

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

May 31, 2023

ACCT
Central Region
Equity Award Committee

Distinguished Members of the ACCT Central Region Equity Award Committee,

I serve as the current Chair of the Board of Trustees of [REDACTED]. On behalf of the entire Board, I am passionately endorsing the College's application for the 2023 ACCT Central Region Equity Award. [REDACTED] is most deserving of this award for many reasons, and I will touch on some in this letter of support.

[REDACTED] has been laser-focused on equity and diversity as a key strategic direction. This work includes increasing outcomes for students from underrepresented groups, as well as enhancing the diversity of our employees, and perhaps most importantly creating a welcoming environment for all. Our current four-year strategic plan directly speaks to this effort. An overarching theme that emerged from a community-based planning process was "Equity" which was then embedded in a formal goal: to build institutional capacity to support equity, diversity and inclusion. As part of this work, we have adopted three pillars of equity which include:

1. Closing Equity Gaps – recognizing that equal treatment may not be sufficient to achieve success for all people
2. Removing Barriers – identifying and removing unjust barriers that limit our realization of an inclusive community
3. Focused Solutions – implementing initiatives and respect and value a wide range of ideas and perspectives

The College adopted not only a diversity statement, but also an equity statement that codifies our commitment to "meeting people where they are and providing them with support and opportunities essential to accomplishing their goals." In addition, the Board and President create annual goals that are aligned to address key initiatives; a diversity goal is always included. This year, the goal is to create measures that aid in the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty and staff. This is monitored via an Institutional Effectiveness Measure (key performance measures for the College) where we regularly review faculty diversity relative to student diversity, as well as overall employee diversity relative to the diversity in the community. The Board was pleased to learn that from 2017 – 2021 we increased the number of Black employees by 8% and the number of Hispanic employees by 12%. However, we also realize that the trend must continue and accelerate in order to mirror the race/ethnicity of our students and community.

In collaboration with President [REDACTED], the Board approved a cabinet-level position, Vice President of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. This office includes five full-time positions and is dedicated to "eliminating systemic barriers that impact the educational and professional advancement of historically underrepresented students, staff and faculty to create a culture that affirms the identities of all people." A key initiative that the Board has supported is the LEAD Faculty Fellows program where faculty from diverse backgrounds are hired and placed in a cohort where they receive specialized mentoring and support. Four

full-time tenured diverse faculty have been hired via this process. The College also supports three employee resource groups that are voluntary groups of employees who are members of historically underrepresented groups:

- DREAM – supports participation and inclusion for employees of color
- LAND – supports employees with disability or those using accommodations
- SAFE – supports creating a welcoming environment from an LGBTQIA+ perspective

At a policy-level, the Board recently reviewed its policies and removed gender references. This helps to ensure all feel a sense of belonging. Several months ago, the Board approved a Recruitment and Hiring Policy that specially states that we are "committed to cultivating a community of talented employees from diverse backgrounds who contribute to fulfilling our mission, vision, philosophy and core values." In addition, the Board has made it a regular practice to schedule an annual professional development session focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. Professional consultants have been engaged to provide feedback and advice on how to further our equity agenda. Most recently, Dr. Kimberly Beatty, who co-authored the book *Transformational Change in Community Colleges: Becoming an Equity-Centered Institution* (2021) attended and reviewed our policies and practices. She affirmed that we are one of the leading institutions in addressing diversity, equity and inclusion challenges. Dr. Beatty also commented on our laser-focus and tenacity in addressing this through multiple lenses including policy, the strategic plan, institutional measures, as well as a heartfelt commitment.

The College also disaggregates data to ensure all students are persisting and completing. The Board regularly reviews these data and was pleased to learn that [REDACTED] is making progress due to the targeted efforts we are making in this area. For example, fall-to-fall persistence for Hispanic students is at the same level as it is for white students. We have also learned of intentional practices our faculty are using to address equity gaps at the classroom-level. In addition, students can now earn a "graduate distinction" in social justice by successfully completing required courses and demonstrating competency through a capstone experience. This designation appears on their transcripts.

A recent gift from philanthropist and author MacKenzie Scott was used to create the Igniting Paths to Success Scholarship which removes financial barriers and targets historically underrepresented students. Thus far, 1,121 students were awarded the scholarship of which 67% are students of color. Although this program is new, students are already experiencing positive impacts. Fall-to-spring persistence for "Ignite Scholars" is seven percentage points higher than non-Ignite Scholars.

