guided Pathways	🙂

2	Academic and Study Skills	X	X		• FYE • Justice Scholars
					• Honor Soc. of • Emerging Leaders
					  Educated Brothers curriculum
					• Sis • Academic Success
					  Center
						🙂

3	Leadership/ Resilience	X	X	X	• UMOJA • Justice Scholars • PUENTE • Emerging Leaders • A2MEND curriculum • BSU	🙂
4	Mentoring	X	X	X	• A2MEND • Honor Soc. od Educated Brothers • My Brother's Keeper Long Beach	😐
5	Events and Workshops	X	X	X	• UMOJA • PUENTE • Male Summit	🙂
6	Intersectional Identity	X	X	X		😐
7	Basic Needs	X	X	X	• Viking Vault • Justice Scholars • Next Up	🙂

Key: the x in columns 3-5 indicate the mention of those foci in literature, interviews, and student data, respectively. The happy faces in column 7 indicate my assessment (based on what I saw and heard) of the degree to which the college provides services for that foci (green full-smile = well, yellow half-smile = somewhat well, and orange no smile = not well yet).

I shared this cursory analysis with the Dean and VP to elicit feedback and identify key personnel with the content knowledge, will, and bandwidth to serve on the core workgroup that would develop the MSI design. This workgroup, consisting of 12 educators and 5 students, met for the first time on September 16, 2020. During that meeting, I allocated time for open dialogue to discuss individual and collective hopes and dreams for LBCC's MSI. I then presented them with the table above to explore the seven common themes. Although not the initial plan, we spent the subsequent two meetings refining the table while assessing the degree to which services/supports were offered. The latter proved to be a very uncomfortable process for some involved. Through this procedure, we determined that LBCC has an abundance of programs, student clubs, professional development opportunities, and student services designed to reduce achievement disparities. Unfortunately, much of these endeavors have been spearheaded

by faculty as an addendum to their pre-existing workload and responsibilities. While these efforts are meaningful, well-respected, and well-executed, the scarcity of time and subsequent absence of continuous oversight (understandably) has resulted in an assortment of insulated acts of equity in cyclical iterations of stop and go.

To utilize existing resources more efficiently, limit duplicative efforts, and reach a wider student audience, I felt it necessary to work collaboratively. In doing so, we could build cohesion among student services, create tailored programming, provide continual oversight, and cultivate equity-mindedness across service areas. Moreover, a 2017 report released by the Center for Urban Education (CUE) out of the University of Southern California (USC) revealed that LBCC's Institutional Student Equity Planning (SEP) moved from explicitly targeting disproportionately impacted ethnic groups towards the provision of services for "all students" with zero mention of specific subgroups between academic year 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. Although that is no longer the case in the current SEP, unfortunately, the color-blind approach is still believed by many to be the only fair and justifiable way to conduct business as an IHE. This approach is especially prevalent among those with no lived experience of racial oppression. As mentioned in the introduction, LBCC's administrators, faculty, and staff are far from racial/ethnic parity with their student population. This disparity is even more pronounced when looking specifically at academic affairs. While individuals are well-intentioned, and candid conversations are taking place, the discourse has not yet produced a notable shift in "business as usual." Namely, faculty are to teach, and student services are to remediate the deficiencies (whether personal or systemic), disallowing students from fully engaging with the established curriculum and experiencing success. This bifurcated approach is

prevalent K through 16 and exists independently of the faculty's racial/ethnic composition, representing a distinct yet related challenge.

Based on this analysis, we collectively arrived at a problem statement that provided the focus for our theory of action, both tasks requiring multiple meetings to complete. Before generating ideas for how we could structure our MSI to directly address the "problem," I wanted to ground the group's thinking around Dr. Harris and Dr. Wood's (2014) *Five Domains of Black Male Success at the Community College* conceptual model and offer a framework through which to apply an equity lens. Influenced by many contemporary and well-respected theories of impactful education, we utilized LOTUS Strategy Group's (2019) The Warrior Way: EVERI Student, Every Day framework to ensure that our efforts were intentional in engaging, validating, empowering, relating, and inspiring our MOC students.

We devised participation criteria based on AB19 legislative requirements, as this was to fund our efforts, and developed a proposed budget. Through that criteria, we distilled a recruitment pool of 638 first-time, full-time students who identified as male, and Black, Latinx, or Asian & Pacific Islander (API). The latter (API) is an umbrella term comprised of a wide range of subgroups, some experiencing disproportionate impact at alarming rates, while others outperform all racial groups, including White. Centered around Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's concept of positive discrimination, we began targeted recruitment from a subset of 455 in late October, intending to double the representation of Black and Pacific Islander students within our MSI when compared to LBCC's general student body. Hampered by the absence of in-person interaction and visibility, our Outreach and Recruitment Specialists (ORS) made individual phone calls. Once

recruited, the first point of service was a series of focus groups by racial identification, adapted from the California Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE) MOC Focus Group Guide (2014). They would provide an opportunity to establish a personal connection with staff and peers, build trust, and learn from our pilot population's experiences. In addition, we developed a brief electronic needs assessment that included questions about food and housing insecurity, access to internet and technology, learning disability, academic and study skills, mental health, career exploration, comprehensive education planning, and extra-curricular involvement that would serve as an exit ticket for participants to secure a $10 gift card.

While the MSI would develop and deliver a buffet of tailored services that directly address identified gaps, we would also serve as a vehicle to identify existing programming and connect students to said services. To that end, focus groups and needs assessment responses would be used to connect students to existing college support services. Additionally, we needed to cultivate equity-mindedness among faculty, staff, and administrators and look beyond direct services while building a culture of empathy, trust, and respect to remove barriers for MOC, all of which was often elevated in our workgroup as we moved towards developing a prototype to operationalize our TOA.

Phase 2: (November 2020 - December 2021) Use what works to develop our MSI design (ideate/prototype)

Our MSI core workgroup initially met bi-weekly for 90 minutes. However, after experiencing the lengthy process of collectively arriving at a POP and TOA, and to harness the energy built around our efforts, per the workgroup's election, we moved to weekly meetings starting in November. Student recruitment continued while we discussed potential foci and critical components of our MSI design. Pulling from our

initial hopes and dreams dialogue, asset table, and best practices codified in literature, we allowed our TOA to guide our prototype's development. During our first prototyping meeting on October 28th, I presented the MSI logo I had developed and vetted through the marketing department (figure 8) and its significance to give us an identity. I presented a proposed timeline for our pilot launch (figure 9) and outlined a proposed service journey (figure 10). I then invited the workgroup to provide feedback. Through that process, we concluded that our MSI design would consist of 3 primary foci: 1) connecting students to current services, 2) a series of workshops, and 3) a formal mentoring component. At the subsequent meeting, I offered a proposed scope and sequence for the workshop series comprising 15 sessions, each centered around a strategic topic, including five structured mentoring interactions. To ensure alignment between our TOA and identified best practices, each session, including the mentoring component, was connected to the 5 Domains and EVERI framework.

Figure 8. LBCC MSI: N.O.B.L.E. Scholars Logo
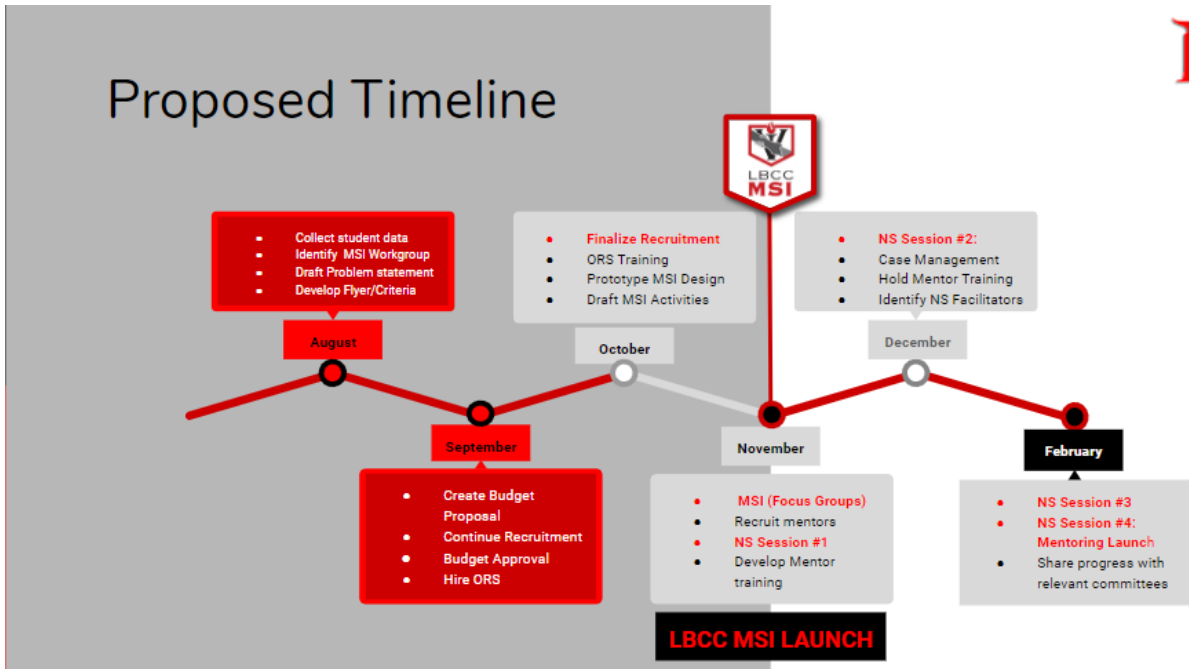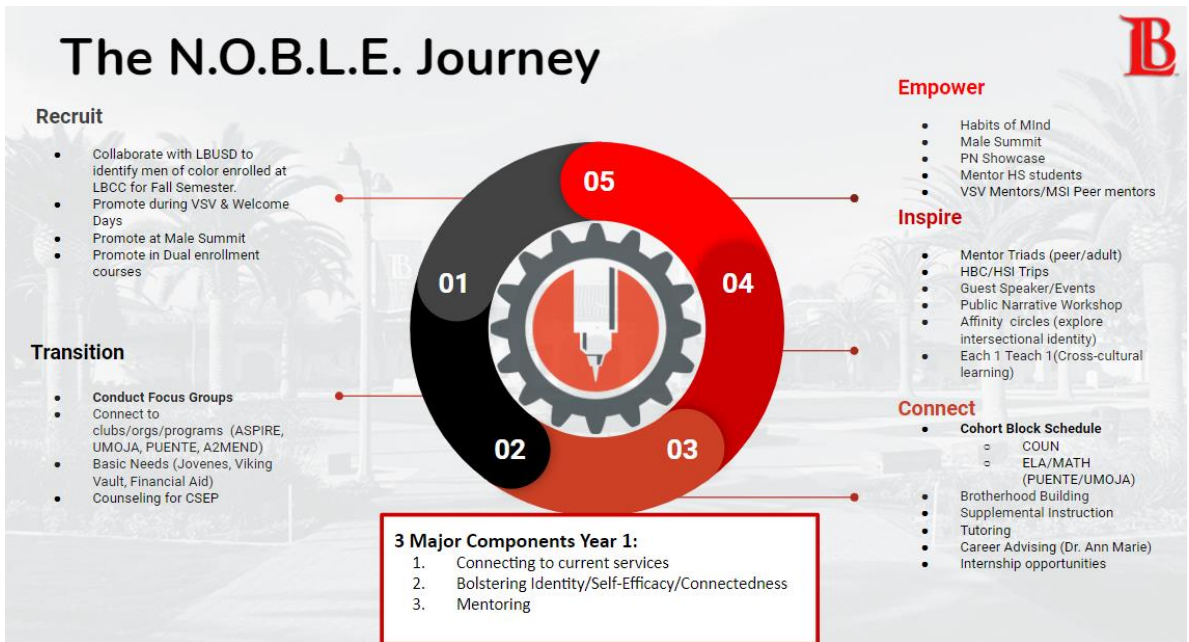
Figure 9. Proposed MSI Pilot Timeline

Figure 10. The N.O.B.L.E. Journey

After several revisions and additions to establishing a robust list of topics, I

developed an electronic survey for workgroup members to rank them in order of

importance and indicate desired frequency and length of student sessions. After much

dialogue about the results and considering the implications of a virtual modality and resultant "Zoom fatigue" among students, we arrived at 90-minute bi-weekly meetings, or eight sessions per semester. Hence, our pilot program was to consist of a launch to establish rapport and promote brotherhood, three workshops based on ranked topics, three mentoring sessions, and closing, with focus groups being our first point of student contact to assess needs and connect to appropriate services (session zero). In addition, MSI students would be invited and highly encouraged to attend a virtual HBCU trip and special events, including the Male Summit co-sponsored by LBUSD, LBCC, and CSULB, designed to inspire middle and high school MOC students to aspire to higher education.

