



## Ensure Students Are Learning:

### A Definition of Equity-Minded, Asset-Based Teaching

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As educators across sectors seek to advance opportunities for every student, less universal is a fundamental common understanding and level setting of what exactly is meant by equitable postsecondary pathways and outcomes. The [Guided Pathways Model](#) is one tool to get students on a path to college and careers. Embedded in the framework of Guided Pathways is ensuring that all students are learning. A precursor to getting students on a pathway as well as keeping students on the path are nuanced understandings and application of equity-minded practices. However, being an equity-minded educator requires having critical cultural awareness and not engaging in race neutrality.

A shared vocabulary and universal language around building an equity-minded, asset-based instructional culture of teaching and learning is needed. Below are a few key terms that should be operationalized in practice to ensure all students are learning.

**Asset-Based Teaching** incorporates approaches such as employing culturally relevant materials and assignments through the use of culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Asset-based teaching does not perpetuate deficit perspectives and consciously acknowledges students as a resource that provides intellectual capital and contributions to teaching and learning (Civil, 2017).

**Critical Cultural Awareness** is understanding that there is no one-size-fits-all model and that the personhood of individuals is laden with culture since any practice not grounded in advancing the whole person will not advance equitable outcomes if it is not organized from the outset with attention to culture, especially with respect to marginalized groups (Christopher et al., 2014).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching** involves conscious awareness that “culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment” (Gay, 2018, p. 8). Instructors modify pedagogical approaches to incorporate classroom interactions that reflect students’ cultural values, which subsequently shapes learning. Culturally responsive teaching “centers classroom instruction in multiethnic frames of reference” (p. xxvii).

**Equity-Mindedness** includes being informed by

current statistics on demographics of students, faculty, and staff and monitoring intersectional inequity at the course, program, and campus levels such as across race, ethnicity, gender, social class, disability, etc. (Bensimon, 2007).

The aforementioned terms provide some level setting and serve as navigational signposts to inform and amplify culturally responsive classroom practices. Equity-minded educators reflect on institution-based dysfunctions, cognizant of racialized institutional structures and exclusionary routines that negatively impact access and outcomes (Bensimon, 2018). Therefore, connecting to your students’ experiences and designing course activities/assignments with their cultural background in mind is imperative. As a reflective practitioner, consider how you will build upon the assets of the diverse learners in your course or department. Then move beyond reflection to action. For an expanded discussion on this topic, see Zamani-Gallaher (2020).

## References

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