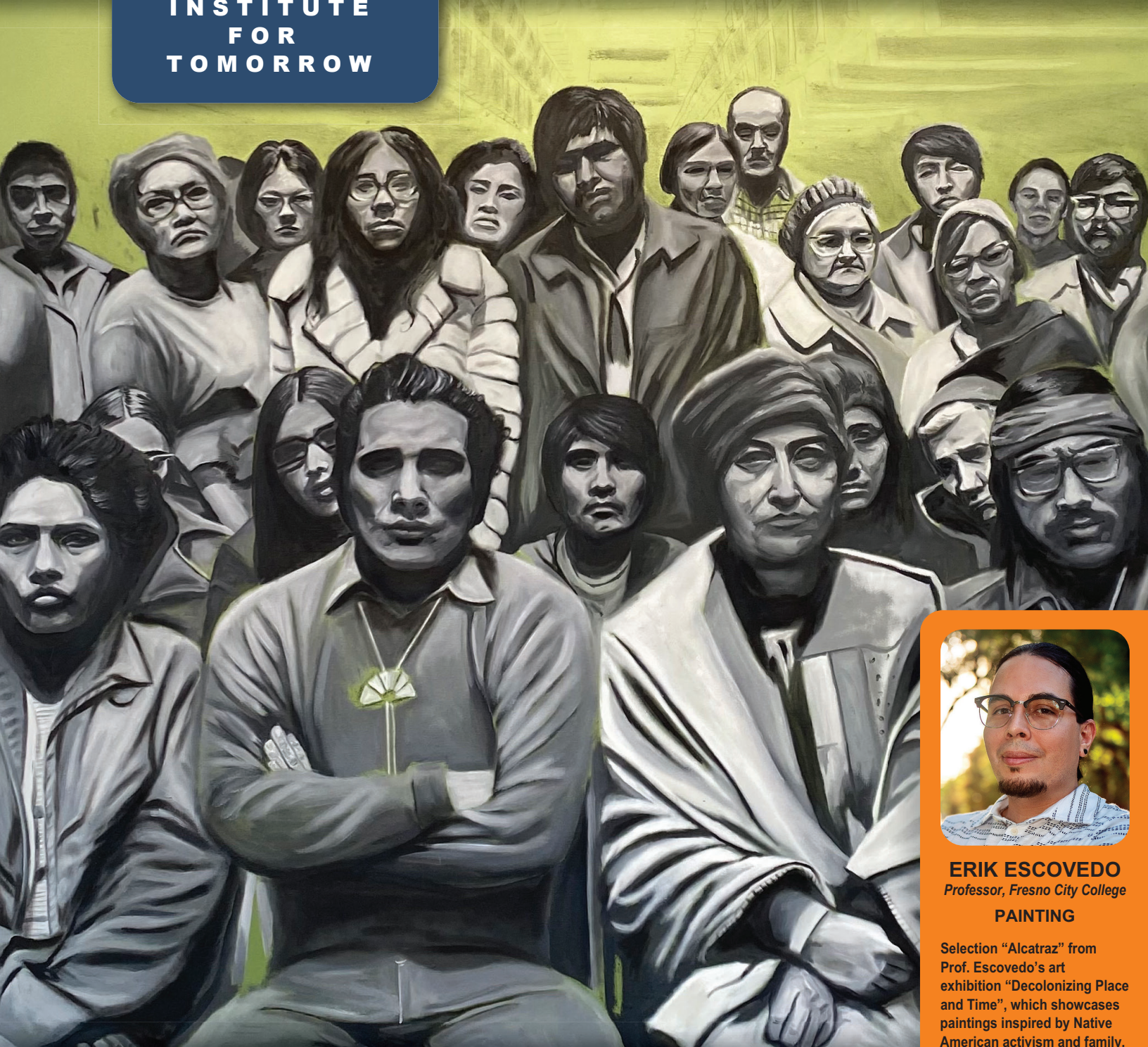




LEADERSHIP
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YOUR VOICE

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ERIK ESCOVEDO
Professor, Fresno City College

PAINTING

Selection "Alcatraz" from Prof. Escovedo's art exhibition "Decolonizing Place and Time", which showcases paintings inspired by Native American activism and family.