Since this pilot was funded through AB19 dollars, we divided the list of 638 potential participants into three priority categories based on FYE compliance, with particular import placed on API and Black student recruitment. Through the efforts of two outreach and recruitment specialists at a combined total of 23 hours per week, we were able to speak to approximately 180 students during a 3-week period, yielding 42 unduplicated responses on our MSI interest form, representing a yield of 23%. It took approximately 1.5 hours per student recruited. Based on those responses, we scheduled one API focus group (6 students), two Latinx focus groups (22 students), and one Black focus group (12 students). Well aware of the difficulties maintaining motivation and engagement through Zoom, we opted to continue our recruitment of additional students between our focus group facilitation and first MSI session to ensure a healthy cohort after attrition.

During this same time, my MSI workgroup co-chair, who serves in a dual capacity as Supervisor of the Male Leadership Academy at LBUSD and adjunct counselor at LBCC, connected me to a city employee. We then engaged in conversations with the City of Long Beach and their partners at My Brother's Keeper (MBK) to discuss our plans to launch an MSI with a robust mentoring component explicitly designed for MOC. The prospect of developing a mentoring program informed by best practices through the Critical Mentoring lens generated much excitement as this could eventually serve as a model to expand mentoring services across institutions throughout Long Beach City. After several individual meetings with MBK employees caused by a snowball of referrals, I connected with Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan, author of *Critical Mentoring: A Practical Guide* (2017) and co-founder and CEO of the Youth Mentoring Action Network (YMAN).

In her book, she highlights the importance of mentor selection, training, and matching. In alignment with her recommendations, we would intentionally select adults that demonstrated awareness and commitment to equity for men of color. The most notable departure from traditional mentoring models is tailored training that moves beyond the logistics of the mentoring relationship, with an explicit focus on bolstering critical consciousness among mentors. Furthermore, it seeks to position mentors and protégés as partners in the mentoring relationship, rather than a hierarchical model like standard nomenclature such as big brother-little brother or mentor-mentee suggest. To this end, we contracted with Dr. Weiston-Serdan to provide all mentors with a 2-hour training highlighting the core principles of Critical Mentoring. Mentor recruitment took place during November and December, with the training originally scheduled to take

place in January, during National Mentoring Month, spearheaded by the Harvard School of Public Health and MENTOR since 2002, but moved to February 5th to accommodate winter break.

Phase 3: (November- March 2021) Pilot, evaluate and adjust (test)

Our outreach and recruitment specialists contacted all forty-two students on our interest list by sending an email invitation and text reminder, informing them of logistics, provision of $10 gift cards to participants, and appropriate Zoom link for our focus group sessions. In addition, students received individual phone reminders on the day of the session. All focus groups were initially slated to occur in late October but were pushed to the third and fourth weeks of November, prior to the Thanksgiving break, to maximize recruitment. Despite holding multiple sessions and consistent communication, we experienced a disappointingly low turnout with one API student, four Latinx students, and four Black students making the Zoom sessions, for a total of nine participants. The harsh reality of starting your college journey amidst a global pandemic and palpable racial tensions directly impact engagement. Students communicated this during focus groups and future conversations. The low turnout was likely also impacted by the focus group's proximity to the holiday break. Nonetheless, the discussions were quite valuable. Notably, students named lack of motivation, sense of isolation, disconnection via Zoom, and the need to maintain employment as the most significant barriers to their success. This insight was shared with our workgroup and equity subcommittee and used to inform and adjust our pilot plan.

In efforts to ensure a healthy pilot population, general recruitment continued, capping out at forty-eight students during the first week of December. We held two MSI

orientations to establish rapport and create a collective identity. The dates and times were determined through an electronic poll to maximize attendance. In addition, students were encouraged to complete our needs assessment (if they had not already done so), seek tutoring assistance as they prepared for finals, offered registration assistance and financial aid application assistance, and were referred to counseling if lacking a comprehensive student education plan (CSEP). A total of 29 students attended the orientations, thus becoming our MSI pilot cohort. While the remaining 19 students who added themselves to the interest list would no longer be contacted via phone or text, they continued receiving our email communications and bi-weekly newsletter launched in February.

Comparable to bringing effective teams together, cultivating effective mentoring relationships requires intentionality. In line with the critical mentoring standards, we first identified desired characteristics for potential mentors, including, among others, strengths-based orientation, effective communication skills, and awareness of and comfort discussing race and its impact. Informed by those characteristics, we requested nominations to begin targeted recruitment during the winter break, resulting in eighteen potential mentors. Seventeen accepted the call and participated in training facilitated by Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan. As recommended, we created structured opportunities for continued support in fomenting a positive and meaningful mentoring relationship.

During the winter break, we began connecting students to services based on needs assessment results and generated a calendar of events for our pilot. Seeing the difficulty in attendance and students feeling the bore of Zoom fatigue, we adjusted programming

for the spring semester by reducing both length and number of scheduled whole-group

gatherings. Scholar participation for the remainder of the fall looked as follows:

- Attend opening session
- Attend 2 NOBLE Scholar Workshops
- Attend 3 "Each One Reach One" Mentoring sessions
- Attend closing ceremony
- Maintain full-time enrollment (register in 12+ units)
- Maintain good academic standing
o One counseling appointment per semester
o Attend tutoring prior to midterms/finals

On February 17th, we held our first official workshop of the semester titled

Building Brotherhood. We also registered all scholars to participate in the *2021 LBCP*

Male Summit: Awareness + Action = Power, a three-day virtual event that I helped

coordinate, designed to inspire and empower middle school, high school, and college

MOC students. The event was scheduled over three days during the first week of March

(1.5 hours per day). It included three dynamic keynote speakers: Dr. Eric Thomas ("The

Hip Hop Preacher"), Maagic Collins (mental health activist and host of *Fight the Funk*

Podcast), and Dr. César Cruz (Harvard Ed.L.D. Alum and co-founder of Homies

Empowerment in Oakland, California).

As of the writing of this capstone, our pilot is in full swing. To evaluate its

progress, we will continue collecting *process data* by tracking points of communication,

number of events, attendance, and number of referrals, as well as *perception data* through

student and mentor feedback, qualitative observations, and an end-of-year survey. By

reconvening the initial MSI workgroup as an advisory committee every quarter, we will

examine collected process and perception data, discuss successes and difficulties, and

explore adjustments for future iterations of LBCC's MSI. Upon conclusion of the spring

semester, we will pull outcome data (units attempted, units earned, academic standing,

and GPA) for all students on our initial interest list. We will utilize the 19 students who did not participate in any way as our control group for comparison purposes. Even so, we are aware that persistence and retention may be highly impacted by the pandemic, as statewide data already indicates a decline in enrollment of up to 30% for spring 2021 among most California Community Colleges.

Evidence to Date

During my time at LBCC, I compiled an assortment of evidence to record progress towards my strategic project goals. Below is a table that lists the "If" elements in my theory of action (left column), lists correlated efforts (center column), and my assessment of progress to date (right column), followed by additional description of each. I then provide the same for "Then" elements of my TOA, with an abbreviated overall description since this capstone only includes evidence captured through February 17, 2021. In the subsequent section, I offer my thoughts as to why things unfolded as they did.

Theory of Action "If" Statements	Correlated Efforts	Assessment of Progress
I enter the organization from a learning stance by engaging a diverse cross-section of stakeholders to ground my work in the local context and elicit diverse perspectives to identify existing assets and opportunities	Held regular meetings with Dean of Equity to learn about current efforts and identify key stakeholders on campus Conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with LBCC Administrators, Faculty, and staff Conducted two interviews with experienced MSI Directors from other community colleges Held numerous informal conversations with other college employees Conducted four student focus groups Mapped LBCC's existing assets in support of MOC Identified opportunities for development	COMPLETE

I convene a core workgroup comprised of current students and diverse employees who deliver critical student support services	Identified a core workgroup comprised of 5 current students and 12 LBCC faculty, administrators, and staff Met regularly bi-weekly, then weekly per their election, between September 16th, 2020 and December 2, 2020, for a total of 7 meetings (10.5 hours). The workgroup will reconvene quarterly on an ongoing basis to discuss challenges, successes and elicit feedback.	COMPLETE
I establish relational trust and build on the national attention and momentum around racial injustice to garner support for equity efforts beyond direct student services	Attended a wide range of meetings to highlight MSI efforts resulting in opportunities for collaboration Established communication with Equity Coordinator to include MOC specific information in LBCC's Cultural Curriculum Audit	IN PROGRESS
I intentionally structure a process that centers the end-user (students), engenders collective buy-in, and focuses on the technical and adaptive dimensions of improving student outcomes	Utilized "Design" thinking to center our core workgroup process, which included current students to ensure their voice was at the table Introduced the workgroup to Dr. Urias, Falcon, Harris & Wood's *Five Domain conceptual model* Introduced the workgroup to LOTUS Strategy Group's *"Warrior Way: EVERI Student, Every Day"* framework	COMPLETE
And communicate our progress with pertinent stakeholders	Presented MSI Design process and progress to LBCC's Equity Subcommittee on December 14th, 2021 Presented MSI to feeder high school partners at the High School Educator Conference on January 8th, 2021 Presented MSI to LBCC students and Staff at a virtual open house from January 28th -February 2nd, 2021 MSI referenced at LBCC's February Board meeting Co-coordinated LBCP 2021 Male Summit for middle school through college-aged MOC students and promoted MSI at the event.	IN PROGRESS

In the following paragraphs, I demarcate each "*If*" statement in my TOA and provide additional details regarding evidence to date.

I enter the organization from a learning stance by engaging a diverse cross-section of stakeholders to ground my work in the local context and elicit diverse perspectives to identify existing assets and opportunities.

