



NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE  
**STUDENT EQUITY PROJECT**  
*STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS*



THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

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## **ABOUT CCEAL**

### **MISSION**

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) is a national research laboratory at San Diego State University. CCEAL supports community colleges with research, assessment, and training activities that support the success of historically underrepresented and underserved students. The mission of CCEAL is to develop knowledge and advance promising practices that enhance access, achievement, and success among underserved students of color.

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Napa Valley College contracted the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University to engage in a comprehensive assessment of disproportionately impacted students' experiences (e.g., Latinx, Asian American/Filipino American, LGBTQ, White students). The assessment entailed conducting focus groups with students who represent a range of backgrounds and identities. This project is a part of Napa Valley College's efforts to redress persistent inequities and outcome disparities in student success that disproportionately affect historically underrepresented and underserved students.

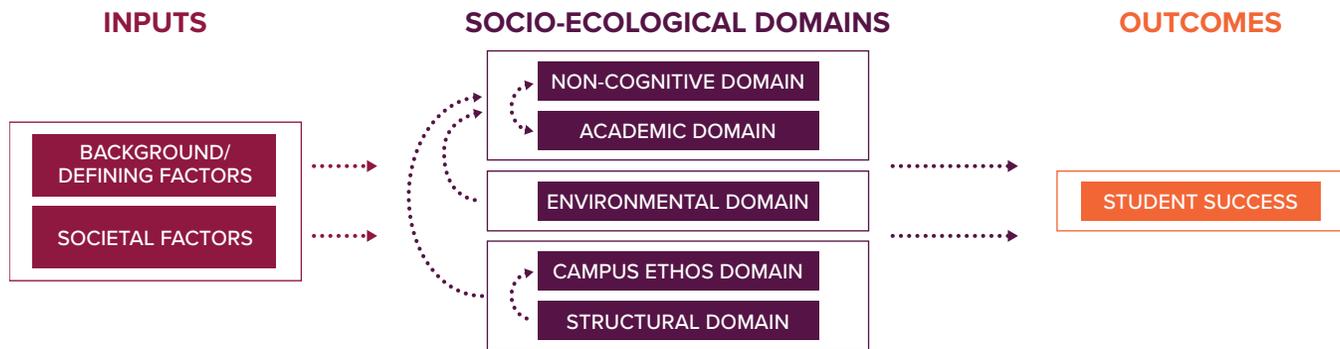
The purpose of this report is to share findings that emerged from the qualitative assessment of the experiences of disproportionately impacted students at Napa Valley College. In line with the purpose of this project, these four overarching questions guided the qualitative inquiry with students:

1. What are the lived experiences of disproportionately impacted students at Napa Valley College?
2. To what degree do disproportionately impacted students feel a sense of belonging at Napa Valley College?
3. How have the “twin pandemics” (COVID-19 and systemic oppression) influenced the experiences of disproportionately impacted students at Napa Valley College?
4. What are some intentional and equity-minded strategies that educators can enact to improve outcomes and the quality of experiences of disproportionately impacted students at Napa Valley College?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework guiding this study is the socio-ecological outcomes (SEO) model (Harris III & Wood, 2016).<sup>1</sup> As illustrated in Figure 1, the SEO model is composed of seven constructs that account for key factors that contribute to the success of students of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian) and other underserved students in community colleges.

*Figure 1.* Socio-ecological outcomes (SEO) model.



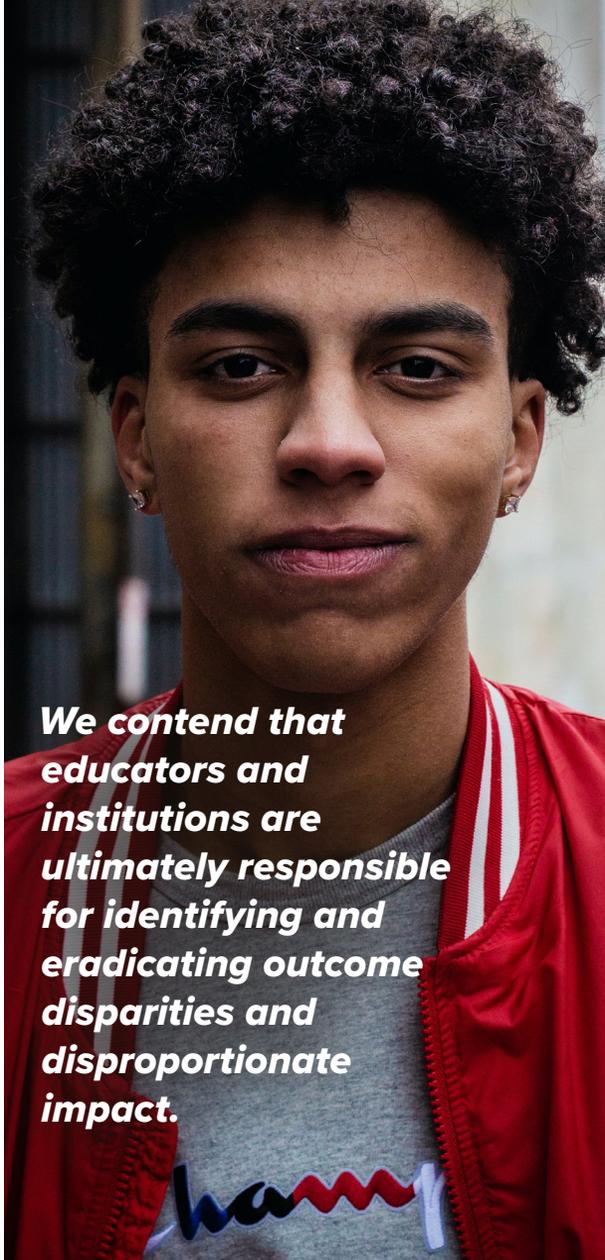
The first two constructs are described as inputs, consisting of background defining and societal factors that account for the experiences of students of color prior to entering the community college. Background defining and societal factors shape dispositions and expectations of students of color as they matriculate into community college. Defined as the socio-ecological domains, the non-cognitive, academic, environmental, campus ethos, and structural domains illustrate the various factors that contribute to the student success of students of color and shape their salient experiences on campus. Moreover, according to the SEO model, student success in community college is broadly described as persistence, achievement, degree attainment, transferring, goal accomplishments, and preparation for the labor market.