This letter articulates just some of the many impactful things [REDACTED] is doing to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion. In fact, we recently presented at the 2022 ACCT Leadership Congress on initiatives that assist in recruiting Latinx students by connecting the experience to the entire family, and two new mentoring programs for students of color. There is no doubt that [REDACTED] is committed to enhancing diversity, equity and inclusion. We were honored that this commitment was recognized by the [REDACTED] Community College Trustees Association when [REDACTED] College was selected as the 2023 statewide winner of the Diversity and Equity Award.

We dedicate many resources in these efforts, but the biggest resource is our unwavering focus and commitment to increasing positive and meaningful outcomes for our employees, students and community. I strongly believe [REDACTED] is deserving of this notable award.

Best regards,

[REDACTED]

██████████ College is guided by our four-year strategic plan, *Forward Together FY21-FY24*, which serves as an umbrella for institutional planning efforts. Our strategic plan includes six goals, one of which is, "building institutional capacity to support diversity, equity and inclusion." We also launched our "three pillars of equity" model, which includes: (1) removing barriers, (2) closing equity gaps, and (3) executing focused solutions, to provide a simplified visual for ██████████ colleagues to quickly understand how to operationalize equity. Together, our strategic plan and pillars of equity help us strategically move forward to achieving our goals of integrating diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) into the fabric of our college.

Increases in the institution's workforce and leadership positions by underrepresented or underserved populations.

Within the past five years, ██████████ College has made substantial progress and has demonstrable evidence of an institutional commitment to advancing diversity, embracing equity and prioritizing inclusion under the leadership of ██████████, our sixth president and ██████████'s first Black and female president. Currently, 33% of Harper's executive cabinet members are Black and 78% are women. One of the most significant contributions to our progress was establishing a permanent, executive cabinet-level position reporting directly to the president. ██████████ was hired as ██████████'s inaugural Vice President of DEI in July 2021. The creation of this position and the establishment of the new Office of DEI shifted the college's organizational structure, demonstrating a clearer commitment to DEI by dissolving the previous model, which included a three-year rotating position held by a faculty member. Additionally, institutional funding was allocated by the Board of Trustees to support four additional positions within the new office, including an executive assistant, a manager of the Cultural Center and two coordinators for student diversity initiatives. Currently, the DEI office is fully staffed by women and 80% of the team identify as Black or Latinx.

Success of the institution's community engagement or outreach efforts in attracting and maintaining the interests of underrepresented or underserved populations regarding the institution.

During the fall 2021 semester, almost a decade after ██████████'s Center for Multicultural Learning was closed, ██████████ officially launched the Cultural Center. Cultural centers date back to the civil rights era and historically serve as a place of belonging for individuals from underrepresented, underserved and marginalized communities. The launch of ██████████'s Cultural Center filled a significant void for students, faculty and staff and has become a vibrant place on campus that offers a lounging area, conference rooms, events space and computers. Annually, over 70 programs, events and trainings are sponsored by the Office of DEI for students, employees and local community members, many of which are held in the Cultural Center. A spectrum of topics are explored that promote reflection, inquiry, understanding, collaboration, and, most importantly, opportunities to build a healthy, thriving community that fully embraces all people. We have seen an increase in engagement and support for DEI initiatives campuswide, including record-breaking attendance at our annual Diversity Symposium, co-sponsorships with our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), our Equity Dialogues Series and our inaugural Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Celebration. Along those lines, we have also established a number of "signature programs" to serve as ██████████ traditions, including heritage month celebrations (e.g., Disability Awareness Month) and commemorative days (e.g., Indigenous People's Day). We also launched a campuswide "Hate Has No Home at ██████████" campaign to affirm that ██████████ stands firmly against discriminatory expressions and physical or psychological violence based on individual or group identities.