This is an area where I believe we experienced great success. I entered LBCC with an open mind to genuinely engage in collaborative efforts. I quickly developed rapport with the VP of Student Services (the VP) and Dean of Student Equity (the Dean), which opened the door to meaningful discussions about LBCC's history and current culture. Their institutional knowledge was crucial in identifying not only individuals whose titles granted them formal authority, but vocal advocates for MOC as well. I then gained access to institutional planning documents, reports, and presentations, and I identified individuals to participate in semi-structured interviews. Those interviews allowed me to gauge the types of services already in place, what individuals perceived as prominent barriers (problem), what support could help remove those barriers (solution), and direction for areas of research. As the end-users of our program, student input was crucial. To that end, I reviewed results from two student engagement surveys, the CCSSE and CCSM, and conducted four student focus groups. Equipped with this data and a table outlining existing efforts, we aimed to surface gaps in service (opportunities).

I convene a core workgroup comprised of current students and diverse employees who deliver critical student support services.

After conducting all interviews, I generated common themes regarding perceived barriers, potential solutions, and existing assets at LBCC, and shared the draft asset table

with my supervisors to elicit feedback. Based on that conversation, we identified 15 individuals who represented a good cross-section of administrators, faculty, and staff, including those who deliver vital student services such as basic needs, counseling, emergency aid, student life, athletics, student discipline, and first-year experience. Of the initial fifteen, thirteen agreed to participate. Once convened, I asked workgroup members to invite students from their specific areas with an explicit focus on racial diversity. This resulted in five student members for a final workgroup of seventeen after one withdrew due to competing priorities. Below is a list of workgroup membership listed by their role at LBCC:

Dean of Student Equity	Student Life Coordinator
Equity Coordinator/Social Sciences Faculty	History and Political Science Faculty
LBUSD Male Leadership Academy Supervisor	MSI Outreach and Recruitment Specialist
Basic Needs Manager	MOC Student
First-Year Experience Manager (FYE)	MOC Student
FYE Coordinator/Counseling Faculty	MOC Student
Justice Scholars/Emergency Aid Outreach Specialist	MOC Student
Operations Manager	MOC Student
Kinesiology and Athletics Faculty/Coach	Me

I establish relational trust and build on the national attention and momentum around racial injustice to garner support for equity efforts beyond direct student services.

This is difficult to gauge and certainly never complete. However, I can state that I have been a regular participant and contributor at several meetings and participated in technology and Basic Needs Program food distribution. Through these venues, I have met

a wide range of LBCC employees, established relationships, and engaged in critical conversations. By making myself visible, consistently elevating our MSI efforts, and naming the disparate outcomes our system has traditionally created, I have invited others to interrogate our current policies and practices to consider their impact on minoritized populations. During our workgroup meetings, we often discussed the distance between academic and student affairs and the need to work across divisions to impact what happens in the classroom. To this end, I have engaged in conversations to learn about and potentially contribute to LBCC's Cultural Curriculum Audit, a voluntary training developed by the Equity Coordinator in the division of Academic Affairs. The audit's purpose is to support faculty in equitizing their syllabi, classroom culture, and pedagogical practices. Moreover, the possibility of offering MSI-specific counseling and English courses has been met favorably by both the Dean of counseling and the English Department Head. The overwhelming willingness of faculty/administrators and staff to serve as mentors indicates support and represents an opportunity to create impact beyond student services as they apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they gained/strengthened through their participation in their sphere of influence. As evidence, after participating in our mentor training, the professor of Counseling 2, "Making a difference through Mentoring," has decided to incorporate key concepts of critical mentoring and Dr. Torie Weiston's book into his course.

I intentionally structure a process that centers the end-user (students), engenders collective buy-in, and focuses on the technical and adaptive dimensions of improving student outcomes.

The workgroup was convened for the first time on Wednesday, September 16th, and met a total of 7 times through December 2nd to develop a pilot prototype. Our process was grounded in the Design Thinking model, thus started by empathizing with LBCC students through their inclusion in our workgroup, review of perception data collected through engagement surveys, and student focus groups. Student insight provided the lens through which we reviewed and modified the asset table discussed earlier, with the end goal of accurately defining the problem. Through that process, we arrived at the following problem statement:

"LBCC has deployed a wide array of quality services and interventions, yet focused efforts in connecting incoming Men Of Color (MOC) [including Black/African American, Latinx, Asian American, Filipino, Pacific Islander/Desi, and Native/Indigenous students] to existing services, and expanding programming with an explicit focus on MOC retention, course completion, graduation, transfer, enhancing connection to the college, and removing institutional barriers, that includes antiracist training to dismantle the culture of distrust, disdain, and disregard of MOC have not been operationalized, resulting in an assortment of insulated acts of equity, limiting opportunities for impact."

To consider both the technical and adaptive dimensions encapsulated in the problem statement, I introduced the 5 Domains Conceptual Model (Urias, Falcon, Harris III & Wood, 2017) and the Warrior Way: EVERI Student, Every Day framework (LOTUS Strategy Group, 2019) before generating programmatic ideas. We frequently had honest and vulnerable conversations about lived experiences during our workgroup meetings, demonstrating psychological safety to engage as our authentic selves. Furthermore, responses to an anonymous survey showed that 100% of responders "Strongly Agreed" they felt heard and valued in our workgroup.

Communicate our progress with pertinent stakeholders.

As a new initiative, it was essential to elevate our work. To capitalize on the virtual modality required by the pandemic, I designed multiple Zoom backgrounds that prominently displayed "LBCC MSI" and regularly used them when meeting across divisions and with external partners. This generated curiosity that resulted in opportunities for collaboration. For example, a partner high school head counselor wrote the following in an email "I would love to meet with you this coming semester to see how we can collaborate…Having the males link with MSI would be a great tool to provide a support network for them. Something that can provide them a better transition to college" (private email communication 1/8/2021). Moreover, I shared progress at the Student Equity Subcommittee, HS Educator Conference, virtual open house, and the Dean highlighted critical elements of our pilot at February's LBCC Board Meeting.

Theory of Action "Then" Statements	Correlated Efforts	Assessment of Progress
We will be able to design and pilot an MSI prototype comprised of collaborative efforts that create cohesion among, and supplement, existing services	Developed an MSI Pilot design with three primary foci: 1) connecting students to existing services, 2) bolstering identity and self-efficacy, 3) structured mentoring Conducted targeted recruitment efforts resulting in 42 unduplicated prospective MSI participants representing a diverse cross-section of LBCC's student population Developed and implemented a needs assessment survey Used needs assessment results to connect students to appropriate resources and services Developed an MSI Handbook including guidelines for recruitment,	COMPLETE

	case management, and implementation of services	
Create meaningful experiences for male students of color that engender a sense of connectedness, identity, self-efficacy, and community	Developed a scope and sequence for student workshops addressing a diverse range of topics and identified session facilitators Held focus groups, student orientations, MSI launch, and one thematic workshop (to date) Implemented case management Assisted with registration, financial aid, and counseling appointments to promote persistence to spring Developed bi-weekly communication dubbed "The Breakdown" Co-coordinated LBCP 2021 Male Summit designed to inspire and empower middle, high school, and college-aged male students of color from the greater Long Beach area Developed an evaluation survey to gauge satisfaction and gather perception data from pilot participants (to be administered May 2021)	IN PROGRESS
Equip students with the navigational and social capital necessary to seek and attain academic, social-emotional, and basic needs support	Connected students to institutional resources and services Developed a structured mentoring model for LBCC's MSI to be piloted in March Recruited and Trained 17 Mentors Created an LBCC Mentoring Handbook that provides an overview of critical mentoring, its standards, and operationalization at LBCC	IN PROGRESS
Leverage relational trust to build institutional knowledge about MOC student experiences and needs to engender support and action beyond student services	Established communication to explore collaboration with Academic Affairs for the Cultural Curriculum Audit Collaborated with LBUSD, CSULB, City of Long Beach, and MBK to discuss regional mentoring efforts Met with deans and coordinators to explore learning community for 2021-2022 MSI cohort	IN PROGRESS

Long Beach City College now has a Male Success Initiative prototype that is
being piloted during Spring 2021 that will be expanded to reflect a full year of services
for academic year 2021-2022. Through targeted efforts, we were able to recruit 42
prospective students, more than doubled the representation of Black students, and
increased API representation by 75% within our MSI compared to the general population,
in line with our intentional recruitment goals.
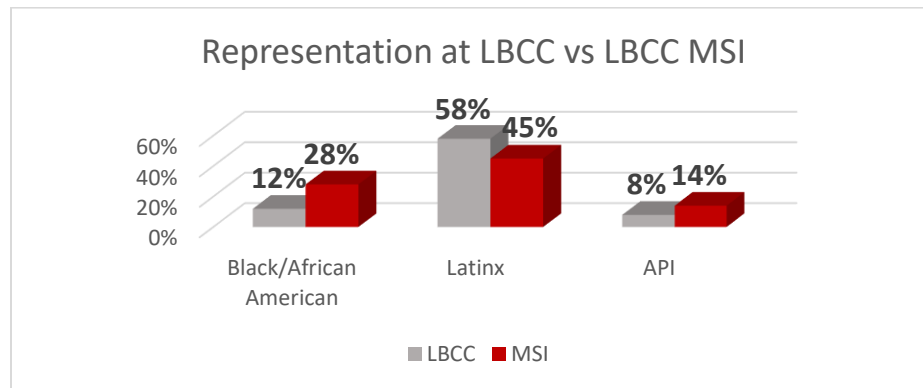
Implementing our needs assessment allowed us to connect students to vital
resources and services to facilitate their academic success. These include food, housing
and transportation assistance, mental health resources, tutoring, academic & career
counseling, Chromebooks, WIFI hotspots, and financial aid assistance. In the process, we
were able to increase awareness of the MSI and foster relationships with various
departments, including Financial Aid, Career Services, Basic Needs, Mental Health, and
Counseling, generating greater access and facilitating warm hand-offs for our MSI
students.

Figure11: Sample MSI Needs Assessment Response Data

4. In the past 6 months, were you evicted from your home or were you unable to afford your rent?

More Details   Insights

- Yes   7
- No   23

5. Does your household have difficulty in obtaining and maintaining nutritious food?

More Details   Insights

- Yes, often   9
- Sometimes   7
- No   14

16. Have you taken a course or survey that tells you which majors/careers may be a good fit for you at LBCC? (eg: My Majors, Counseling 48 course, Career Coach)

More Details

- Yes   14
- No   16

17. Have you noticed any sudden changes in mood, appetite, energy levels, irritability that have lasted more than 2 weeks and do not allow you to function as you are used to?

More Details

- Yes   12
- No   18

We continued to engage our students through empathy, molding our offerings to consider the student experience, most notably, Zoom fatigue. In response, we reduced our workshops from 120 minutes to 90 minutes, we reduced mentoring sessions from 90

minutes to 60 minutes, and we modified our mentor launch to eliminate the need for an additional whole-group gathering. This human-centered approach to student services communicates an appreciation for their unique circumstances while encouraging vulnerability and demonstrating the importance of help-seeking behavior. Both were well noted and appreciated by our students. Illustrating this point, an African-American N.O.B.L.E. Scholar exclaimed, "Yal just ain't gonna let us fail, are ya king!?" when picking up a chrome book and hotspot, co-incidentally from me since I had volunteered that day, after being referred to emergency aid by our MSI (verbal communication during tech distribution, February 2, 2021).

