



Moving the Needle: Equity, Cultural Responsiveness, and Anti-Racism in the Course Outline of Record

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As educators in the largest system of higher education in the United States, faculty in the California community colleges acknowledge equity as crucial to their work. The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' mission includes a commitment to equity (ASCCC, 2020a), and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Vision for Success includes the goal to first reduce and then close achievement gaps for traditionally underrepresented student groups (CCCCO, 2017). In the last year, national and global events have highlighted the necessity for community colleges to increase focus on systemic change to promote equity and anti-racism in classrooms, colleges, and communities (ASCCC, 2020b).

The course outline of record (COR) and the curriculum review process are key places where campuses can advance equity work in important, systemic ways. As a "document with defined legal standing that plays a critical role in the curriculum of the California community colleges" (ASCCC, 2017), the COR sets expectations for a course and guides instructional practice. Embedding equity in the COR ensures that all students who enroll in a particular course will have the same access to course content and objectives that are culturally responsive and anti-racist. Explicit inclusion of equity, cultural responsiveness, and anti-racism is important for newer instructors, for articulation with four-year institutions also engaging in equity work, and for experienced instructors who may benefit from a fresh look at their course outlines. As a binding document, the COR translates directly into the classroom and affects students' success and learning.

A focus on equity and anti-racism may seem relevant only to a handful of disciplines, but reviewing CORs through an equity lens shows that faculty can all take part in this type of inquiry and systemic change. While maintaining fidelity to disciplinary content and instructional approaches is important, all faculty can have

conversations about equity within the context of their disciplinary expertise. The following is a brief explanation of some of the components of the COR that can be reviewed and redesigned using an equity lens (Bean & Gelpi, 2019):

- **Course Title and Description:** These elements are usually the first things students see about a class and can send a message to the students. The title should be descriptive, accurate, and inclusive and the description student-centered, using accessible and inclusive language with a focus on what the student will gain from the course. They should be inviting and welcoming. Discipline-specific terminology should be appropriately defined or explained through context. The goal is to ensure that every student, even before enrolling in the class, can read the description and understand what the course will cover and how it may be relevant for that individual student. For example, the description for a history course might consider how black, indigenous, and other people of color have traditionally been erased from the curriculum and shift the focus in the course description by using language like “colonized people” in place of “colonial.”
- **Units/Hours:** Higher units and hours can slow student progress and have consequences for student financial aid. In addition, most colleges are progressing in their guided pathways work, which includes reducing time to completion. Faculty should consider whether the course units are aligned with transfer institutions and model curricula. If units are high, a plan should be in place to validate them using disaggregated data that identifies the effects on enrollment for disproportionately impacted groups, including racial and ethnic groups. Noncredit options should be listed if appropriate.
- **Limitations on Enrollment:** Faculty should consider whether barriers to enrollment such as pre- and co-requisites or advisories may have disproportionate impact on any students. Limitations on enrollment must be appropriately validated. Reviewing requisites for disproportionate impact is already a requirement for certain types of requisites per Title 5 §55003(g), but faculty should consider whether applying that review process to other limitations on enrollment would help to ensure equitable access to more courses.
- **Course Content and Objectives:** Where appropriate, faculty should consider explicitly including culturally responsive and anti-racist content in the course topics and objectives. Although diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) content that explicitly addresses racial inequities may be a stronger fit in some disciplines, almost every discipline will have debates, disagreements, or assumptions that can be challenged; the COR should have an acknowledgement and discussion of these issues built in. Opportunities should be built into the topics and objectives for students to see themselves and their experiences represented and to bring their authentic selves to the course through strategies like reflection or response. Faculty should consider not just the content but also the language and terminology used to describe it and be cognizant of where the terms and topics reflect Eurocentric or colonizing views—for example, “third world countries”—and seek opportunities to move the marginalized experiences of black and indigenous people to the center. A review should not just examine what is in the course but also what is left out.
- **Assignments:** Example assignments act as a guide to new faculty for ideas and development. They should provide examples that align with equitable course content and opportunities for students to bring their own experiences to the course. These assignments should be both formative and summative.

- **Learning Outcomes:** Faculty should consider a course SLO with a specific focus on DEI or anti-racism in all CORs. For example, a course outcome addressing anti-racism could include articulating or analyzing how social and historical context affected major theories or discoveries in the field, particularly in light of systemic racism. A specific SLO aligned to the course content allows faculty to focus on these areas in assessment and ensure that their students' learning includes equity and anti-racism. Even where DEI content is not explicitly present, the outcomes assessment process should include equity review and thoughtful data disaggregation.
- **Methods of Instruction and Evaluation:** The COR should include multiple methods of instruction and evaluation, including some authentic assessments capturing more contextualized understanding. Delivering course content for multiple learning styles and ensuring students have a variety of methods to demonstrate their learning can lead to more equitable outcomes and a more inclusive learning experience (Harris & Hernandez, 2021).
- **Course Materials:** Textbooks, manuals, or other materials should include diverse representations in authorship and content. If they do not, supplemental materials might be included. Course materials should be ADA-accessible and affordable. Where appropriate, open educational resources alternatives should be considered. Although some colleges consider textbooks listed on the COR to be primarily examples, the texts are an important guide for faculty about what kinds of materials are considered acceptable for the course and can have an important impact on the texts that are ultimately selected.
- **Other Considerations:** Appropriate general education, transfer, and articulation agreements for the course should be listed, as should appropriate distance education modalities approved for the course. A review of the COR should balance the need for increased access with the ability to maintain the quality and fidelity of the course.

Although the points above focus on the COR, degrees and certificates can also benefit from a fresh look with an equity perspective, particularly as colleges advance a guided pathways framework with an emphasis on ensuring learning and completion.

As colleges work to include equity, cultural responsiveness, and anti-racism in their curriculum, they will also need to develop parallel review processes and professional development to ensure that faculty have the necessary tools to design and review course outlines with an equity lens. Many colleges have already begun this work, using tools like cultural curriculum audits, equity rubrics (Koenig, Taylor-Mendoza, & Miller, 2020), and guided pathways (ASCCC Guided Pathways Taskforce, 2021). Other possibilities for systematic equity review might include incorporating equity, cultural responsiveness, and anti-racism in curriculum review materials such as curriculum handbooks, committee training, and standardized questions incorporated in the curriculum management system or during committee discussions.

Models for equity review should ensure that the primary responsibility for curriculum review remains with discipline faculty while also ensuring that equity is discussed systemically across the curriculum review process. Faculty can identify the best places for these discussions at their own colleges—whether in initial

faculty self-review, departmental review, program review, curriculum committee review, or some combination—and then work to develop tools that will aid the review process at each step.

Curriculum and equity are at the heart of what community college faculty do. All faculty need to help to make a more equitable system that reflects the diversity of the students, faculty, and communities of California's community colleges.

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