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the SEO model, see Harris III, F., & Wood, J. L. (2016). Applying the socio-ecological outcomes model to the student experiences of men of color. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2016(174), 35-46. doi:10.1002/cc.20201

In addition to the aforementioned conceptual model, the research design for this project was informed by several vital equity-related initiatives that have been recently enacted in California and will have a substantial influence on how colleges address issues of disproportionate impact. Specifically, we constructed the focus group questions based on the California Community College Chancellor's Office Student Equity and Achievement Program (SEAP) and Vision for Success.

Finally, our work is informed by Estela Bensimon's notion of institutional responsibility for student success (Bensimon & Harris III, 2012).<sup>2</sup> We contend that educators and institutions are ultimately responsible for identifying and eradicating outcome disparities and disproportionate impact. Institutional efforts to facilitate success among disproportionately impacted students must be prioritized above and beyond *perceived* student deficits (e.g., academic preparation, external commitments, poverty). These efforts must be informed by the questions: "What are we doing (or not doing) as an institution that is creating and sustaining outcome disparities?" and "How can we change our policies, programs, and practices in ways that can best meet the needs of our disproportionately impacted students?" It is from this standpoint where equity-minded institutional practices emerge.

<sup>2</sup> Bensimon, E. M., & Harris III, F. (2012). The mediational means of enacting equity-mindedness among community college practitioners. In E. M. Bensimon & L. Malcom (Eds.), *Confronting Equity Issues on Campus: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in Theory and Practice* (pp. 216-246). Sterling VA: Stylus.



***We contend that educators and institutions are ultimately responsible for identifying and eradicating outcome disparities and disproportionate impact.***

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participant demographics were collected via a questionnaire form sent to students prior to the focus group. While a total of 14 students (eight women, six men) participated in the focus groups, only 10 submitted the demographic questionnaire. Of the 10 students, two were White, and the remaining eight were People of Color including Mexican American, Filipino, and Black. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (N=6), two identified as gay, and one identified as lesbian. Concerning the participants' ages, six were 18-24 years old, two were 25-34 years old, and one was 50 years or older. The majority (7) of the students reported being employed.

Five of the 10 students were enrolled in 12 units or more. At the time of data collection, one student had completed between 15-29 units, two had completed 30-44 units, three had completed 45-60 units, and four had completed more than 60 units. Students represented various majors (including double majors) across campus, including business (N=3), engineering (N=2), technology and computer science (N=3), social science (1), health science (1), LGBTQ studies (1), viticulture and wine technology (N=1), and transfer studies (N=1). The overwhelming majority of the participants (9 of the 10) indicated “transfer to a 4-year institution” as their primary educational goal.

### **DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection for this project occurred during the Fall 2020 semester via Zoom Pro. Students who identified as experiencing disproportionate impact at Napa Valley College and who were currently enrolled in credit-bearing courses were invited by the Office of Student Equity and Inclusivity to participate in one of 4 focus groups that occurred over three days. One focus group was facilitated for each of the following salient identities: Latinx students, LGBTQ+ students, Asian American/Filipino students, and Disproportionately Impacted White students. Prior to each focus group, we informed the participants (both verbally and in writing) that their participation was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed that they could opt-out of answering questions they did not feel comfortable answering and could discontinue their involvement in the project at any time without consequence. None of the participants who began the project discontinued their participation.



**Although we took a deductive approach to analyzing the data, we paid close attention to concepts and insights that emerged inductively.**

All of the participants agreed to have their conversations audio-recorded and were assured that the insights they provided would be treated confidentially by our project team. Participants were given the option of sharing or muting their video during the focus group and were asked to change their screen names to a pseudonym of their choosing. Those who did not were assigned pseudonyms by our project team. All of the audio recordings were transcribed for data analysis. Immediately following each focus group, the facilitators co-constructed research memos to capture the salient aspects and interpersonal dynamics of the conversations. We relied on both the transcripts and research memos to construct this report. As an incentive for participating in the focus groups, the Office of Equity and Inclusivity provided each student a \$50 gift voucher to the campus bookstore.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The audio recording for each focus group was transcribed for data analysis. Each transcript was uploaded into Dedoose—a qualitative data analysis software program that enables multiple researchers to collaboratively analyze a data set. Data were coded deductively in three phases (initial, focused, and axial) as prescribed by Charmaz (2014).<sup>3</sup> Although we took a deductive approach to analyzing the data, we paid close attention to concepts and insights that emerged inductively.