Despite the difficulties of conducting recruitment in a virtual environment, we have provided direct services through tailored workshops, case management, structured mentoring, and direct (monetary) aid to 29 first-time, full-time MOC students and have received positive feedback from participants. It is important to note that the isolating experience of college was intensified by the absence of in-person learning and limited peer interactions. Many students express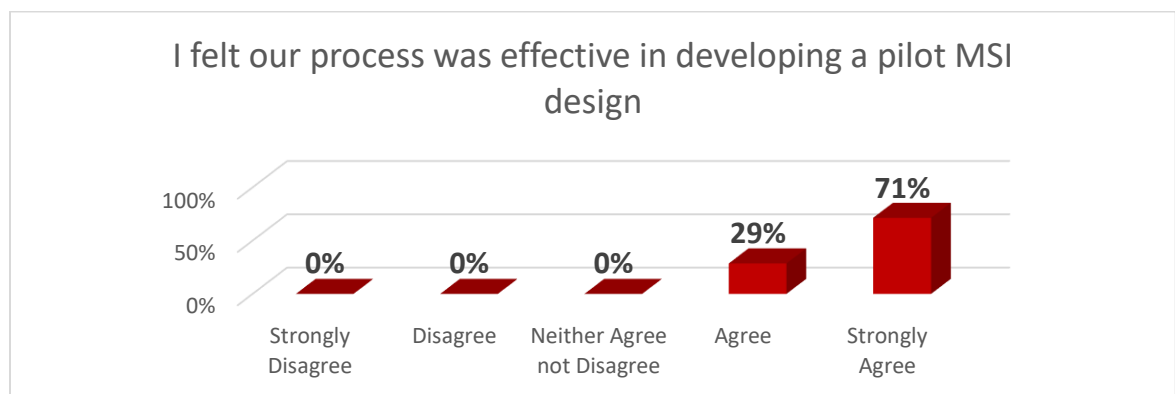ed the MSI being the only place they felt seen, appreciated, and valued since they started their college journey. One student said, "It helps when support staff meet with you one-on-one on a more personal level," after we connected him to a financial aid representative to troubleshoot a registration hold. Another stated, "Honestly, I had felt disconnected to the college until we held the MSI focus group. I feel cared for and heard." Recruitment efforts for next year's cohort will be included as part of LBCP's matriculation processes starting in March, which should yield a much larger MSI cohort and allow for services to be deployed during the summer prior to entering LBCC.

Our workgroup process elevated the importance of eliciting student voice, presented tools to shift mental models, and offered a framework to diagnose and address future problems of practice. The knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs elevated through that process will undoubtedly influence their work beyond this workgroup. For example, during the initial Student Equity School Planning meeting held in December of 2021, I suggested that in addition to objectives regarding direct student services, all departments identify a policy or procedure that should be modified to reduce barriers and promote students' success. This concept was fully embraced and incorporated, indicating an orientation towards institutional change. Moreover, all LBCC employees serving as mentors attended a training facilitated by Dr. Torie Weiston-Serdan, emphasizing the importance of considering race and other identity markers when working with MOC. Below are quotes and Likert scale ratings collected through an anonymous survey after our final pilot design meeting. They indicate satisfaction with the process, belief that we engaged in collaborative efforts that will produce positive results, and highlight what workgroup members will take to their respective roles on campus:

- "Again, one of the best working groups that I have been involved in since my 16 years of employment here at LBCC. I am looking forward to future working groups like this one to further support our Black and Brown students, Male and Female" (Anonymous, MSI Workgroup Survey, December 2, 2020).

I felt our process was effective in developing a pilot MSI design

I believe we have a strong foundation to create positive change through our MSI
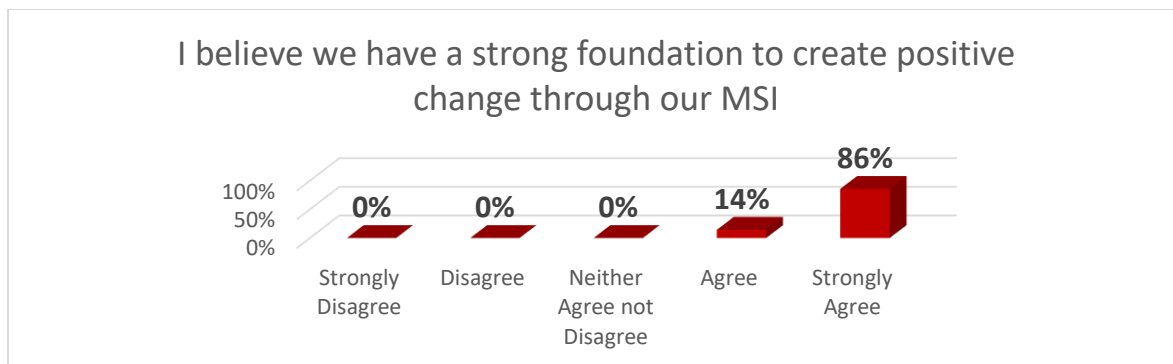
- "I appreciated and am taking with me the Warrior Way: EVERI student every day. These are critical components of student success and mentoring that will keep me intentional about how I am connecting and supporting my students" (Anonymous, MSI Workgroup Survey, December 2, 2020).

While there is much data still to be collected to accurately assess progress and impact, I feel confident that our MSI pilot has positioned LBCC to expand services and improve MOC outcomes. Qualitative feedback from participants and facilitators alike indicates that we are creating a meaningful space for community, dialogue, and growth. In the words of one scholar, "Without it, it [college] was kind of like finding my way through a dark tunnel, without a flashlight. You know the MSI is kind of like that flashlight with a rope to guide you and pull you in the right direction." Impacting MOC outcomes will continue to be a visible goal of equity efforts that will span across departments in a way that will surface institutional barriers and thus encourage institutional change, as evidenced by the explicit inclusion of policy change in this year's iteration of the Student Equity School Plan. As the problem statement demonstrates, much work is necessary beyond the scope of student services to truly eliminate gaps in achievement for MOC. However, implementing a robust MSI signifies a solid first step in that direction.

Beyond the technical dimensions of supporting MOC, there were many adaptive challenges to my project as I intentionally sought to activate hands, hearts, and minds. As

evidence, I offer two anecdotes from our critical mentoring training. As one participant described, the training "fostered a safe space and a comfortable environment for all of us" (personal email communication, 2/11/2021). During the span of 2 hours with people who do not regularly work together, a Filipino gentleman who has been at LBCC for more than 10 years introduced himself using the correct pronunciation of his last name. He added that this was the first time he had done so at LBCC and described a sense of pride in bringing this part of his cultural legacy into the space. At our subsequent Student Services Leadership meeting, the VP utilized the correct pronunciation when calling on him to share area updates. Secondly, towards the end of the same training, a relatively new administrator opened up about his sexuality and shared that he had not done so in his many years of employment at his previous institution. Both acts required courageous vulnerability and embodied the spirit of our work with MOC students as they stood firm and proud in their intersectional identity.

Analysis

To gain a deeper understanding of my leadership in and outcomes of this strategic project, I interrogate the evidence above through the use of my own insights, elements of my RKA, and other theories I have encountered along my life. In combination, they help to better understand my experience as a resident. Below I share an analysis of what I have distilled through my leadership of this strategic project:

1. People vs. Structure or Managing vs. Leading

2. The Power of Symbols in Crafting Counternarratives

3. Leveraging Formal and Informal Sources of Power

4. Leading in Many Ways (fitting leadership to the context)

This insight can inform future efforts, and I will explore those implications in the subsequent section.

Managing Structures and Leading People

My first goal as a resident was to hit the ground learning to avoid positioning myself as an outside expert who had been brought on board to fix their problem. Beyond learning about LBCC's history, organizational structures, and student success metrics, I needed to gain a good sense of its people. Bolman and Deal (2013) assure that "effective teams seek out the full range of necessary technical fluency" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 108). Therefore, my charge was to assemble a workgroup comprised of diverse individuals who could speak to various skills and areas of expertise. Despite the challenges presented by the virtual environment, I was able to leverage relationships and the authority granted by my working title, Director of Special Projects, to successfully enact the architecture necessary to efficiently design and pilot an MSI prototype. I naturally operate from a collaborative, collegial, and dialogue-based approach. However, I am also aware of how lengthy that type of process can become. In light of my conversations with the VP, I felt a sense of urgency to launch our pilot during the fall semester.

Moreover, the prospect of hallway check-ins, cubicle drop-ins, and non-structured interaction was not possible during quarantine, requiring me to step outside of my comfort zone and rely heavily on structure to drive the process. To ensure an efficient and productive process, I strayed away from my human resource lens and provided many structures to guide us. In addition to design thinking, I adopted principles from *Meeting Wise* (2014) and employed a rolling agenda with clear objectives, timing, assigned roles

for each meeting, and developed a decision-making protocol to move past any bottleneck in our process.

Despite our intentionality in identifying workgroup members, there was no guarantee that their respective needs would align. When the fit between people and a workgroup is incompatible, individuals may feel neglected, withdraw their efforts, or in extreme cases, intentionally sabotage the process (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Our first meeting began with an icebreaker activity that produced a lot of banter and laughter to engender collegiality. Since this was the first time we all came together, I felt it essential to create space to just be human, build rapport, and create a container for open and honest dialogue. To accurately diagnose the "problem" and hence generate an appropriate solution, we would need to interrogate LBCC's current approach. This process can be quite uncomfortable, especially in a culture not accustomed to slowing down to diagnose before quickly jumping into solution mode.

I entered our first workgroup meeting emboldened by a false sense of relational trust built during one-on-one interactions and mistakenly perceived comfort with the Asset and Opportunity Table (Figure 7, p. 38) during individual conversations as a sign that it would be well received as a group. However, that was not the case. I failed at framing Figure 7 as a visual snapshot that could inform our direction rather than a comprehensive list of services. I also noticed that the emoji faces intended to clarify gaps in services, hence a way to differentiate, were instead viewed as evaluative of their provision and understandably raised sensibilities in the group. After recognizing their discomfort, I allowed space for attendees to dialogue about what they viewed as strengths at LBCC, and they continued to offer other examples that should have been on the table.

While data is commonly used to inform programmatic decisions, I suspect that this level of interrogation of current practices, surface-level as it may have seemed to me, was unfamiliar to many in the group. It was also perhaps indicative of a culture over-reliant on "best practices" to quickly generate and enact new solutions rather than careful consideration and diagnosis of the actual problem. Furthermore, while I had built rapport with each member individually, many in the workgroup had never worked together, thus did not feel the psychological safety to engage fully in that activity, highlighting the importance of devoting ample time to norming and building a healthy container when any new collective body is formed.

After the hiccups experienced in our first meeting, I consulted with the dean, who is also part of that body. I had to pause and consider a relevant contextual variable, what individual members care about most: time/structure, quality of the product, or participation through dialogue (Bolman & Deal, 2013). I continued to open with ice breaker activities and provided more room for open discussion during meetings 2 and 3, but was again unable to get through my proposed agenda. I began to appreciate the group's desire to engage in open dialogue. I also felt the need to set parameters to avoid becoming "just another meeting where we come together to talk, but nothing ever gets done," as one member described her previous experience with workgroups. My ambitious agendas had been driven primarily by my timeline leading up to a fall launch rather than the actual pace this work requires. Recognizing the workgroup's inclination towards discussion-based processes, we collectively decided to move to weekly meetings allowing for lighter agendas and greater balance between task completion and dialogue.

