



Equity Data Case Studies

Activity Booklet



Riverside City College
Data Coaching Program

The purpose of these case studies are to simulate some of the more challenging situations you may face. The activity will take you through three scenarios that while exaggerated in the exercise, have some common negative reactions to equity data. By preparing for these conversations in advance, it will hopefully allow you to be more successful at keeping the conversations more productive and on track. These case studies were adapted from the Santa Monica College Data Coaching Program.

“Using the ‘W’ Grade to Deflect in the Conversation”

Discussions of racial equity gaps often start with the examination of course success rates. Course success rate is defined by dividing the number of successful grades (A, B, C, and P) by the number of valid grades earned in a course, including “W” (withdrawals). When confronted with data that show that racially minoritized students have lower course success rates than White students, David starts the “W” grade argument.

The “W” grade argument questions the inclusion of the “W” grades in the calculation of course success rates. David says:

Course success rate is a poor definition of success. Many of my students drop because of non-academic reasons. What if a student drops because they get sick? Or get a job midway through the term?

The “W” grade argument deflects from the core data findings that we are not serving African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx students well enough in the classroom.

Reflect on why David would use the “W” argument. What do you think are the underlying reasons or motivations for a comment like this one?

How would you respond to this comment? What would you say to address the root issue with a comment like this one? What can you do to get the conversation back on track?

Anticipate the next part of the conversation. What other questions and/or comments are likely to be made by David or other colleagues in the discussion of equity gaps in course success rates?

What questions could you ask the team that probe for ideas or reflections that focus on closing equity gaps for African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx students and away from the “all student” goal?

What would you say to prompt the team to start investigating the underlying root causes for why the equity gaps exist? What would you say to engage the team in inquiry?

What deficit-minded comments have you heard from colleagues related to course success (or student success) of racially minoritized students and/or what comments could you anticipate?

How could you address these comments in the previous question to keep the conversation on track and focused?

“Using the ‘Is this statistically significant?’ Argument to Deflect in the Conversation”

During the institutional equity retreat, UC transfer data disaggregated by race/ethnicity are shared. The institutional researcher is facilitating a discussion about the findings that indicate that African American/Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American students are experiencing equity gaps when Alexis, the psychology department chair, raises her hand and says

The number of African American/Black and Native American students who transfer to the UC are so small. I am concerned that the data are not statistically significant.

Johnny, a counselor, responds:

These are students – whether the data are significant does not matter because our students are humans.

But Alexis digs in further:

As a social scientist, I know that there are so many other factors like class that are affecting student outcomes. Without testing the statistical significance of the data, how can we know that race is even a factor? Are the differences between race just noise?

Several others in the room respond to Alexis’ comments, but she digs in her heels even further and will not let the argument go.

Reflect on why Alexis would use the “statistically significant” argument. What do you think are the underlying reasons or motivations for a comment like this one?

What is the first thing you would say in response to this comment? What would you say to address the root issues with a comment like this one?

Anticipate the next part of the conversation. What other questions and comments are likely to be made by Alexis in the discussion of racial equity gaps in transfer outcomes? What can you do to prepare for this situation?

What can you say to those in the room to get the discussion back on track and focused on investigating the equity gaps?

What are the steps you would take to address Alexis during and after the retreat?

“Using the ‘It’s not race’ Excuse to Deflect in the Conversation”

After the heated exchange between Alexis and others, the group decide to take a 15-minute break. During the break, Alexis insists on continuing the discussion about the transfer data.

She abandons the “statistically significant” argument in favor of the “it’s not race, it’s another variable” excuse. She names socio-economic status, parental involvement, motivation, quality of school, and maturity as factors that she hypothesizes affects transfer success more than race.

How would you respond to her argument? How would you redirect deficit-minded comments about students? Consider what would appeal to her as a social scientist.

If the situation escalates and you feel unsafe, how would you leave the conversation safely?