<sup>3</sup> Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## OVERARCHING FINDINGS

The following overarching thematic categories emerged as salient across the four focus groups.

1. Student Identities and Sense of Belonging
2. Cultural-Familial Expectations and Support
3. The Impact of COVID-19 on Students' Experiences and Success
4. Perceptions of Racial Reckoning in the U.S.

In this section of the report, we discuss each thematic category and support this discussion with representative quotes and reflections from the participants in each focus group. We conclude this report with recommendations and advice for how Napa Valley College faculty, staff, and campus leaders can employ equity-minded practices to close equity

gaps and facilitate success for disproportionately impacted students.

### **1. STUDENT IDENTITIES AND SENSE OF BELONGING**

In this project, we sought to obtain a deeper and more informed perspective on students' salient identities and the degree to which they experienced a sense of belonging at NVC relative to these identities. Thus, our initial questions asked participants to share which of their identities were most salient and the degree to which they felt their identities were recognized, valued, appreciated, and reflected in the curriculum of the classes in which they were enrolled. Given the broad range of student perspectives explored in this project, responses to this inquiry were varied and diverse.

For Latinx students, their racial/ethnic identity was most salient due, in part, to students' strong

cultural-familial connections. By and large, these students felt a sense of belonging at NVC, which they attributed to the substantial representation of Latinx students and staff at the college [including counseling faculty]. One student shared:

*There's a lot of Latinx students at NVC — it's the same demographics as it was in high school. I feel like there's always going to be a Latinx student in my classrooms. I feel like I fit there. There's a lot of resources for us.*

However, participants also noted that Latinx faculty's representation was an area the college could improve upon. In particular, students cited a lack of representation of Latinx faculty in Mathematics and Science disciplines. Broadly, participants expressed that they rarely had opportunities to engage their Latinx identities in the curriculum, which was largely invisible.

LGBTQ+ students shared similar sentiments regarding the lack of visibility in course curriculum and classroom discussions. Participants noted that while conversations about gender identity and gender expression were more commonplace in sociology, psychology, and LGBTQ+ courses, they failed to experience a sense of belonging in other courses. As a result, the burden of responsibility to facilitate such dialogue fell upon LGBTQ+ identifying students. One participant shared:

*I really feel like most of the time, I'm the one that's adding the LGBT aspect into it [assignments]. I'm the one that's adding like the history moments into it. In English, I should be exposed to some LGBT authors or literature that speaks to LGBT issues. Even on our campus, we have, I think, one of the biggest selections of LGBT books in our library. So, it's like accessible to our students*

*and it should be incorporated in the learning across subjects.*

In reflecting on their History courses, another student added:

*We have a large number of history faculty, but LGBTQ history is not included in these courses. Why aren't we learning about what happened in the Castro or other areas in the Bay Area?*

Overall, LGBTQ+ students experienced NVC as “cisnormative” and described it as lacking a visible community with explicit institutional support. Thus, they did not experience a sense of belonging at NVC relative to their LGBTQ+ identity. Consequently, because institutional support for creating a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ students was, at best, ambivalent, students assumed primary responsibility for doing so. Some examples of the efforts that have been enacted include

creating a student organization and activities for LGBTQ+ students, encouraging the campus to fly the pride flag during pride month, advocating for more gender-inclusive bathrooms, and asking faculty to adhere to the use of gender-inclusive pronouns. Also worth noting is the positive relationship between the LGBTQ+ community and the campus police at the college, which was attributed to ongoing LGBTQ training which is required for officers. Because of this, students have found officers to be more involved and responsive to the LGBTQ+ community.

The Filipino American students in the project also expressed difficulty in feeling a sense of belonging at NVC. During our conversation about identity, students spoke candidly about the racial microaggressions they experienced in the classroom. For example, one student shared that she and a professor were reviewing her final course grade,

to which he expressed surprise in her grade being as high as it was.

While at first she believed this was a compliment, she later reflected on her professor's reaction and found it offensive. The student attributed this to her limited engagement in class, stating:

*Sometimes I'm like, shy to answer during class because I get like super anxious and I'm like, what if I get it wrong and people will just, you know, people are just like looking at you from top to bottom, making those expressions at you in class. So maybe that's a factor but I'm not really sure if they're [professor] aware of like that behavior offending me as well. So, I think right now there's like a judgment inside the classroom that even professors themselves aren't aware of.*

Another, who moved to the U.S. from the Philippines, regularly experienced a racial microaggression that bothered her. When people learned that she was from the Philippines, they often commented on how well she spoke English. She shared:

*Whenever I talked to other people and they asked where I was from, they were surprised that I've only been here a few years and they'd say, "your English is so good." It was awkward to hear this because I've been studying English since I was in Kindergarten.*

Finally, when asked whether they saw their salient identities reflected in the curriculum, there was a resounding "no" from participants. "*Only in my Filipino American History course,*" shared one student.

