

Texas Minority Serving Community Colleges Support Success and Equitable Outcomes through Resource Sharing

by Randi Congleton, OCCRL Research Assistant

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) serve an important role in educating our nation's diverse students. On October 14–15, Richland College, located in Dallas Texas, in collaboration with the Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving–Institution (AANAPISI) Program will host the first [Minority Serving Institution \(MSI\) Convening](#) of institutions, faculty, practitioners, and researchers from across the country to share resources and to develop strategies in support of MSIs.

The purpose of the MSI convening is for representatives from MSIs to come together and discuss effective research, initiatives and programs that impact the academic success of students at two-year and four-year colleges and universities. This year's convening will focus on current research and evidence, and how moving forward institutions can identify more robust methods for determining the success of programs and initiatives at MSI's in order to improve, obtain funding, and effect change at our institutions. The idea for the MSI Convening came about as Richland College concluded work on the college's first AANAPISI grant. College faculty and staff wanted to determine the most effective capacity-building strategies to achieve and sustain student success for colleges that serve large percentages of minority students. To that end, Richland College proposed a national annual gathering of MSIs to share research for what works, the methodology behind successful initiatives, and how to replicate and scale good approaches. Richland College would like to create an ongoing platform that assists MSI designated colleges in these efforts. The MSI convening planning team consists of:

2016 MSI Convening – Richland College, Dallas County Community College District

- Dr. Kay Eggleston, President
- Dr. Zarina Blankenbaker – Executive Vice President/Project Director
- Dr. Jennifer Baggett – Biology Faculty, Co-Chair
- Professor Rey Flores – Criminal Justice and Government Faculty, Co-Chair
- Professor M.T. Hickman – Travel, Exposition and Meeting Management Faculty, Co-Chair
- Dr. LaQueta L. Wright – Sociology Faculty, Co-Chair

Randi Congleton, Graduate Research Assistant, interviewed the convening planning team for the Minority Serving Institution (MSI) Convening to learn more about the educational context of community colleges in Texas and the role of MSI's in improving educational pathways.

Can you tell me about the two-year context in Texas? In particular, what are the unique features of community college education in your state?

Community colleges in Texas take students where they are in their educational journey and empower them to move to the next level. Community colleges tend to be more nurturing for students; opportunities for face-to-face faculty interaction are greater and therefore mentoring takes place more frequently than in a four-year institution, particularly at the freshman and sophomore levels. Community colleges in Texas are committed to the support and success of all students regardless of their levels of preparation. This support is manifested through mentoring and tutoring centers, a variety of schedule modalities to meet every need, student clubs and support organizations and intensive case-management for those who require it.

Texas does not have a statewide system of governance for community colleges. Each college is governed independently, with separate boards of trustees, by the county and/or city in which they reside. Community colleges are partially funded by the state through reimbursement for contact hours but increasingly, a larger portion of the funding comes from student tuition and county taxpayers. While public community colleges in Texas are not governed through a statewide system, each college reports to the Texas Coordinating Board of Higher Education and adheres to standards for course offerings. Because of this, students typically have no problem transferring between community colleges in Texas and to universities due to articulation agreements and a standard core.

What do you see as the value of MSIs to the larger goal of supporting educational pathways?

MSIs are key to increasing the number of students who successfully complete college since these colleges design targeted support mechanisms for meeting individual student needs. Many colleges with MSI grants have student navigators who guide, direct, and mentor minority students, many of whom may be low-income and/or first-generation college students creating not only equal opportunity but also equitable opportunity. Students who feel the support of their institution are more likely to complete their degree program or educational path. Minority serving institutions provide a place where students can find targeted support services and a community of students with similar experiences.

What do you see as the opportunities, challenges, and differences across MSI designations?

Opportunities are abundant to increase higher education access among historically underserved minority student populations, especially through grant funding. Doing so will (a) increase diversity in the workplace at all levels, (b) improve the standard of living for all Americans, and (c) increase American competitiveness in the global workplace. As we work together through conferences like the MSI Convening, we can come together to reduce differences and improve communication and collaboration.

The primary challenge across all MSIs is the assumption that uniformity exists within ethnic groups. Very often insufficient consideration is given to various cultural differences, especially among Hispanic and Asian students who may come from a variety of countries across the globe. The challenge is in meeting those diverse needs while not compromising rigor and while maintaining academic rigor and consistency. Another challenge are the differences across MSI designations. Differences exist between institutions and how they assess the success of programs and initiatives, which makes it difficult to compare data, replicate programs, and make significant impact across the United States.

To what extent are students cognizant of and/or intentional about enrolling in a minority serving community college as opposed to a predominately white two- or four-year institution?

Students at Richland College have told us they enroll here because they feel comfortable and accepted. It is not clear that they enroll because we are an MSI, but they definitely notice the diversity and they appreciate it. A young woman on a recent student panel remarked that she was impressed when her professor walked in the first day and the professor "looked like her."

What future research and policy initiatives do you feel are needed in advancing two-year MSIs?

Future research needs to focus on determining which student success strategies actually work and the methods to replicate and scale these initiatives. Particularly at the community college, staffing is an issue. Unlike at a four-year college or university, where quantitative research is often faculty-led and supported by graduate students and post-doctoral researchers, community colleges primarily rely on a limited number of administrators and staff who are asked to design, implement, and evaluate research on student needs, programs, and initiatives across the entire college.

There is a need to expand the research capacity of two-year institutions and communication between all institutions so each institution is not forced to reinvent the wheel. The purpose of the MSI Convening is to look at the current strategies and programs colleges are using so we can look at the data that exists now and discuss ideas to improve that data and help us reach a consensus on which practices are promising and warrant more research and implementation at other colleges, as well as what faculty and administrators can do to support these efforts. Because Richland is new to hosting the MSI Convening, and this shift in focus from programs to the data we collect about programs is also new, we do not currently have specific suggestions of strategies or policy initiatives. Instead, we hope this year's conference will provide us with answers to those questions.

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Register online by Friday, September 30.
richlandcollege.edu/msi-convening

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