In addition to our many DEI programs and trainings, during the fall 2022 semester, the Office of DEI launched GLIDE (Guiding Learners to Intentionally Develop Efficacy), a peer mentorship program designed to address the equity gaps identified for our Black and Latinx students, specifically. GLIDE is a two-year pilot program with 40 incoming student mentees and 10 mentors with two or more semesters at ██████████ (with a 2.5 GPA minimum). The mentors receive a \$700 stipend per semester for participating and the mentees receive \$500 per semester. GLIDE assists students with goal setting, developing proactive study habits, learning about financial literacy education and information regarding the spectrum of academic support services available. They also participate in at least one ██████████ excursion each semester, providing them exposure to amazing experiences outside of their local communities. The initial data received that compares GLIDE students to their peers is overwhelmingly positive, with them outperforming their peers in areas such as semester-to-semester persistence. GLIDE is offered in addition to our OMD (One Million Degrees) program which started at ██████████ in 2014 with 40 students and now has 200 students. This program is designed to help students from low-income backgrounds succeed academically and professionally by providing financial assistance, coaching, academic interventions and professional development. The goal is for OMD scholars to transfer to four-year colleges and universities upon completing their associate degrees.

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Also, during the fall 2022 semester, we began the redesign process for our Diverse Faculty Fellows program, now called LEAD (Leveraging Equity in Academia through Diversity) Faculty Fellows program and launched our JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) Faculty Fellows program. LEAD Faculty Fellows is designed to recruit racially diverse professionals for tenure-track faculty positions through a pipeline model in an effort to ensure that our faculty demographics more closely reflect our student body demographics. The JEDI Faculty Fellows program affords current, full-time faculty exposure to the administrative aspects of DEI work and helps them gain the knowledge, skills and ability to develop and lead institutional DEI efforts both within and outside of the classroom. The JEDI Faculty Fellows program garnered national attention within six months of its launch as a featured story in *Community College Daily*.

Our DEI efforts also include a number of initiatives with our Board of Trustees, whose members have served an integral role in our DEI progress and success. The Board's Policy Manual has undergone two audits; the first resulted in the removal of gender-based language and the second audit was conducted by Paul Gorski, founder of the Equity Literacy Institute and EdChange. Recommended changes from Gorski are currently being reviewed to determine an implementation plan. [REDACTED]'s Board also committed the time for two annual workshops focused on DEI and established a goal to monitor the college's progress in diversifying faculty and staff. The Board also approved the revision of our building/space "naming policy." Originally, this policy was exclusively driven by the financial contribution level of donors. However, spaces such as cultural centers are often named after historical figures, dedicated retirees, etc. so it was critical to modify the policy to reflect an awareness of, and respect for, the unique histories upon which identity spaces were created (e.g., LGBTQIA+ Resource Centers, Veterans Centers, etc.).

[REDACTED] is also proud to have an active DEI Shared Governance Committee and three highly engaged ERGs. Our DEI Shared Governance Committee is now one of the bodies that reviews all new policies and uses an equity rubric to help assess for equity gaps. They have three sub-committees – education, policy and climate and most recently created an ad-hoc committee to focus on the development of an anti-racist statement (and corresponding actions) for Harper. We also have three ERGs – DREAM (Diverse Relationships Engaged in Affirming Multiculturalism), LAND (Learning about Abilities and Not Disabilities) and SAFE (Staff, Aministrators and Faculty for Equality). The ERGs meet independently with their respective constituencies and collectively with the Vice President of DEI. They play an essential role in advancing DEI in ways such as sponsoring community building programs, elevating employees concerns, initiating recruitment and retention efforts, mentoring new faculty and staff and fostering a more inclusive campus climate. The National Conference on Race and Ethnicity recognized the value of our ERG structure and we are slated to present "Advancing DEI on College Campuses: The Role of Employee Resource Groups" in New Orleans on June 2, 2023.

Five years ago, we established our SJLC (Social Justice Leadership Certificate) program for employees, which consists of a year-long, project-based curriculum focused on social justice theory, institutional structure and organizational decision-making practices. Our SJLC participants have developed some innovative projects that are now permanently part of [REDACTED]'s culture. For example, our SJS (Social Justice Studies) Distinction, provides students a unique opportunity to complete courses focusing on social change and civic engagement, was originally a project conceptualized by a faculty member in a previous SJLC cohort. Now, students have the opportunity to complete SJS courses that fulfill general education requirements (vs. these courses only being available as electives) and allow students to prioritize transfer goals and degree completion while remaining immersed in the work of imagining, analyzing and achieving justice.