For the disproportionately-impacted white students,

participants described their experiences at NVC as "normal" (perhaps due to their dominant racial identities). They felt that they had been supported well by the college. One student shared:

*I have felt really supported, I have felt particularly supported by the professors and the administration and I don't know that I would be where I am today if it hadn't been for the incredible level of support I've gotten in that community. And I would say that even the students have been generally very supportive and understanding and no one has made me uncomfortable.*

The discussions pertaining to identity for these students focused primarily on gender, ability status, and religion. For example, one participant in the group spoke transparently about how being a survivor of domestic abuse and

struggling with PTSD had a salient impact on her identity.

*As soon as I entered school there was a violent episode in our house. And I was, you know, couch surfing and totally traumatized and a mess and crying every day and shaking and having, you know, flashbacks. And the whole community came around me and from, you know, from top to bottom.*

Another student described his Christianity as being most salient, which was generally accepted within the campus community. He shared:

*From a Christian perspective, I will say that this is probably my biggest identity. I haven't really come across any really intense issues. I do have strong beliefs and convictions about certain things. I haven't been like attacked or really*

*like, pointed out, singled out in a classroom. People are usually very, very supportive across the board. They're very open to different perspectives....I've been a part of a few like Bible studies on campus, and I feel like have been generally supported. Yeah, overall, I would agree that most people, most experiences I've had on campus have just been very supportive and open.*

## 2. CULTURAL-FAMILIAL EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

A second salient theme deduced from the data provided insight into how cultural-familial expectations and support impacted students' experiences and success. In the focus groups, we asked students to comment on the critical sources of support that were afforded to them by way of family, how their decisions to pursue education were influenced by cultural or familial expectations, and

what, if any, challenges they have experienced that could be attributed to family expectations.

For Latinx and Filipino American students, family and culture were tightly wound. One Latina participant stated,

*When I think about what I'm carrying on my shoulders, it's not just me, but it's my family that I'm carrying and the rest of my culture as well.*

Across the focus groups, participants described their families as being very supportive of their academic pursuits. One Latinx student described their family's support as essential to their ongoing motivation and success:

*I honestly feel truly blessed. I feel 100% supported by my family. They continue to support my decision to transfer to the university in the*

*upcoming year. So I've never really had like that struggle, and they actually really care about what I'm doing. And I like to keep them informed, like what classes I'm taking.*

Other students noted the “cultural disconnect” between familial support and expectations. For example, one participant stated,

*Yeah, like I'm very supported, of course, but there's a little bit of a cultural disconnect. I still feel like there is a little bit of a barrier of understanding what like education actually looks like. I feel like sometimes they [family] just see it as like, you go to class and you should learn the material like that's all you have to do, but I feel like maybe they don't see like the struggles and the hours that we have to put into studying. My mom was like, why don't you just go to Berkeley. I was like, yeah, like it's that easy.*

Concerning material support, participants most frequently noted that while their families were unable to help pay for tuition, providing a place to live and validating messages were significant factors for their success. One participant in the LGBTQ+ student focus group reflected:

*My family didn't like finish high school, you know, and so, at least for support I also consider myself like really lucky because they understand that it's really hard. They're like, you can do this and you can get through this.*

Another LGBTQ+ identifying student gave a “shoutout” to their friends at NVC for being their “biggest supporters,” sharing that:

*My family has always doubted me when it came to education, but my friends here keep me motivated and make me*

*want to strive for more. I appreciate them all so much.*

One of the disproportionately impacted white students noted that she did not have much family and, therefore, considered the folks that she developed relationships with on campus as “family.” She shared:

*I gained another family and people know me and support me from all ends of that campus. I mean, you know, from the financial aid office to, you know, the Transfer Center, like everywhere I go, you know, even at the library and the café, like people know me. And I, I really am so grateful because I was such a wreck. I would not be where I am today. They got me through it, you know.... I just, I had this world of people supporting myself, I'm so grateful.*

The Filipino American students in the project also expressed strong cultural-familial connections to their racial/ethnic identities. Such connections often led to a generational clash between students and their parents' expectations concerning majors and career choices. While some students wanted to pursue degrees in social work or music, they were persuaded by family to pursue more "lucrative" careers such as nursing or business. One student reflected:

*I'm trying to pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing, but that's not actually the course that I wanted. I just wanted to be able to, you know, be a social worker. But, since nursing is part of our family already – my grandmother's a nurse, my mother is a nurse, my cousin is currently taking a nursing program in the Philippines...I still hear my dad talking about, like, once I get to be a nurse, I'd be able to earn a lot of money. Actually,*

*my sister wanted to be a pharmacist, but when she transferred, she changed her major to nursing, because that's what my dad wanted her to do.*

While participants' families placed high value on financial earnings and prestige, there was enormous pressure to continue the family tradition of becoming a nurse. Another student shared,

*I wanted to get out of that stereotype that if you're Filipino you should be a nurse.*

When asked whether their family would be less supportive if they chose a different path, the student commented,

*I mean, not like super supportive of that. But I think they'd much prefer if I was a nurse.*



**Such connections often led to a generational clash between students and their parents' expectations concerning majors and career choices.**

### 3. THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND SUCCESS

As we all know, the COVID-19 global health crisis has had a dramatic and devastating impact on all of us—students, faculty, and staff alike. In March 2020, nearly every college across the U.S. had to swiftly transition classes and support services from in-person to remote delivery. No one foresaw this happening, and stories abound about how students' lives were drastically disrupted. Some endured being laid off or having their work schedules involuntarily altered. Others had to figure out how to attend school while caring for family members and young children, who were also transitioning to remote learning. Some even contracted the virus or suffered the loss of loved ones. Given these traumatic events, NVC leaders were interested in understanding the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on students' academic and personal lives.