Work truly moves at the speed of trust, and establishing trust takes time. Relying on lateral coordination through coalescing a workgroup and engaging in a structured process that allowed space for open dialogue, with Design Thinking to guide it, was well received and resulted in a healthy prototype to pilot during spring 2021. While all workgroup members expressed high levels of satisfaction with the way our work unfolded and shared that they would adopt structures I had implemented, such as rolling agendas, assigned roles, and timing in their own work, our initial meetings did not go as smoothly as I envisioned because I prioritized structure over people. When the right people are involved in a structured process that elicits and harnesses their individual talents, participants feel valued and remain committed to the work produced. I believe I ultimately achieved the right balance as the following quote from a workgroup member confirms: "Eric demonstrated terrific leadership and created cohesiveness amongst our staff when many of us had not worked together before. He kept us goal-oriented and mission-driven" (MSI Workgroup Survey, December 2, 2020).

As a student-serving initiative, I considered the end-user (students) at all times. In addition to students' inclusion in our workgroup and conducting student focus groups, observational and informal feedback gathered through our pilot was utilized to adjust our programming and approach, precisely the level of care we wanted our students to feel. Centering people's needs and experiences at all levels (eventually) produced a sense of engagement, validation, and empowerment among those involved. Notwithstanding, the mandatory virtual setting represented a unique challenge. While I am happy with the success of the design process, I underestimated the difficulty of recruiting students in the absence of physical proximity and visibility. The advent of virtual interactions during

normal circumstances represents an excellent opportunity to expand communication and connection points. However, they are suboptimal as the only modality to conduct recruitment, build rapport, and cultivate relationships, especially as a new service for new students. The taxing effects of quarantine on mental, emotional, and physical health are only amplified by schools' demand on time through frequent Zoom sessions.

Our greatest challenge was getting students to commit to yet another virtual meeting. For this reason, we implemented a tiered approach to communication: first attempt through email, second attempt through text, third attempt through phone call. Furthermore, recognizing students' other obligations, phone calls were attempted at different times and days of the week. We intentionally created engaging, interactive, and validating experiences to position ourselves not as "one more Zoom meeting," but rather a space MOC students looked forward to sharing by calling them gatherings. Through our case management and referrals to services, we were best able to build relational trust and psychological safety with our students. As an extrovert that thrives on human interaction and coalition building, initially, I felt the Zoom environment virtually stripped me of my superpower, pun intended. Despite the technological learning curve and eventual acclimation to meeting and bonding through a screen, we ultimately caught our stride. We managed to produce engagement and connection by validating our students through genuine care and authentic relationship (Valenzuela, 1999). During a conversation about his experience in the pilot thus far, a scholar shared the following, "If you can find a connection through Zoom, and still feel some type of energy through Zoom, then automatically hands down when you're in person it will be way better cause now it's like

straight natural, you could really feel it" when describing his excitement for our eventual return to campus (personal communication, February 18, 2021).

The Power of Symbols in Crafting Counternarratives

As a new initiative, it was vital that we create visibility, encourage curiosity, and build support for our efforts. It was, therefore, crucial that our name and logo accurately convey what we hoped our program to embody. The challenge was using a naming convention that was recognizable beyond LBCC while also developing a unique identity. California State University Long Beach and Fullerton, both within a 25-mile radius of LBCC and popular destinations for our transfer students, had existing programs termed "Male or Men's Success Initiatives" (MSI). In solidarity with our partner organizations and to provide continuity for local students, the VP urged me to adopt the same terminology and prominently display "MSI" on our logo.

To develop a unique identity, I began by visiting our theory of action to pull out key terms and themes. While our efforts are designed to produce better outcomes for a population often labeled "at-risk," we aimed to craft a counternarrative that elevates their resilience, not their trauma. People of color come from rich histories of art, culture, science, achievement, discovery, greatness, and nobility. I wanted our nomenclature to motivate our students to accept their greatness, honor their roots as descendants of prodigious people, and embrace their identity as academics. The term "noble" is an English/Spanish cognate describing distinguished lineage, virtuous personal qualities, and high moral principles and ideals. As a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), a recognizable name in English and Spanish is a definite plus, thus we decided to run with it. Nautical and Nordic terms inspired by their Viking mascot are standard at LBCC. I incorporated a

nautical reference by turning "noble" into an acronym referring to course-plotting: Navigating Onward to Brotherhood Leadership and Excellence. As a result, we dubbed our MSI participants "NOBLE Scholars." Likewise, we took care to ensure our logo projected nobility (coat of arms style shield), brotherhood (interlocked arms of different shades), and excellence (torch signifying enlightenment and leadership). Finally, a letter "V" in the background representing our collective identity as LBCC Vikings was incorporated (Figure 8, p.42). To combat the sense of isolation that college can induce, especially in light of virtual learning mandated by the pandemic, we procured school and self-care supplies, T-shirts, and backpacks emblazoned with our logo. We delivered them to our scholars as a physical representation of their belonging. In addition, we provided MSI Zoom backgrounds prominently displaying their identity as NOBLE Scholars at their discretion.

Embracing diversity through the exploration of ethnic heritage and cultural knowledge while also uniting under a shared collective identity creates validating experiences while promoting connectedness and engagement. Moreover, it counters the dominant narrative that minoritized students are successful despite who they are, and instead posits that they will be successful precisely because of who they are. In this way, we communicate a firm belief that they belong in college and that they can and will succeed. This not only aligns with the EVERI Student Every Day framework, but also addresses the non-cognitive domain by bolstering a sense of identity and self-efficacy to ameliorate the effects of stereotype threat and imposter syndrome. Educators' beliefs about student potential are often the greatest predictor of success (Gooblar, 2020).

Many cultural teachings were shared during our MSI design process, some very intentionally by me, and others that came up organically through dialogue. Hence, I found it appropriate to bring those to our students in an intentional manner. By exploring the Zulu concept of "ubuntu," Mayan concept of "In'Lak'Ech," Akan concept of "Sankofa," and the Samoan word for warrior "toa," all of which had been elevated throughout our workgroup meetings, we developed a NOBLE Scholar credo: "I am because we are-you are the other me-bound through common struggle-warriors for our community." Beyond the program name and logo, this credo serves to foment a collective identity by honoring diversity while making explicit their shared journey to prosperous futures through education. Reciting it at every gathering grounds us in our "why" and ensures we walk in our purpose. For many students, this was the first time they had heard of such concepts, or at minimum, heard them elevated in an academic setting. I was unsure if the credo would be well received or instead perceived as cliché and contrived. With time I was reassured that they were indeed embraced, as our NOBLE Scholars began to reference these cultural concepts in casual interactions. Bringing their cultural heritage into the space in such an intentional and explicit manner served to validate their previous knowledge and honor their identity. Moreover, it encouraged cross-cultural learning, allowed students to see their heritage in their academic pursuits and each other, a physical manifestation of the Mayan principal of In'Lak'Ech. One scholar explained, "I feel part of something, like if I were in a sports team, all working towards a common purpose, together, not individually. I'm not alone; I have a family here." As the Five Domain Conceptual Model recommends, we engendered a sense of belonging, identity,

and social connection by intentionally addressing our scholars' non-cognitive development (Wood & Harris, 2014).

In line with cultural affirmation, our mentoring component has been dubbed "Each One Reach One," an adaptation of the phrase "each one teach one" made popular by Malcolm X during the civil rights movement. However, the phrase's origins stemmed from the days of slavery, when literacy among the slave population was viewed as a threat to White supremacy, hence outlawed. This was a powerful tool to continue the systemic oppression of black people in this country. The brave and fortunate few that managed to master the written word were thus compelled to share this skill, and information gleaned through it, with others afflicted by the same oppressive system. It was this communal spirit that gave way to the phrase, which has since been adopted by many movements, including the Autonomous Chapter of the Brown Berets in Watsonville, California, a farm-working community located 15 miles north of my hometown.

This nomenclature communicates the value of cultural wealth, identity, community, and the principles of critical mentoring, partnering with students to help them *see* the system, gain the skills to *navigate* the system, and sense of empowerment to *change* the system. As was the case during that time, lack of educational attainment continues to perpetuate cycles of poverty and bondage through incarceration among many minoritized communities. As the concept of Sankofa suggests, I wanted our scholars to realize that in their past, they can find that which they need today to move confidently into tomorrow. As Dr. César Cruz asserts, if trauma is generational and can be passed down through DNA, so too can resilience, wisdom, and greatness. It is not

necessary to shed your identity through what Angela Valenzuela (1999) dubbed subtractive schooling to be successful. The impact of such symbolism went beyond the student population, as demonstrated by adults' courage and vulnerability at the mentor training. It is now common to hear our scholars and adults espouse the phrase "Each one teach one" at our gatherings. As the phrase suggests, we have indeed created a community that honors and values the relationship between teaching and learning, and made explicit the idea that we simultaneously do both in every interaction. In the words of one scholar, "It felt like a dream…for some reason, in a positive way, MSI needs you. You're adding, contributing something to the group, to this society," representing a culture of shared power (Freire, 1970).

Leveraging Formal and Informal Sources of Power

I was brought on to my residency with the title of Director of Special Projects, a strategic decision made by the VP of Student Services to ensure I was viewed as a full-fledged member of LBCC's management team and grant me the formal authority to move my project forward. I believe my official title and LBCC's governance structure gave me access to spaces I may have otherwise been precluded from inhabiting. However, my title did not grant me influence; that was something I had to earn (Heifetz, 1998).

Having grown up in a relatively insular and small community, I was a known commodity in the Salinas Valley prior to my doctoral pursuits. It was not uncommon for me to encounter people I knew from various aspects of my personal and professional life throughout my career endeavors. While informal authority must consistently be earned, this sense of familiarity provided me an advantage in that context. Excluding the VP of student services, I was a complete stranger to everyone else at LBCC. Furthermore,

nobody there was familiar with my previous work. Despite being the 6th largest city in California, Long Beach has an insular community of leaders of color. For my project to be successful, I would need to tap into this network. Through initial interaction with individuals who I viewed as "power brokers," I perceived a level of appraisal of my character. This was likely a combination of my own insecurities and actual vetting of my "realness" by individuals committed to changing outcomes for men of color in Long Beach.

Bringing my authentic self to my work is a personal core principle. This is why, despite my freshness at LBCC, I felt compelled to engage fully in departmental and institutional conversations about race prompted by the murder of George Floyd, a risky move because I could have simultaneously enlisted allies for my strategic project and created distance with others. Although it likely produced both effects, psychologically, it gave me courage and granted permission to jump right in. In the end, it was my ability to walk in my purpose that allowed me to quickly build rapport and connect with colleagues on a human level, which then allowed me to wield influence, not inferred expertise on account of my title or role as a Harvard Resident.

California Community Colleges operate through a process known as shared governance. Like our democratic practices attempt to do, shared governance provides a system of checks and balances where decision-making responsibility is shared among those who may be affected, namely boards, councils, administrators, faculty, and students. Amplifying efforts through additional college bodies generates visibility, provides a vehicle to elicit feedback, and often leads to opportunities for collaboration. Most committees comprise a healthy cross-section of college employees, including

people who wield formal authority on account of their title and others with informal authority on account of their status in the institution's social fabric. As such, they are highly politicized environments that can quickly stimulate support or jeopardize the longevity of new initiatives.

While presenting progress on the MSI pilot at the Equity Subcommittee, including our established participation criteria, a member that I will call Dalia to protect her anonymity, shared her concern that allowing students to *self-identify* as MOC may result in the misrepresentation of their identity to benefit from services. Beyond the concern of students potentially taking advantage of our criteria, I inferred the claim that I was reluctant to take a stance about who we were to serve. Heightened by the difficulties we had experienced recruiting, this, of course, raised my sensibilities, and I quickly responded by highlighting our targeted recruitment of Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander students. I shared my view that identity is profoundly personal and did not feel it was my role to determine who is ethnic enough to participate and that I recognized the deep sense of disenfranchisement and rejection experienced by multiracial individuals whose racial identity is questioned, hence my hesitance in contributing to the same. Additionally, as a program designed to serve students at the intersection of race and gender, I felt it imprudent to impose our perceptions of who qualified under either dimension of identity.