Importantly [REDACTED] is data-driven and makes decisions based on both quantitative and qualitative data. To aid us in this process, we use a data dashboard called "Bits N Bytes." Bits N Bytes is a collaborative, cross-functional tool that provides faculty and staff access to institutional data to support college decision-making and analyses. Access to data is essential as it helps us understand student and employee patterns across demographics. Recently, an "equity gaps" tab was added to this dashboard to facilitate access to information on equity gaps in several institutional effectiveness measures, such as enrollment, persistence and degree attainment. During the fall of 2022, we also contracted with NORC at the University of Chicago to conduct eight focus groups to obtain qualitative data to better understand the lived experiences of our Black, Latinx and Asian students to improve our services for them. NORC has provided a list of recommendations that are currently under review. We also hired an independent HR consultant, Pamela Pirtle, to audit [REDACTED]'s employment practices and policies related to DEI. Her audit included a review of internal and external data and individual and group interviews with employees at all levels of the institution. Findings from this audit resulted in a number of action items, including the recently created diverse employee recruitment plan.

Increases in access by underrepresented or underserved populations and increases in completion of the educational objectives (attainment of a degree, certificate, credential, transfer or gainful employment) of those populations.

The disaggregation of data is now a foundational practice for [REDACTED]. All programs at [REDACTED] College are required to perform a yearly program analysis to address retention, fill rates and completion issues. Equity was added as an additional focus of program analyses for all academic departments at [REDACTED]. As part of this process, equity gap data are collected and analyzed and other key indicators are reviewed simultaneously. Program-specific targeted interventions are then designed and implemented in the following academic year. A good example of how our academic departments use data is from our Philosophy department. After reviewing their data, they conducted a participatory action research project for four consecutive semesters. Several faculty within this department researched, selected and implemented best practices for inclusive pedagogies. The results were very promising, with increased student success reflected across all student demographics for professors that implemented any of the best practice strategies.

As of the midpoint of our strategic plan (2022), equity gaps have been reduced in the following areas: developmental math – the gap for Black students was 15.7% (2016-2019), now at 11.3% (2018-2021), a 28% decrease in the gap (4.4 percentage points); developmental writing – the gap for Black students was 11.4% (2016-2019), now at 6.4% (2018-2021), a 44% decrease in the gap (5.0 percentage points) and fall to fall persistence (full-time) – the gap for Black students was 19.2% (2015-2018), now at 13.7% (2017-2020), a 29% decrease in the gap (5.5 percentage points). Our strategic plan goals also outline the following targets: increase the number of credentials conferred by 5%, reduce equity gaps by 20% and increase the graduation rate by 10%. To date, we have surpassed our target (10% increase) for the overall graduation increase – in 2019, the graduation rate was 33.7% and in 2021 our graduation rate was 37.8%, a 12% increase (4.1 percentage points).

Notably, [REDACTED] received recognition in April 2022 as one of the 25 semi-finalists for the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence and recognition as a Leader College of Distinction from Achieving the Dream in February 2023. We were selected as a semi-finalist by the Aspen Institute based on our data showing significant improvement in student success outcomes in key areas such as retention, completion, transfer and equity. Similarly, Achieving the Dream, an organization focused on helping low-income and students of color, selected [REDACTED] as one of three Leader Colleges of Distinction, reflecting that we demonstrated improvement in three or more student outcome metrics, including at least one lagging indicator such as completion or transfer. [REDACTED]'s national recognition by Aspen and Achieving the Dream amplifies the success of our DEI efforts.

[REDACTED] offers students a wide range of financial resources to support their success and persistence through our community partnerships and outreach initiatives. The Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) grants were also available to [REDACTED] students during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. HEERF provided direct support to students with minimal screenings and funding distributions were expedited to support students' retention, persistence and overall success during the global crises. [REDACTED] awarded over \$21M to more than 11,000 students through HEERF. We also offer Promise Scholarships, which provide all in-district high school students the opportunity to earn up to two years of 100% tuition coverage if they meet the eligibility requirements and maintain good academic standing while enrolled at [REDACTED]. Additionally, we launched an "Igniting Paths to Success Scholarship" in 2021, created from the generous \$18M donation received from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott. This scholarship supports underrepresented students who are pursuing high-demand academic programs and need financial assistance to cover tuition, fees and book expenses. We have over 1,500 recipients and approximately two-thirds are from historically underserved populations. [REDACTED] also offers wraparound services to students through our "HAWKS Care" program, which supplies students with essential needs (e.g., food, clothing, school supplies, etc.).