Overall, the global pandemic impacted all of the participants—some more intensely than others.

Three challenges came up consistently across the focus groups. First, students expressed a need to adopt new strategies for learning course content. For example, one of the Latinx students described himself as an extrovert and said that he learned best through conversations with other students and engaging in collaborative study groups. Another highlighted the need to be a more self-directed and independent learner, which was markedly different than what was required of her before the transition to remote learning. She shared:

*I feel like I definitely have to be more self-disciplined and organized and really stick to my schedule, even when I'm just at home for the day because it's really easy to just like zone out when you're at home.*

The experiences varied for the students participating in the disproportionately impacted (DI) white student focus group. One student shared that their high school was an entirely online experience. Thus, the transition to remote learning at NVC was,

*...kind of normal for me. Um, I will say that I do better in a classroom situation. I enjoy it more. So, going back to online I don't feel like I wasn't able to figure anything out, I would say, I'm pretty adept at online learning.*

This participant found that a virtual learning environment allowed him an opportunity to take more courses since he was unable to secure a job during the pandemic. Alternatively, another DI white student found it more challenging to retain information during online courses than in person. This was partially due to limited access to reliable Wi-Fi. The student reflected,

*I mean, there were times when I would drive to the campus to get the free campus Wi-Fi at night and just sit in my car. And I will say as far as technology, the campus Wi-Fi sucks. It's awful and everybody knows this is one of the worst public Wi-Fi systems. It crashes constantly incredibly hard.*

Students who had learning disabilities felt especially impacted by the transition to remote learning. These students noted difficulties accessing course materials online, staying engaged, and focusing on lectures. Several participants commented that most faculty struggled with the transition themselves. One DI white student shared,

*I was taking business law last semester and then COVID hit and the [professor] didn't even have Canvas, which is like our campus' default even*

*before COVID. So I know that transition to online was very hard for him. It was hard for students as well because we were not able to view our grades or like submit anything online. We constantly tried to email him. We didn't know what our grades looked like because he wasn't able to, to, you know, use the online platform properly. Now I feel like they've had a little bit more time to adjust.*

Participants expressed displeasure with faculty who relied on single methods of instruction. For example, students taking primarily synchronous courses found it challenging to focus on class lectures while simultaneously taking notes. Some students with disabilities stated that accessing the PowerPoint ahead of time would have aided their learning. On the other hand, faculty who defaulted exclusively to recorded lectures failed to incorporate synchronous engagement that

students often preferred. Despite these challenges, participants credited most faculty with being supportive and flexible during the transition to remote learning.

A second challenge consistently faced by participants was the need for a conducive learning environment at home. For most students, managing distractions at home was difficult, and they found themselves feeling “lazy” or with “no motivation to wake up.” One Filipina American student shared, *“Sometimes it's easier to just watch TV or do laundry.”* The lack of a routine made it difficult for students to be productive. Since students no longer had the same access to the library or other academic learning spaces on campus, they had to create these in their homes. However, a few participants noted that they shared a home with family members—some of whom were also students, and, thus, space was a premium. One Latinx student reflected,

*Yeah, my sisters are also doing their school online and like it's all of us at home, and then on Thursdays when I have class, it can get noisy really easily.*

Similarly, a participant in the LGBTQ+ focus group vented:

*I just hate not having my own space, I feel like I'm very, I like to separate my study space in my home. I really am missing that environment where everybody really comes together and is in the same environment to like study together. I'm also very, I'm very extroverted, so like for me, it's been even harder because that's how I connect with others and learn material at the same time.*

Finally—although this challenge was not widely experienced by all participants, a substantial number of them noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had a

negative impact on their mental health. Exasperating this challenge was the limited access they had to mental health counseling services. One Latinx student shared:

*For myself, it had like a huge impact on my mental health, I didn't have the opportunity to get a therapist through the Mesa STEM Center, and it was all it was free. But luckily, I haven't had the need to go back, but I know it's there and I'm very aware of it.*

A participant in the LGBTQ+ focus group expressed that she felt depressed and alone during the pandemic. Despite being a student leader and having invested a substantial amount of time supporting others, she felt that the campus did little to check in on her during this dark and difficult time. This was coupled with her frustration that not many others, particularly therapists, could relate to her salient identities. Further, one DI white student felt

the compounded effects of stress, anxiety, and PTSD while attempting to find affordable housing and working to make ends meet.

Overall, what participants appreciated most from faculty was flexibility and understanding. Students found that faculty who understood external pressures due to COVID-19 were more likely to engage students both academically and personally. Participants also appreciated the accessibility to campus resources, such as tutoring, the library, and the Mesa STEM Center. One of the Latinx students shared that they received emails about “loaner laptops and hotspots.” Latinx, LGBTQ+, and DI white students expressed thanks for the campus library being open. Students in the Filipino American group were appreciative of the tutoring services. One recommendation that students had, however, related to scheduling counseling appointments. While participants agreed that the counseling services, including the ConexED

and Cranium Café platforms were helpful, they felt that many students were not well oriented about how to utilize the programs to schedule appointments. Thus, students suggested this be better reviewed on the website or at new student orientation.