Fearing that I may have come off as defensive, and that others may share her concern, I offered the topic up for discussion. This group is comprised of influential administrators, faculty, and staff; hence the actual value of our work could be undermined by the perception of inadequate vetting of participants or reticence to take a stand on race. Several members spoke in support of self-identification, with some naming

instances where they had completely misread a student's identity. I don't believe we succeeded in assuaging Dalia's anxieties, who seemed to continue conflating the orientation towards *self-identification* with a hesitance to take a stance on race. Nonetheless, we reached a consensus in support of our current recruitment criteria.

I later read a validating email from a different subcommittee member that stated, "I am currently listening to your presentation in the equity meeting and literally crying…I am a mom to 3 biracial males and wished my older two had a program like this" (email communication, December 14, 2020). She explained the rejection they faced, as their appearance did not align with the dominant narrative of how they identified and the emotional anguish that rejection caused—a stark departure from what Dalia seemed to infer from my response to her concerns. This other subcommittee member ended her email message by offering her expertise in Career Services to ensure our MSI participants have a clear career goal and assured me that we had her full support.

In this instance, I could have pulled solely from my formal authority to assert my decision to uphold "self-identification" as our criteria. However, this would not have been a wise approach as it would have communicated a reluctance to compromise and an authoritative orientation to leadership in a space where I had very little relational capital. Instead, I embraced my identity as a man of color to communicate how such an approach can cause unintended harm to a population already contending with so many challenges. My willingness to listen, and consider alternate perspectives while standing firmly behind my convictions, allowed me to leverage formal and informal sources of power while being my authentic self, both common requisites of effectively navigating politicized spaces. Engaging the group on a human level by clearly communicating who I am and

why I am called to this work at the onset of my presentation granted me the credibility to move past that hiccup without undermining our current efforts, and inspired trust to gain support for future ones.

Leading in Many Ways

According to Julie Battilana and Marissa Kimsey (2017), there are at least three ways to contribute to a movement for social change: agitator, innovator, or orchestrator. Throughout my residency, I was able to inhabit many spaces and occupied a distinct role as a change agent in each. Although I did not use Battilana and Kimsey's language, I was intentional in not only cultivating equity-mindedness but encouraging action. It was, therefore, important to highlight the many ways one can lead for equity.

Beyond the direct student services that would be rendered through our pilot's operationalization, the workgroup served as a vehicle to explore the concept of equity through the use of frameworks. The intentional inclusion of introductory activities and check-ins at our meetings allowed all participants to connect with their personal experiences and sense of purpose. By creating space to engage in authentic dialogue and connect on a human level, we were able to see beyond titles, thus eliminating hierarchy in the space. It also produced the opportunity to explore our implicit biases and appreciate how they were developed through time. For example, during one meeting, I asked members to share two truths and one lie. Our task was to uncover the false statement. A young Latinx man shared, "I have been arrested several times" as his lie, but no one questioned his statement. We then unpacked why that may have been the case. Exploring our preconceived notions and how they impact the way we engage with our students

created space for introspection and begin the process of considering alternate truths (LOTUS Strategy Group, 2020).

From the onset of our workgroup, I made clear that our goal was to develop a minimally viable product that filled an existing gap in services but also encourage the interrogation of existing institutional culture, policies, and processes that create artificial barriers for success. I was brought on to develop a new student service but was straightforward and honest in my early conversations with the dean that, in my view, what truly needs "fixing" is the system students are forced to endure. My position as a relative outsider and limited-term employee enabled me to espouse these views without fear of retribution, damaging preexisting relationships, or sabotaging my own upward mobility. I embraced the freedom my ephemeral presence granted me as an opportunity to push the group to appreciate that by focusing all our energy on filling the perceived deficiencies of our MOC students, we were complicit in perpetuating their systemic marginalization.

All college employees have the capacity to lead by acknowledging their implicit biases, initiating equity efforts, or being vocal supporters of existing ones. In this way, everyone can be an "Equity Warrior" by creating impact within respective spheres of influence. When asked what they were taking from our time together as a workgroup, an anonymous responder stated, "I will use my influence to continue to create space to have important conversations about the needs, and experiences, of men of color on our campus. Continue to educate myself about how to best be an advocate. Use my influence to inform revisions to allocation of resources to support these needs" (MSI Workgroup Survey, December 2, 2020).

To establish that one does not need to possess formal authority to lead as "equity warriors," I offered the "First Follower: Leadership Lessons from Dancing Guy" by Derek Sivers. This short clip depicts a single man dancing out of rhythm at an outdoor concert who was later joined by a complete stranger. That stranger made it "acceptable" for others to join in, and soon enough, most people in the shot were on their feet dancing. The narrator elevates the importance of support by stating, "It was the first follower that transformed the lone nut into a leader. There is no movement without the first follower" (Sivers, 2010). As early adopters of new equity-minded initiatives, they too could make it "acceptable" for colleagues to join the equity movement, thus leading from where they stand. I wanted to drive home the message that equity is not an addendum to the work relegated to a distilled list of programs and services; as open-enrollment institutions, equity is the work of the Community College. As such, every aspect of their own work should be viewed through the same lens we adopted in our work together.

The primary role of agitators is to "articulate grievances with the status quo in ways that create common purpose among those who oppose it" (Battilana & Kimsey, 2017, para. 15). By engaging MSI participants through genuine relationships, we gained a deeper understanding of the problem and its context. By harnessing my personal sources of power as a man of color, relational sources of power through social networks, and positional sources of power through my formal authority, I acted as an agitator by elevating lived experiences and unique needs of MOC with internal and external partners alike.

"Innovators create actionable solutions to the problems identified by agitators" (Battilana & Kimsey, 2017, para. 21). Being new to Long Beach City College provided

me an outside perspective that allowed me to see the problem in a unique way by creating distance between me and the status quo. By drawing on known approaches to impact male success, I was able to bring allies to the table and adapt those practices to better suit the needs of the local context. However, innovation by definition is experimental. Thus, evaluation and subsequent revision are essential, as the Design Thinking model suggests. I acted as an innovator in leading the effort to develop and launch LBCC's inaugural MSI Pilot.

However, without support from a wide range of institutional agents, one cannot create a movement for social change. "Orchestrators' relational power enables them to identify and win allies, influence others, and access resources for change adoption" (Battilana & Kimsey, 2017, para. 30). Fortunately, I entered LBCC under the leadership of agitators, innovators, and orchestrators in an environment ripe for change, enabling my ability to serve in these capacities as well. Through the activation of preexisting networks, I coalesced efforts towards building a regional mentoring initiative that I hope can have a far-reaching impact in disrupting the school to prison pipeline, reducing youth violence and improving educational outcomes for boys and young men of color in Long Beach.

While management relies heavily on the application of technical skills, readily observable thus replicable, leadership requires the ability to work within structures to motivate and inspire people. The stereotypical image of a stoic, distant, infallible leader denotes a top-down, authoritative approach that feels impersonal and does little to motivate, much less inspire, employees to perform at their optimal capacity, thus stifling innovation (Goleman, 2003). Managers are concerned with short-term goals, creating and

maintaining structures and systems to achieve them, directing employees, and minimizing risk. I believe I exhibited good management skills through the operationalization of the workgroup to design and launch the MSI. Perhaps I inhabited this role too rigidly during our early meetings by relying so heavily on structure rather than pulling from my natural inclination towards the human resource and symbolic frames (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

However, through time, I embraced my tendency for a human-centered approach and operated through the symbolic frame. It was only then that I was able to engender a long-term vision, cultivate relationships, and inspire risk-tolerance for others to engage as their authentic selves in the process (Arruda, 2016). Daniel Goleman (2003) contends that while technical skills and academic aptitude are good predictors of the position you can hold, it is those who know their strengths and weaknesses, can motivate others, and are skilled at relationship building that rise to the top (Richter, 2006). He describes these aptitudes as emotional intelligence (EI), and though EI alone does not result in outstanding leadership, its absence precludes it entirely. Furthermore, navigating institutional politics requires that we consider not only lines of command, but recognize informal authority, identify and leverage influencers, and craft narratives to garner support.

Implications for Site

Analyzing the evidence of progress on my strategic project to this point has surfaced several key implications for the division of student services and the Male Success Initiative itself. I elaborate on my observations below.

Recommendations for the Division of Student Services

At their core, many student services at Long Beach City College are designed to remove barriers, capacitate students, provide the necessary support, and engender a sense of belonging to expand access and ultimately enhance success. As such, they are vehicles to build towards equity. It is, therefore, understandable and justifiable that a Dean of Equity position exists. However, the broad range of efforts that can be categorized as "equity" can quickly lead to a robust portfolio of oversight. Balancing supervision of program implementation, managing staff, operationalizing new initiatives, evaluating and adjusting existing ones while stewarding the vision for services that span the areas of access, retention, and success can be quite daunting. Furthermore, the transient resource of time can become overburdened with meetings and coordination, hampering the opportunity to engage in visioning and innovation. It is, therefore, necessary to create an infrastructure that allows for both managing and leading equity efforts. One way of achieving this balance is by creating an administrative position that reports to the Dean of Equity and oversees specific programmatic efforts.

My strategic project to pilot a Male Success Initiative was written into the 2019-2022 SEP plan as a viable way to reduce the achievement gap for male students of color. The same Student Equity Plan listed the establishment of a Social Justice Intercultural Center (SJIC) as one of its goals. With a minimally viable product in place, it is now necessary to think about how this foundational MSI work will be expanded to create a wider reach for impact. The establishment of the SJIC can create a physical space that can house an assortment of equity programs (Justice Scholars, MSI, etc.), thus encouraging coordination and integration. An SJIC coordinator can oversee existing

heritage month planning, provide a one-stop-shop for community resources, and design engagement and informational activities in service of disproportionately impacted student populations (PI, LGBTQI, Native American, Black/African American, and Latinx students). Coordinators of equity programs under this umbrella would report to an Associate Dean or Academic Director of Equity Programs who can provide operational oversight. This would allow the Dean of Equity to focus on strengthening cross-divisional collaboration by leading institutional efforts that address policy and structural barriers for students and faculty alike. By leveraging financial resources such as Equity funds, AB19, and grant funds, new positions can be created to promote intentionality, cohesiveness, and continuous oversight of equity programming. Below is a chart offering a potential structure with red boxes denoting new positions. Funding all new positions would represent an annual expense of roughly $448,800, including salary and benefits:

Figure 12. Looking Ahead: Equity Programs Support
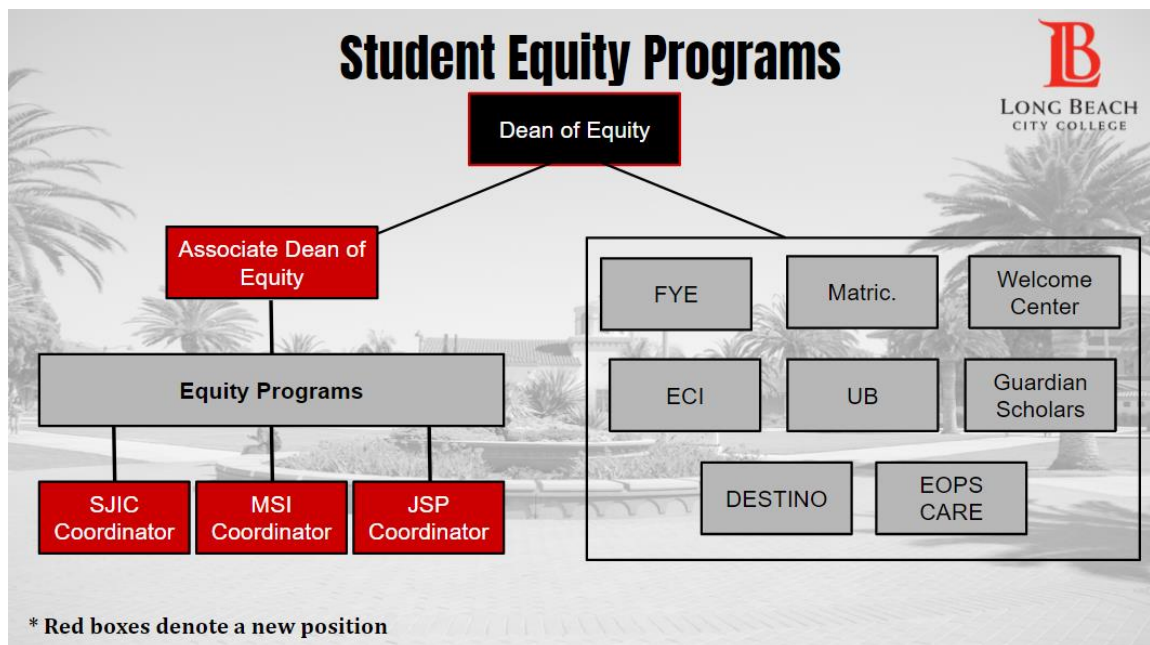
In light of the achievement disparities evident among Filipino and Pacific Islander students, it is imperative that LBCC develop targeted services that aim to provide a supportive, culturally affirming, and structured learning community similar to UMOJA and PUENTE. College of San Mateo has a well-established learning community known as MANA designed to assist Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students complete an associate degree or transfer to a four-year institution while building identity, cultural pride, and affirming community. El Camino College, our neighbors in Los Angeles, followed San Mateo's lead by establishing their own MANA program and could serve as a proof of concept to pursue similar services at LBCC. Coupled with the availability of Sociology and Ethnic Studies courses (soon to be required for transfer), Black, Latinx, and PI students will be better able to combat stereotype threat and imposter syndrome.

Recommendations for the Male Success Initiative

I believe the 2021 MSI pilot provides a solid foundation to build upon. It would be prudent to harness momentum, leverage existing resources, and expand services by identifying points of interest convergence to scale impact. Looking ahead, LBCC must build the necessary infrastructure to ensure the smooth continuation of MSI supports and pursue expanded services. To that end, I offer five potential foci:

1. Expanding learning communities (LC)

2. Offering multiple MSI "Journeys"

3. Offering opportunities for employment

4. Engaging in regional mentoring efforts

5. Engaging in LBCC's Cultural Curriculum Audit

Learning Communities: Long Beach City College has several formal learning communities that assist students in their transition to college and build a sense of connection with peers around a common interest. I recommend that an MSI learning community consisting of paired courses be enacted. Rather than creating an entirely new curriculum that must go through a lengthy vetting process, the college can be judicious in identifying instructors that have demonstrated capacity to connect with diverse students, engage in culturally responsive pedagogical practices, and feel passionate about social justice to add a unique flavor to the existing curriculum. This can be easily accomplished by creating additional sections of existing courses and limiting enrollment to MSI scholars. I recommend a Counseling 7-*College and Professional Success (3 unit)* course and an English 1+*(6 unit)* course combo during the fall semester. Once the opportunity to serve as peer mentors through federal work-study has been enacted (explored further in opportunities for employment), interested MSI scholars can be encouraged to take Counseling 2-*Making a Difference with Mentoring (3 unit)* course in the spring semester, thus producing a well-trained hiring pool for the subsequent academic year. This course sequence differs from existing LC offerings, reducing duplicative efforts, and is degree/transfer applicable. Conducting MSI recruitment through the matriculation process with partner high schools will encourage a sizeable cohort of scholars allowing for the LC courses to be filled to capacity. Moreover, it is vital that matriculation and MSI recruitment efforts include LBUSD alternative high schools in a meaningful way, as community college is the only vehicle towards a post-secondary degree for their graduates.

Offering multiple MSI "Journeys": Enacting a learning community allows a structured space for MSI participants to build community, explore their intersectional identity, and connect with campus resources while earning degree/transfer applicable units. However, participation in such a structured modality can prove restrictive in two ways: limiting MSI participation to course enrollment caps, and/or preclude students whose work schedule or life obligations do not allow such a structured format. To offer more flexibility and meet students where they are, future efforts should include multiple levels of engagement, with participation in the structured learning community described above representing the most intense. The second option would be virtually identical to what was enacted during the pilot year, with additional workshops/gatherings to reflect a full year of activities. And finally, a third option would be comprised primarily of structured mentoring, with tailored workshop attendance as an option, not a requirement. The latter would not include the provision of direct aid through AB19 funding, and thus could expand beyond first-time, full-time MOC students.

Figure13: Select Your LBCC MSI Journey

Select Your LBCC MSI Journey

	N.O.B.L.E. Scholars Fellow +	N.O.B.L.E. Scholars Fellow	Each One Reach One
Focus Group	✓	✓	✓
Needs Assessment	✓	✓	✓
Structured Mentoring	✓	✓	✓
Case Management	✓	✓	✓
Tailored Workshops	✓	✓	
Direct Aid	✓	✓	
Learning Community	✓		

Opportunities for employment: One of the most noted obstacles for male students of color to fully engage with their education is familial responsibilities that require them to maintain employment. In many cases, those jobs are entry-level positions in the service industry that fail to accommodate their course schedules or required study time. Others opt to avoid scheduling conflicts by procuring employment that allows for work after hours. While this strategy can reduce scheduling conflicts, the resultant lack of sleep, inability to engage in extracurriculars, and social detachment can produce a sense of isolation that is taxing on mental health. The provision of direct student aid and support with scholarship and financial aid applications can ameliorate most students' financial needs. Yet, others will require additional financial resources or be forced to abandon their academic pursuits.

Many MSIs have utilized paid internships and peer mentor opportunities to fill this need. They allow for experiential learning, work experience to build their resume, a flexible schedule that prioritizes their academic pursuits, and greater financial stability. Collaborating with workforce development to earmark a set number of internships for MSI participants, and expanding offerings, if necessary, to intentionally include their career interests (based on career interest inventory results such as MyMajors) would be an appropriate first step. As part of the FYE umbrella, MSI participants must apply for FAFSA or the California Dream App. By leveraging federal work-study monies, 3-5 MSI completers can be employed as second-year students to support with case management, coordination, and mentoring efforts for incoming cohorts. Moreover, expanding mentoring efforts to include the local business community may provide a vehicle to

attract additional funding, increase current internship offerings, and offer MSI Dreamer scholarships to serve as peer mentors as well.

Regional Mentoring Efforts: As stated in the RKA, mentoring is often named as a viable lever to produce better outcomes for BYMOC. Therefore, conversations initiated with MBK, the City of Long Beach, LBUSD, and CSULB during our pilot year to strengthen mentoring opportunities through regional efforts should continue. LBCC's MSI mentoring component can serve as a proof point to inform the possible adoption of critical mentoring practices and the "Each One Reach One" model at a regional level, thus expanding impact beyond LBCC.

Cultural Curriculum Audit: Lastly, to truly embody the spirit of an "initiative" and not just a program, MSI efforts must move beyond the provision of direct student services and seek ways to influence institutional culture. Long Beach City College's Cultural Curriculum Audit has produced promising outcomes in enhancing course-level success for disproportionately impacted populations. Moreover, participation has expanded beyond LBCC Faculty to include other IHEs. Enhancing the collaboration of equity programs with faculty coordinators overseeing the Cultural Curriculum Audit is a powerful way to elevate the needs of MOC and other BIPOC populations to produce far-reaching impact by addressing their experiences within the classroom. It represents a mental model shift in that it expands the concept of student support beyond the capacitation of students to succeed under current structures- towards capacitating faculty, administrators, and staff to better engage, validate, empower, relate, and inspire LBCC's men of color (LOTUS, 2020).

Implications for Sector

Through my strategic project, I have identified three core implications for the sector of higher education: (1) College students must be viewed and supported through a holistic lens. Ensuring a smooth transition to and progression through higher education requires much more than academic prowess. As was highlighted in the RKA, closing achievement gaps among disproportionately impacted populations will require energy towards addressing all five domains: academic, non-cognitive, social, environmental, and institutional (Urias, Falcon, Harris III & Wood, 2017). Legislation such as AB19 in California has assured additional funding to bolster equity efforts through the provision of specialized support and services. (2) However, creating impact at scale requires that we look beyond the provision of direct student services towards further scrutiny of institutional policies, practices, and culture. Lastly, community colleges inhabit a unique space between compulsory education and selective universities. As such, (3) Equity should not be seen as an addendum to the work; it is the work.

College students must be viewed through a holistic lens. The advent of technology has simultaneously revolutionized the transmittal of information, literally putting the answer to any question at our fingertips, and exacerbated gaps in equity. The global pandemic experienced in 2020 forced the world to adopt new behaviors, and educational institutions had to transition to virtual learning as their primary modality. This shift quickly surfaced the wide range of factors that contribute to or hinder student success; only this time, institutions were forced to consider students' needs beyond the provision of quality instruction. Significant funding was devoted to establishing a solid

virtual infrastructure for course delivery, providing students Chromebooks and hotspots, and adapting student services under the state mantra of "Safer at Home."

As the year progressed, it became exceedingly clear that while a virus does not discriminate, an inequitable society certainly produces discriminatory impact. Furthermore, home, tragically, is not a safe space for all. Those of us who never experienced loss of pay and could comfortably work from home had to acknowledge our own privilege. Many of our disproportionately impacted students come from low-income, crowded households with adults employed in traditionally exploitative lines of work, curiously dubbed "essential" during the crisis. Their educational attainment was hindered by factors far beyond access to technology. I became acutely aware of the financial, social-emotional, and interpersonal strife that our students were forced to manage. Despite concerted efforts to meet financial needs through emergency aid, basic needs through food, housing, and transportation assistance, mental health and academic needs through online counseling and tutoring, we were unable to ensure access to quiet, comfortable, and safe learning spaces.

I understand the extenuating circumstances institutions faced and appreciate the monumental efforts made to meet student needs. However, these extenuating circumstances only served to make visible the pre-existing barriers that all too often preclude students from successfully progressing through their academic pursuits. I firmly believe the lessons learned should impulse a far-reaching and intentional shift in institutional culture by moving away from the demand that students be college-ready and instead embark on a journey for the institution and its educators to become student-ready. The enactment of special programs cannot continue to be the go-to response. To do so,

colleges should ask themselves, how can we extend the level of concern for students' basic, technological, academic, and mental health needs beyond this pandemic? What practices to accommodate remote access should be extended to reduce the need for students to travel to a physical location during hours constricted by a traditional 9-5 workday? What policies and practices were shifted during this statewide dip in enrollment that should be officially codified to remove structural barriers? Finally, how do we bring this level of care and support into every course, in every classroom? Prohibiting the practice of midterm and final high stakes examinations as the sole determinants of student grades is a solid first step in that direction.

