



ILEA BLOG SERIES – MORTON COLLEGE

Morton College, as an institution of higher education that educates a majority of students of color, low-income and first-generation students, we have an obligation to ensure our community has access to educational opportunities. We also have a responsibility to ensure our practices are equitable and that we are retaining and graduating our students. When asked to join the ILEA partnership, we said yes without hesitation as the organization aligned with our institutional goals and allowed us to be part of a statewide initiative to enact change across communities. Below is insight into our institutions Equity Plan development:

What was the most challenging section of the plan to write and why?

One of the most challenging sections to write was the Institutional Strategies due to the lasting impact that they will have on our students and our institution. The strategies will guide our work throughout campus over the next few years. While we were writing and developing the strategies, our goal was for them to be intentional, measurable and impactful. We hope these strategies will become institutionalized equity practices that extend beyond the five years of the plan.

How does your Equity Plan fit within your institution's strategic plan?

Our college's strategic plan aligns with our Equity Plan. Several objectives from our 2022 strategic plan call to increase Fall-to-Fall full-time student persistence rates and to increase Fall-to-Fall retention and graduation rates. We believe that an equity lens will help achieve these goals.

What campus engagement activity/event did you learn the most from during your Equity Plan development process? How did it inform your institution's plan?

The equity café discussions between faculty, staff, and administration were the highlight of the development process. They facilitated discussion between the different groups represented on campus, which provided insight on how best to serve the student as a whole and not just focus on our individual areas.

What was the most impactful conversation you had on campus that greatly informed your work on the Equity Plan?

Being able to come together as faculty, staff and administrators, was extremely powerful during our survey debrief session. Previously, there were not many opportunities that were allocated to having equity conversations. During our debrief ICAT session, hard conversations about our campus were had amongst a variety of groups. They were honest and allowed us to use them as a basis to develop the equity plan. Listening to a variety of perspectives helped us further understand the structural barriers that hinder our student's success.



Tell us about a new strategy you're excited about implementing as part of your institution's Equity Plan.

As educators, we recognize the cost of attending college is the number one barrier for students to attain a postsecondary credential. The college committed to evaluating fees and maintaining low costs to ensure we are financially attainable and affordable. We want to eliminate any barriers for our students to ensure all of our college community has access to an affordable, high-quality education. The equity plan helped us understand the inequities and barriers such as removing fees can lift a financial burden on the students. The pandemic caused challenging times and now more than ever, it's crucial that small steps such as reassessing fees help remove financial barriers as many of the communities we serve are being financially impacted due to COVID-19.

Talk to us about the importance of faculty to closing equity gaps on your campus.

In order for fundamental and college-wide change to happen, we need each individual at our institution to engage and understand equity work, how it affects our students and the positive change it can have. Change needs to happen in our offices, in our policies, and mostly in our classrooms. Without faculty, our work will be fruitless. Which is why faculty retention and training is an important component of our equity plan.

What does meaningful faculty participation in closing equity gaps on campus look like?

To be an equity ally, the faculty need to commit to engaging with their students both in and outside of the classroom. Communication is key. Students need to know their faculty are invested in their success. Faculty also need to engage with the other stakeholders on campus. By working together within our respective areas on campus, we will have a stronger push towards equity.

Tell us about an 'aha!' moment your team had during the Equity Plan development process.

Our team's "aha" moment was at the first ILEA summit listening to the student panel sharing their successes and the challenges they faced as college students. Students shared how hard it was to concentrate in school when their friend was just shot and killed, and what they needed at that moment was a faculty member who cared and listened. Another student shared that their professor made their textbook available electronically which made it much more affordable allowing them to complete the class. At that moment, we confirmed that small changes have a huge impact on student's collegiate experience. Our equity plan, one-step, one-strategy at a time, will help close the existing equity gaps on our campus.