#### **4. PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL RECKONING IN THE U.S.**

The final issue we explored in this project was the impact of the calls for racial justice that took place in response to George Floyd's tragic murder. Recall that on May 25, 2020, a Minneapolis police officer was recorded on a cell phone restricting Floyd's breathing by placing his knee on Floyd's neck for nearly 9 minutes. This event sparked protests across the U.S. and around the globe, as citizens were outraged by decades of systemic oppression and policing. We asked participants to share their perceptions of this racial reckoning and how it impacted their relationships with others.

Students were largely in favor of the step toward addressing systemic oppression in the U.S. One of the DI white students shared that she grew up in a predominately Black community on the east coast and juxtaposed her experiences there with what she has experienced in Napa.

*I was raised in New York, integrated with a Black community. I am shocked with how many people still don't get it...Napa is one of the whitest places. But the campus has more diversity because you have students coming from beyond Napa. There's more interactions between Latinx and white students on campus, but not in the community. I'm always uncomfortably aware of how white Napa is.*

Like this student, others recognized the disconnect between racial/ethnic diversity of the campus and the lack thereof

in the surrounding campus community. For example, one Latinx participant reflected deeply about the lack of awareness from faculty about their lived experiences:

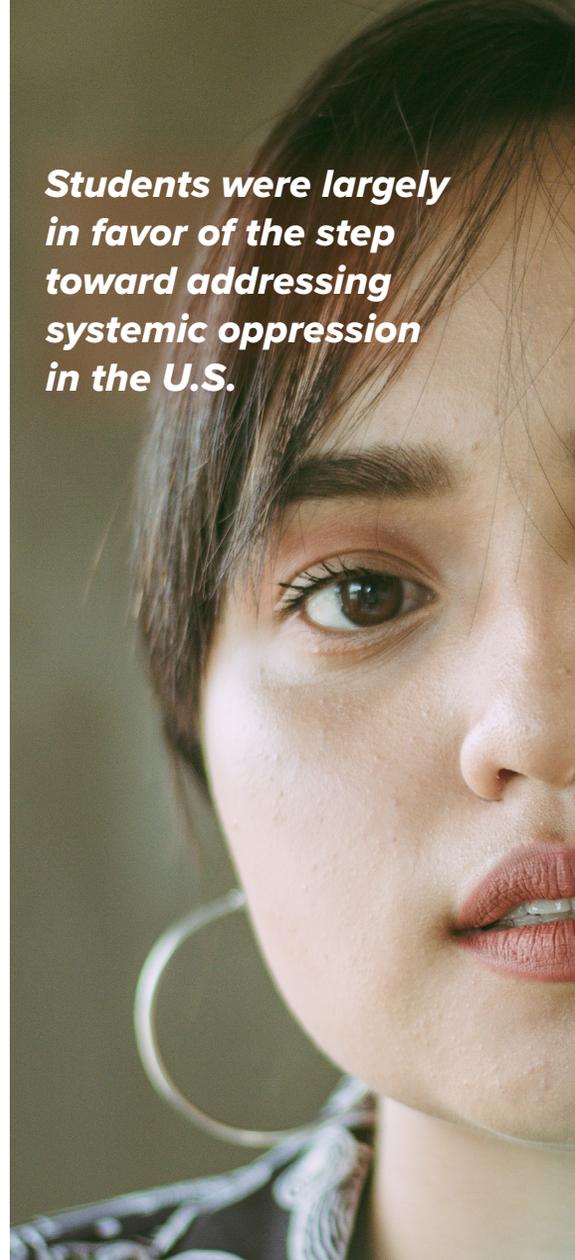
*I remember one math teacher, she took a whole class just to talk about the George Floyd murder. But all she did was talk about it. She didn't really say what options were, or what to do, or how to handle it. It was just a "you gotta know that this is going on," and we're like, "yeah, we know! We watch the news." I feel like they don't really know what goes on over here. So they're like, just repeating what they see on the news. I would have rather have learned math that day. Everything she said, I was like, "Yeah, I noticed. I live here." All I gotta do is look outside to see what you're talking about.*

Similarly, a student from the LGBTQ+ community expressed concerns about the anti-Black and homophobic sentiments in the surrounding area.

*If I bring up anything about LGBTQ or BLM, I could sense some people being resistant and hostile to it. Napa is a good area, but there are still a lot of people who are republican, conservative. There is a rich history of KKK affiliation in the region. However, on campus, a lot of staff are open to LGBTQ communities. We also get a lot of students from Vallejo and Fairfield that help shift the campus climate. There's a resistance on campus — but it's a quiet resistance. The college is supportive, but I wonder whether they do it because it's performative [reputation/image] or is it genuine.*

Many students also expressed disappointment with faculty who did not take any time during class to acknowledge what was happening or provide space for students to dialogue. A student in the LGBTQ+ focus group referenced a statement released by the campus president in response to the BLM protests. From their perspective, the statement did not have the impact and seriousness that students expected to see. The Black community was not happy about it and saw it as “stale” and “vague.” Participants also noted a lag in time between when the racial reckoning began and when the president’s message was sent to the campus community (it took too long). From their perspective, this was indicative of lacking concern for the plight of Black students at that time. The statement also failed to provide concrete actions that the college planned to take to support the Black community, which was also a point of contention.