In addition to the aforementioned student support services, we launched a number of options to help students that articulated transportation challenges. We partnered with the ride-share company Lyft to offer "Lyft Pass," which provides students with discounted rides. Since its inception in September 2022, the college has provided approximately 3,600 rides with average fare savings of 65%. We also collaborated with Pace to pilot a new bus route with increased access to campus and bus service every 40 minutes. Finally, we created a "bike-share" program as an environmentally friendly and a healthy alternative. Collectively, these options have helped us meet the diverse transportation needs of our students.

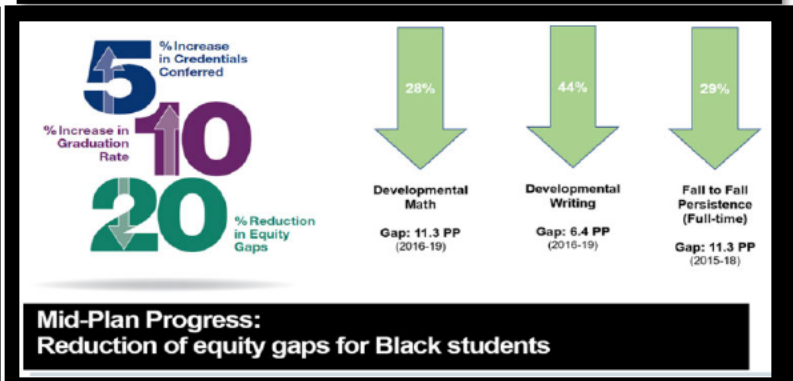
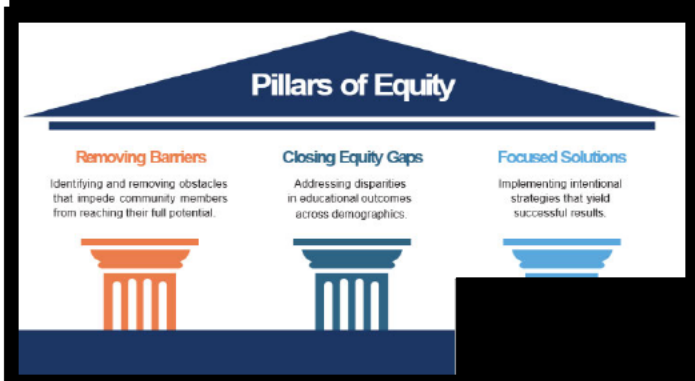
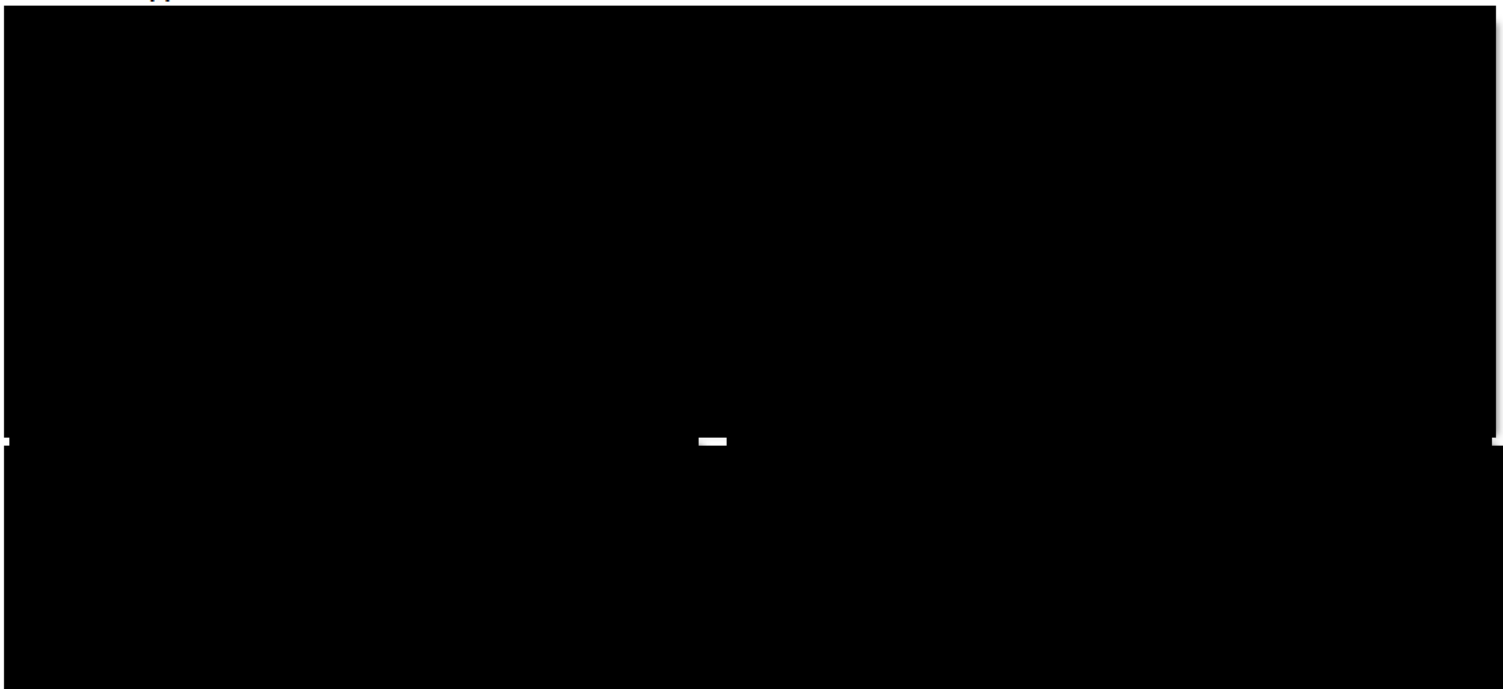
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We also have a range of community engagement and outreach efforts focused on underrepresented populations. For example, our \$100,000 Community Innovation Fund focuses on equity, diversity and economic mobility, in support of five non-profit organizations in [REDACTED] district that provide services to address issues such as housing insecurity and literacy. Additionally, over the past seven years our Workforce Solutions department has served 397 apprentices with 30% identifying as Latinx, 13% identifying as African American and 10% identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander or Multiracial. Having a diverse pool of apprenticeship students assists our employers with diversifying their respective workplaces while also helping to improve personal outcomes for our students. Workforce Solutions also engages our local municipalities by partnering to support their training needs. For example, we are currently working with the [REDACTED], one of our district communities, to enhance the cultural competency of their employees. The goal is that employees develop the skills to better provide services to their increasingly diverse community, to create more safe and inclusive environments for families, organizations and residents.