Creating impact at scale requires that we look beyond the provision of direct student services towards further scrutiny of institutional policies, practices, and culture. Colleges have traditionally been bifurcated into two very distinct sides of the house: Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. This structure was intended to provide clear objectives for each, and in doing so, encouraged a focused division of labor in service of student success. However, the racialized history of education and culture of power that drives institutions has produced a stark distinction between the two sides and who can inhabit them. While many institutions boast an increasingly ethnically diverse workforce, closer inspection reveals three patterns also present at LBCC: (1) the overwhelming majority of employees of color work in Student Affairs, (2) full-time professors are predominately White (3) senior-level leadership is predominately White (NCES, 2018). Despite the drastic shift in national demographics, students and employees of color continue to navigate White-normative institutions governed through White-normative culture. According to Lisa Delpit (1988), "children from other kinds of

families operate within perfectly wonderful and viable cultures but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power" (the five aspects of power, para.10), highlighting the need to provide students with the navigational capital to survive in the current system. But should survival be the goal? True equity cannot be achieved until the very system that has created inequity is confronted, demarking the need to move beyond the provision of direct student services towards institutional and cultural change. This includes adopting equity-minded policies and practices at all levels, including search committee composition, qualification requirements, their weight in hiring, and tenure processes to build intentionality in identifying, hiring, and retaining faculty and administrators of color.

Equity should not be seen as an addendum to the work; it is the work! The community college inhabits a unique space between compulsory education and selective universities. As such, they are the only vehicle to degree attainment for a large contingent. Whether this is due to financial strain, language limitations, lack of knowledge about 4-year options, time constraints caused by familial obligations, lack of access to (or difficulty progressing through) compulsory education, or a myriad of other factors, the community college attracts a much more diverse and historically underserved student population than do 4-year institutions. Moreover, Black students have historically attended schools characterized by low performance, inexperienced teachers, lower levels of resources and funding, and fewer counselors (Harris & Wood, 2015). These conditions propagate systematic, whether formal or informal, tracking to the community college system; hence, 62% of all Black and 82% of Black male college students in California begin their higher education journey at a 2-year institution (Harris & Wood, 2015)

It is, therefore, necessary that every aspect of the community college—outreach & recruitment, matriculation, student services, curriculum and instruction, scheduling of courses, compensation, and hiring practices—be scrutinized through a social justice lens to fulfill our promise of access and success. The fact remains that most full-time faculty and academic administrators at community colleges are White, and the most common trajectory to a college presidency is precisely through the faculty ranks. Conversely, their student population is increasingly predominantly people of color. As Lisa Delpit (1988) stated, "The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power" (the five aspects of power, para.10), thus systematically placing students and employees of color at a disadvantage. Stereotype threat and imposter syndrome are a symptom of a hard truth: people of color in higher education inhabit spaces designed for and governed by White-normative culture. Until our institutions provide POC with mirrors in which to see themselves in the curriculum, faculty, and institutional culture, rather than windows provided by White-normative structures, to envision their own success, minoritized students will continue to feel out of place, marginalized, and disengaged. Furthermore, without robust and intentional efforts to recruit, hire, and retain faculty of color, the face of leadership will not change.

Implications for Self

Throughout my time at Long Beach City College, I have gained a deeper appreciation for my leadership style, aptitudes, and circumstances that allow me to operate at optimal capacity. I entered my residency during a time of great uncertainty and civil unrest. While I was confident that my skill set and previous work experience were a

good fit for my strategic project, I worried that my status as a doctoral resident and roots in a small farm-working community would position me as an outsider in a large metropolitan city. Fortunately, I was misguided in my insecurities and instead learned valuable lessons that will inform my future endeavors as an education leader.

I must grow comfortable being my authentic self, while also owning my expertise by embracing my formal and informal sources of power. This is what a partner at LBUSD was communicating when he said, "Look bro, whether you want to see it or not, you have to accept that you are an expert, and being who you are, people look to you as a leader" (personal communication, 2/5/2021). My deep-rooted cultural value of humility often hinders my ability to appreciate my own talent, aptitudes, and expertise. Further, it encourages me to adopt a learner stance in most situations. Some may misconstrue my reticence not only to recognize but communicate confidence in my own abilities as inexperience, and in extreme cases mediocrity, in organizations heavily governed by White-normative culture. I may also be inadvertently creating an imbalance in power dynamics by routinely preferencing humble inquiry over resolute assertion. Conversely, confidence is not always paired with competence. Therefore, I must strike a healthy balance between measured humility and rational self-assurance. By doing so, I can more directly engage in feedback loops, make my contributions more visible, and embrace my role as an expert while simultaneously attenuating the perception of unearned status or overreliance on scholarly pedigree to justify my career trajectory among those who do not embrace humility as a core value.

I am acutely aware that my personal journey simultaneously validates and shatters many stereotypes about the Latinx experience in low-income communities. It is my

calling to create the conditions for students' demography to no longer dictate their destiny. My residency experience has helped me value the different dimensions of leading change efforts. I have learned to appreciate how politics influence the manner to engage with and what role to play in distinct spaces. As Derek Sivers' (2010) *First Follower Principle* teaches us, it is not always necessary to be the innovator. In some instances, the best way to lead will be by becoming an early adopter and vocal proponent of change efforts as an agitator or orchestrator. Moreover, my personal life trajectory, identity as a man of color, ability to connect with others, self-awareness, and empathy are what truly grant me influence. I must then harness that influence to adjust my leadership based on the context—in some cases positioning myself in the front as expert, uncomfortable as that may be, while leading from the middle, as is my preference, in others. I must adopt for my own being what I often encourage my students to do, "embrace your power, walk in your purpose, and accept your greatness."

I adopt multiple lenses when approaching my work, as suggested by Bolman & Deal's (2013) four organizational frames. Individuals are inherently predisposed or trained to operate similarly in most situations, limiting their capacity to consider and accept alternate perspectives. As an extrovert, I have always valued human interaction, relationships, and putting people first. Understandably, I operate most comfortably through the symbolic and human resource frames. In many ways, in my past experiences, I grew resistant to overly structured environments that demanded constant adherence to protocols, as I found them constrictive and mechanical. Similarly, "politics" in the workplace was a dirty word, and I fully believed that I would be successful by not engaging in them.

It is now clear that despite my natural proclivities, it is necessary to engage leadership efforts through multiple lenses, and I am capable of doing so. The structural frame no longer represents constriction and transactional engagement, but rather a tool to provide focus and direction. However, operating exclusively through that frame is the hallmark of good management, not leadership. Unfortunately, it is easy to slip into the unhealthy habits of *solutionitis* that replicate dysfunctional systems by failing to address the adaptive dimensions of leading for change and instead focus solely on managing its technical operationalization. I fell victim to this very phenomenon in the early stages of the workgroup process. Lastly, I no longer consider *politics* a dirty word, but rather a naturally occurring phenomenon within any collection of human contributors that must be leveraged to achieve transformational change. By harnessing my strengths in the symbolic and human resource frames, I can enact structured processes that are not experienced as constrictive and robotic. Moreover, appreciating that workplace politics are motivated by the incongruence of individual perspectives and needs at their core, I can pull from the human resource frame to engage through empathy rather than apathy.

Conclusion

The year 2020 shook the bedrock of our society. Navigating the gravest health crisis of this century placed physical, mental, and emotional strain on people of all walks of life. The civil unrest that accompanied it made us acutely aware of yet another pandemic, anti-Blackness, and other manifestations of White supremacy. Disproportionate infection and mortality rates among people of color, though not surprising, were but the most recent indicators of systemic oppression in this country. But not all was doom and gloom. These tragic circumstances thrust the concept of equity into

the spotlight, and courageous conversations once thought of as taboo are now taking place among private and public institutions alike. However, we must ensure that this momentum continues beyond discussions to truly dismantle what Dr. J. Luke Wood (2021) describes as the "culture of disdain, distrust, and disregard" that has produced inequitable access and outcomes in schooling for BIPOC students. Simultaneously, it has engendered limited employment opportunities, created salary disparities, and restricted upward mobility for BIPOC educators.

During this time, Long Beach City College adopted a Framework for Reconciliation consisting of 4 distinct phases: 1) acknowledging the existence and long-standing impacts of systemic racism in Long Beach and the country, 2) listening to accounts and experiences of racial injustice, inequity, or harm of community members, 3) convening stakeholders to evaluate the feedback from the listening process and shape policy, budgetary, charter, and programmatic reform ideas, 4) catalyzing action, presenting immediate short-term, medium-term, and long-term recommendations for the City Council's consideration. This process must produce actionable steps through changes in institutional policy and culture to truly move towards social justice, as phases three and four suggest. Careful interrogation of LBCC's recruitment, screening, hiring, retention, and tenure practices to better understand how they may uphold current White-normative structures and prevent racial parity with its students, is a decisive step in that direction. Otherwise, LBCC will have merely provided yet another opportunity for cathartic release and introspection with no meaningful change in behaviors, thus upholding the status quo. As Dr. W. Edwards Deming is credited to have suggested, "every system is perfectly designed to obtain the results it produces." Nothing short of

courageous disruption and bold reimagining of the system itself will fulfill the California Community College's promise of access, equity, and success.

This capstone demonstrates that Long Beach City College now possesses a foundational MSI prototype that: 1) connects MOC students to existing resources that remove barriers to success, 2) bolsters a sense of identity and self-efficacy to increase motivation, and 3) strengthens connectedness by providing fellowship and structured mentoring opportunities, thus promoting retention and persistence. Furthermore, leveraging existing mechanisms such as the Cultural Curriculum Audit to strengthen collaboration across divisions, move beyond direct student services, and address institutional culture is imperative to move towards equitable achievement for BIPOC students at scale. All aspects of the MSI must be intentional in bolstering criticality in students and institutional agents alike. Only by holding the complexity of how our siloed approach to serving students simultaneously ameliorates and sustains the problem, being capacitated to *see the system*, equipped to *navigate the system*, and empowered to *change the system,* can we begin to truly impact institutional culture.

Through my residency, I learned that authority could come from formal and informal sources, and that I can leverage both. I led as an agitator, orchestrator, or innovator, depending on the context. Recognizing that each role is significant, and distinguishing when to assume each, allows me to live into my leadership regardless of my formal title. As a man of color growing up without access to the codes of the culture of power, I have learned to harness the personal authority my experience grants me, and my cultural value of In'Lak'Ech to ground my work. Recognizing not only the humanity in every individual, be it a student or institutional agent, but also our interrelatedness,

allowed me to successfully navigate my residency experience through all four organizational frames (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Furthermore, *politics* is no longer a dirty word. Recognizing that all systems are composed of people with unique experiences, perspectives, and needs, allows space to fully engage through empathy, thus promoting validating and empowering interactions. Change moves at the speed of trust, and trust is built through relationships. By holding the complexity of simultaneously being part of the solution and the problem, we can adopt new mental models and catalyze change to truly impact gaps in MOC student achievement. Moving away from viewing change as a zero-sum game towards identifying opportunities for interest convergence creates the conditions to boldly confront and reimagine education. In the words of Amanda Gorman (2021), "quiet isn't always peace, and the norms and notions of what "just" is isn't always justice." Therefore, we must be bold, courageous, and compassionate in making what activist John Lewis called *good trouble* by stirring hearts, hands, and minds for equity to move from an imagined possibility to a lived reality.

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