***Students were largely in favor of the step toward addressing systemic oppression in the U.S.***



Based on the findings reported herein, we offer the following recommendations to inform the efforts of educators to improve student experiences and outcomes for disproportionately impacted students at Napa Valley College:

### 1. ENCOURAGE FACULTY TO EMPLOY INTRUSIVE SUPPORT PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a declining economy, many students are having to decide if now is the best time for them to be enrolled in school or if it would be better to invest their time and resources in other, perhaps more important, endeavors, such as earning income or taking care of family members. Ideally, students will feel supported by the College and the educators that serve them in a way that enables them to not see this as an either/or proposition. Intrusive support practices, including those that provide transparency from the outset about how to be successful in a course, and practices that integrate academic support into the course are essential in this regard. Short videos and guides that teach students how to access course learning materials and resources remotely are also valuable during this period of remote instruction. Faculty should also ensure that any campus resources available

to support students experiencing basic needs, insecurities, mental health concerns, and financial challenges are known and shared with students in course syllabi. The same can be said for community resources that are available to students as well.

### 2. MAKE COURSE CONTENT CULTURALLY-INCLUSIVE AND RELEVANT

Cultural relevance entails centering diverse students in every aspect of the course, including, but not limited to: course readings, guest speakers, learning styles, and issues addressed in the course. This recommendation aims to disrupt longstanding teaching and learning practices that sustain white supremacy, colonial ideology, and patriarchal and cisnormative social influences. When faculty intentionally take the time to affirm students' identities and lived experiences in the classroom, students develop a host of positive psychosocial and non-cognitive outcomes, including intrinsic interest, sense of belonging, degree utility, and racial/ethnic affinity, to name a few. It may be worth considering identifying a group of faculty with expertise in culturally inclusive and relevant andragogy who can serve as "faculty fellows" to provide leadership and guidance for building campus-wide capacity in this area. In the same vein, counseling faculty who work with students in making academic and career decisions should

be mindful of how cultural-familial expectations shape students' aspirations. The goal here will be for counselors to better support students struggling to negotiate internalized conflicts due to personal and familial expectations regarding their studies and careers.

### **3. SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT LGBTQ+ RESOURCES, COMMUNITIES, AND ACTIVITIES DURING OUTREACH EVENTS**

Students who participated in the LGBTQ+ focus group suggested that more information about the student organization and other campus supports be shared during outreach activities. From their perspectives, knowing that the College has a visible and thriving LGBTQ+ community would be the difference between students and families choosing to attend NVC or another institution. In addition, sharing this information on the campus' orientation website would also be an important step toward helping prospective students recognize the vitality of NVC's LGBTQ+ community.

### **4. CREATE AN LGBTQ+ LEARNING COMMUNITY**

The students who participated in the LGBTQ+ focus group expressed a need for an academic home for the LGBTQ+ community and allies. Thus, it may be worthwhile for the College to create an LGBTQ+ learning community. Students suggested pairing a recently approved English course that focuses on Gender and Sexuality with an LGBTQ+ Studies course. From their perspectives, a learning community would support intellectual engagement on the culture and contributions of the LGBTQ+ community. However, it would also demonstrate a greater level of commitment from the institution. Similarly, students suggested that the College encourage all faculty to be more intentional about incorporating readings, assignments, guest speakers, and dialogue about gender identity and gender expression into their courses. They also encouraged that more faculty adhere to gender pronouns and desired names when communicating with students.



***The tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, and far too many other People of Color in 2020 sparked a racial reckoning and awakening in the United States that was felt by the focus group’s participants.***

## 5. BE RACE-CONSCIOUS

The tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, and far too many other People of Color in 2020 sparked a racial reckoning and awakening in the United States that was felt by the focus group’s participants. The students shared two notable concerns that warrant the attention of all educators at the College. First, some were disappointed at the institution’s response and expressed concern about a statement released by the leadership—perceiving it as poorly timed (too late) and vague. Students were also disappointed with faculty who did not take the time to simply acknowledge that the national events were occurring and recognize that these were difficult times, particularly for the Black community. Given these concerns, we highly recommend that the institution and all educators take a more race-conscious approach to working with and supporting students. This should include efforts to connect course content to systemic oppression, and the lived experiences of minoritized communities, making courses culturally relevant by acknowledging the contributions of diverse people of the field, and creating space for dialogue when issues that impact minoritized communities occur. Executive leaders at the institution should be intentional about releasing statements in response to issues that impact minoritized communities that are: 1) timely, 2) transparent in denouncing racism and systemic

oppression, 3) clearly outline concrete actions that the college will take to address systemic oppression internally, and 4) extend resources and support that are available to students impacted by the issue.

## 6. CONTINUE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE ACUTE BASIC NEEDS INSECURITIES

For several years now, the College has enacted efforts to support students who experience basic needs insecurities as a part of a larger effort to eliminate barriers to student success. One of many unfortunate consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic was its disproportionate impact on students and communities already struggling to meet their basic needs. Because of this, the college must continue to support students who experience acute basic needs insecurities. Having access to meal cards, food pantries, bus passes, hotel vouchers, laptop computers, hot spots, and other resources that help students meet their basic needs will often be the difference between students' persistence and withdrawing from the institution. Therefore, the College must do what it can to continue offering this support to students. Using Federal CARES Act funding strategically to help ease the financial impact of the pandemic so students can remain in school is critical at this time.