In recent years, [REDACTED] College has enhanced and increased institutional DEI efforts to better support all of our constituents and truly fulfill our mission. Although we are proud of our many accomplishments towards creating a more diverse, inclusive and equitable environment, we understand that our work is not done. Institutional transformation requires sustained commitment over time.

It is our hope that this nomination packet provides an effective snapshot of [REDACTED]'s DEI initiatives and demonstrates that our dedication is reflected at all levels of the institution – from our Board of Trustees to our administrators to our faculty and staff. Together, our efforts are aligned to support a multidimensional strategic approach to improve student success and transform lives for generations to come.

A number of [REDACTED]'s initiatives have been publicized locally and nationally, reflecting our intentional focus on DEI. Below are our supplemental materials:



ACCT Central Region Equity Award Narrative:

██████████ College's strategic plan serves as an umbrella for our planning efforts. One of our goals is "building institutional capacity to support diversity, equity and inclusion." We are also guided by our "three pillars of equity" model: removing barriers, closing equity gaps and executing focused solutions. In 2021, ██████████ established an Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and an executive cabinet-level position. More than 70 programs/trainings, a peer mentorship program for Black and Latinx students and two faculty fellowships are annually sponsored by this new office. Our 2022 midpoint strategic plan data revealed that equity gaps were reduced in developmental math, writing and fall-to-fall persistence; and we surpassed our goal for the overall graduation rate increase. ██████████'s dedication to DEI is reflected at all levels of our institution as we strategically align our efforts to improve student success and transform lives for generations to come.