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Equality vs. Equity: What's the difference?

- Equality and equity are **not** the same thing.
- Equality assumes that the playing field is level for students.
- Equity requires that we understand both philosophically and practically that one size does not fit all students when it comes to learning and assessment of learning.

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Equity-minded Assessment

- Traditional assessment makes a significant impact on students' likelihood of success and thereby contributes to justice or lack thereof in society.
- Educators must acknowledge that we live in a dominant culture where:
 - We all have internalized -isms
 - Systems impact privileged and marginalized people differently
 - Systemic oppression is present in institutional practices which it causes harm.
- Many widely used assessment methods and tools signal discriminatory or biased message, trigger microaggressions, focus on student deficits – rather than structural barriers, and fail to center equity.

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Equity-minded Assessment

“Assessment, if not done with equity in mind, privileges and validates certain types of learning and provides evidence of learning over others, can hinder the validation of multiple means of demonstration, and can reinforce within students the false notion that they do not belong in higher education.” – Montenegro and Jankowski, 2017

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Equity-minded Assessment

- Foundationally, equity-minded assessment calls for those who lead and participate in assessment activities to be conscious of how assessment can either **facilitate** or **perpetuate** equity in higher education.
- Equity-minded assessment contains elements of:
 - Culturally Responsive Assessment
 - Social Just Assessment
 - Critical Assessment

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Culturally Responsive Assessment

- Culturally responsive assessment practices are dependent on the context in which students are being assessed.
- Individual cultures are taken into account when gathering data.
- At its core, culturally responsive assessment **must**:
 - Be conscious of the student population being served
 - Involve students in the process of learning assessment
 - Use student-focused and cultural language in learning outcomes to ensure students understand expectations
 - Use evidence sources and assessment tools that are culturally responsive
 - Intentionally improve student learning through data-driven methods which examine the structures, established demonstrations of learning, and supports that privilege some students while disadvantaging others.

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Socially Just Assessment

- Socially just assessment examines the interplay between culture, bias, power, and oppression in the assessment process.
- Educators should use socially just assessment to serve as a mechanism to help close opportunity, persistence, and attainment gaps between different student populations.
- When using this method, educators and administrators must:
 - Recognize assessment takes place within various departmental and institution cultures which impact the assessment processes we follow.
 - Be mindful of how data is analyzed, understanding that it can privilege or oppress.
 - Be aware of the types of comparisons made between learners, we often compare outcomes for students of color to those of white students inferring that white students are the norm for which others should strive.

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Critical Assessment

- Both culturally responsive and socially just assessment from a critical perspective.
- Critical assessment calls for:
 - Accepting the fact that assessment is inherently subjective and is often guided by biases and past experiences.
 - Varying the types of evidence used to assess learning to prevent privileging specific ways of knowing or preferred ways to demonstrate knowledge.
 - Including the voices of students, especially those who belong to marginalized populations.
 - Using assessment to advance the pursuit of equity across previous identified parameters that demonstrate disparate outcomes across student populations.

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Practicing Equity-minded Assessment

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Step 1: Determine Outcomes

- Evaluate how and where systemic bias and discrimination affect the student experience
- Reflect on and clearly articulate the purpose for the outcomes.
 - Identify ways you can operationalize student agency by providing opportunities for students to define learning in their own language.
 - Include multiple voices, including students in drafting and/or reviewing outcomes as well as mapping learning outcomes to learning experiences.
- Equity-minded assessment requires **transparency** in the assessment process as well as in the educational design.
 - Students should know what is being assessed, how it is being assessed, and how well they achieved the assessment's expectations. (The MILCA Transparency Framework)
- Reflect on how you are and better can attend to students' intersectionality

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Step 2: Select Methods and Collect Data

- To enable deep data analysis, assessment data should be collected at a level and in a way that allows for meaningful disaggregation. (**Tip: Think local, not institutional level data**)
- Select methods that balance demands for rigor and transferability with attentiveness and justice.
- Engage students in determining and designing methods for showcasing their learning.
 - Solicit student feedback on assessment questions and prompts developed.
- Utilize a diverse array of data collection methods
- Triangulate findings for more robust understanding.
- Examine and evaluate language used for bias, inclusion, signals of normalcy, and supportive identity orientation.
 - Consider how data collection tools can reinforce White norms
 - Analyze ways in which assessment language reflects culturally acquired knowledge reinforced colonized ways of knowing and perpetuates racism.

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Step 3: Analyze Data

- Equity-minded assessment should involve exploration of assessment data to uncover learning gaps occurring between students AND make data informed changes to close those gaps.
- Analysis of data in equity-minded assessment should:
 - Strive to engage stakeholders in interpretation and reporting of data to ensure results are representative of the voices that matter, bias is mitigated, and deficit-oriented language can be more readily identified, removed, and revised.
 - Employ multiple types of data analysis (e.g., within-group, between group, etc.)
 - Disaggregate data by student demographic variables and combinations of student variables (e.g., Black women, Low SES LGBTQ)
 - Do not hold White student experiences and outcomes as the benchmark for comparison.
- Equity-minded improvements and decision-making **does not** necessitate large student sample sizes; improvement in a single student has implications for retention and persistence.
- A single student should be assessed at multiple timepoints throughout a program to examine learning progression over time, shift the unit of analysis from a student to individual instances of demonstrated learning.

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Step 4: Use and Share Results

- Collaboratively create your reporting process in effort to be intentional about your approach to data sharing.
- Contemplate how you could be writing results from a deficit-based position.
- Consider who has the power to determine if results are valid and accurate and how data reports will be written and shared.
- Ensure findings are actionable opportunities to advance equity.
- Reflect on ways language used in assessment reports and presentations reflect culturally acquired knowledge, validate Western ways of knowing, and perpetuate racism.
- Identify ways to educate administrators, faculty, and staff about racial inequity as a structural problem and the need to consider what exclusionary practices exist on your campus and in higher education.

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Contextual Considerations

- Equity-minded assessment should align with ongoing program, department, or institutional goals.
- Assessment efforts should consider the inequities which matter most in their specific cultural and institutional contexts.
- Depending on the existing culture of assessment, the conversation around equity-minded assessment may be difficult; identify an individual to lead and facilitate the discussion in language that resonated with the institutional context.
- Context-Specific approaches might begin with:
 - *Exploratory analyses* – see if there are inequities within assessment data and inquire about how they can be fixed
 - *Purposeful analyses* – see if a recent change intended to close a learning outcome gap among specific populations has achieve its intended purpose.

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Conclusions and Action Steps



- **Bottom Line:** Equity must be embedded within and throughout the entirety of any assessment effort.
 - Ensure assessments engaging and rigorous but relevant and align with what is taught.
 - Check biases and ask reflective questions throughout the assessment process to address assumptions and positions of privilege.
 - Formatively assess students on a regular basis; differentiate assessments if possible
 - Use multiple sources of evidence appropriate for the students being assessed; offer a variety of ways to demonstrate mastery
 - Be flexible (but reasonable) with options for makeup assessments
 - Include student perspectives in assessment process and act based on obtained perspectives
 - Encourage a growth mindset (rather than a deficit one), emphasis effort over progress, and cultivate student strengths.
 - Increase transparency in assessment results and actions
 - Ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated
 - Make evidence-based changes that address issues of equity within the appropriate contexts.

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