## 7. ADDRESS CONCERNS REGARDING ACCESS TO ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES DUE TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and transition to remote learning also required the campus to convert most academic support services online. Participants in the focus groups shared that this transition made it difficult for them to access critical support services such as tutoring, the library, and the MESA/STEM Center. The students shared that while programming continued to be offered by the College, accessing them through platforms like Zoom and Cranium Café required some retooling on their part and sometimes on the educators who were delivering these services. While remote learning is expected to be temporary, the College should assess both the efficacy and access of these services for as long as they continue to be offered online.

## 8. EXPAND ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

Participants spoke candidly about experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns that made it difficult for them to maximize their potential as students. Students also shared that while the College provided mental health counseling,

accessing this service was challenging due to limited capacity. Thus, the campus should identify ways to expand its capacity to support students' mental health, which may entail hiring more professionals. In addition, the College may also consider partnering with licensed professionals off campus who can provide mental health support at little to no charge to NVC students.

## 9. SUPPORT STUDENTS IN BUILDING ONLINE STUDY GROUPS AND OTHER INFORMAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

One of the key findings from this study was the ways in which the transition to remote learning has adversely affected students in building and sustaining community with their peers. Thus, the College should identify creative ways to support students in establishing online study groups and other informal learning communities akin to those afforded to them in physical campus spaces like the library and MESA/STEM center. Instructors can also support this effort by building collaborative workgroups into their courses. Faculty who take this approach must be intentional in making sure students have the tools and resources they need to collaborate effectively. Faculty should also build time into their courses to periodically check in with groups.

*Instructors can also support this effort by building collaborative workgroups into their courses.*

A young man with dark hair and a light beard, wearing a blue denim shirt, is shown in profile from the waist up. He is looking towards the right, where a bright, hazy background suggests a body of water and a bright sky. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a contemplative mood.

## 10. CREATE ENGAGING ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly thrust nearly every postsecondary institution in the U.S. into remote learning. Most faculty members were not prepared to make this transition. Consequently, many did their best to deliver some level of quality instruction to students. For some faculty, this meant recording lectures and other content and delivering it to students asynchronously. Understandably, this was necessary for many faculty under these circumstances. However, the focus group participants confirmed that recorded lectures and asynchronous engagement are not desirable or conducive to learning. Thus, the College must support faculty in employing a broader range of online teaching and learning approaches. Real-world case studies and other problem-based activities, online debates, blogging, interviews, and other experiential learning strategies that can be done online are examples of what faculty may consider employing in their remote classes. The College should also identify faculty who have expertise in creating engaging online learning experiences and invite them to coach and work with their faculty colleagues who need support in this area.

## 11. DEVISE A STRATEGY TO ACT ON THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THIS REPORT

Both the findings and recommendations offered herein provide a promising direction for actions that the College can take to meet disproportionately-impacted students' needs. These findings and recommendations should be considered with those offered for the African American Focus Group project conducted two years ago. Such recommendations should be integrated into a comprehensive institutional equity strategy to close opportunity gaps in student success and improve the sense of belonging, validation, and welcomeness to engage for these students. Of course, this strategy must be aligned with the College's Institutional Strategic Plan and other planning efforts.

1. What are your salient identities and how important is your identity as a [salient identity] to you?
2. What is it like to be a [salient identity] at this college?
  - To what extent do you believe your identity as [salient identity] has impacted your experiences in college?
3. To what extent do you feel welcome as [salient identity] at this college?
4. Please describe your interactions with educators at Napa Valley College.
  - Who are some key people on campus that convey messages of encouragement and support (“you belong here,” “you can do it” “you have what it takes to be successful”)?
5. To what extent do you see your salient identity in the curriculum?
  - How can faculty best support your learning in their classes?
6. To what extent do you see your salient identity acknowledged by Napa Valley College?
  - How can the college best support you as a [salient identity]?
7. To what extent do you feel supported by family members, partners, and/or friends?
  - In what ways have family members, partners, and/or friends supported your educational and career goals?
8. Thinking about your identity as a [salient identity], what challenges have you experienced (if any) with gaining support from others, that has impacted your experiences in college?

9. What has it been like adjusting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
10. As a result of having to switch to remote learning, what academic challenges have you experienced?
11. How has NVC (professors, staff, admin) supported you during this time?
  - What have you found most helpful? What have you found challenging?
12. What personal or mental health challenges have you experienced as a result of COVID-19?
  - For example, work, transportation, housing, regular access to food, family responsibilities?
13. How have you coped with these challenges?
14. How has the increased call for racial justice impacted your well-being and/or relationships with others?
15. How has NVC (professors, staff, admin) supported you?
  - What have you found most helpful? What have you found challenging?
16. To what extent have you used campus services or other resources since the COVID-19 pandemic? (e.g., tutoring, counseling, career services, financial aid)
  - How helpful or important are these services to your success?
17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as [salient identity] at NVC?



THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

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“

My family has always doubted me when it came to education, but my friends here keep me motivated and make me want to strive for more. I appreciate them all so much.

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