A11Y 6/2/23



DR. DING-JO H CURRIE
Director - LIFT

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Ding-Jo H Currie is the distinguished faculty of higher education leadership and founding director of Leadership Institute for Tomorrow. She is former Chancellor of Coast Community College District.

The authors featured in this issue provide a compelling reminder of the importance of honoring our personal histories and ancestral roots. They demonstrate how our experiences shape our perspectives, and how we can draw on our cultural values to make a difference in the lives of others.

As always, **Dr. Shelly Hsu** offers best practice recommendations for supporting student success.

Trustee **Mary Hornbuckle** testifies to the power of lived experience. Her time as a returning community college student enabled her to see firsthand the challenges faced by non-traditional students, and inspired her to become a public servant dedicated to their success. Her story highlights why safeguarding the success of non-traditional students is a principal value for her.

Similarly, **Dr. Morenike Adebayo-Ige** is shining example of how faculty of color can use their personal backgrounds to enrich the learning

experiences of their students. By incorporating her Yoruba roots into her teaching, she is able to model the importance of cultural pride and identity, and help her students connect with their own cultural roots.

Vice President Melanie Dixon shows the power of using her voice to empower others. By speaking out about the importance of embracing our roots and cultural strengths, she is able to amplify the importance of embracing the gifts and strengths of our own roots and communities.

Dr. William Vega writes a heartfelt tribute to his father's legacy, and a reminder of the impact that

one person can have on their community. By following in his father's footsteps and working in the community colleges himself, Dr. Vega is able to honor his father's memory while also making a meaningful contribution to the lives of his students.

Dr. Abdimalik Buul, working at the system level, is a powerful example of how one person can make a difference on a broad scale. By championing the importance of honoring our roots and cultural identities, he is able to effect change not just in one community, but across the entire system.

The raw and poignant voice of community college student **Shane Lara** takes us on a deeply personal journey, one that speaks to the importance of connection, struggling, belonging, identity and to wholeness with hope. His poem is a must read.

Professor Erik Escovedo and his art serve as an evocative call to action of the ongoing struggle for Native American rights and representation. This masterpiece heightens the visibility of his community and draw attention to their adversity and injustices.

These articles remind us that our personal histories and cultural roots are not just important to us as individuals, but to the communities we serve. They demonstrate the transformative potential of one person's voice and actions, and invite us to reflect on our own roots as we create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all.



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MARY HORNBUCKLE

*President, Board of Trustees,
Coast Community College District*

Digging into Community College Roots

I was never a traditional California community college student, if there is such a thing.

I grew up in Indiana, went one year to a four-year college, then to a vocational training school, followed by marriage and a move to California. When my husband and I started our family, I realized how little I knew about raising children and decided to check out the local community college offerings for some help. My husband had just completed his AA and urged me to go back to school.

Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa had a program called The Redwood Cottage, housed in a former Army air base building and shaded by old trees, designed so that 2- to 5-year-olds and their mothers can learn together. It met my needs perfectly, so in 1968 I signed up.

The instructors were experienced early childhood teachers who worked with the children for the first 90 minutes while the mothers observed and took notes.

Then the instructors met with the mothers to discuss their observations while assistants supervised the children at play. Not only did the program provide the education I needed, it also gave me a new set of friends with children the same age as mine.

Since I enjoyed working with Redwood Cottage children, the instructor encouraged me to take more early childhood education classes at Orange Coast. I signed up for one evening class each semester, finishing the program with an early childhood education certificate just as my second

child aged out of the Redwood Cottage and was ready for kindergarten. Not exactly a fast track to education!

With my children in elementary school, I was able to take on a part-time job in early childhood education, and after several years I was invited to become the preschool director. I realized I needed more education, so I turned to Orange Coast College again. Once more, they had just the program I needed. I also tried television courses offered by Coastline Community College before the advent of online education, but did not find them to be right for me. As with so many students today, the in-person model worked best.

By this time, my daughters had completed high school and were on their own higher education journeys. The older one went straight to California State University, Long Beach, returning to Orange Coast College for a summer math refresher course. The younger one took her own sweet time, enrolling in Orange Coast, changing her major three times, and finally graduating with her associate degree, after five years – another non-traditional student.

Fast forward several more years: While I had a satisfying career, I always felt I had unfinished business; I wanted a four-year degree. So back to Orange Coast I went to finish up the general education classes I needed, while at the same time enrolling in Southern California College (now Vanguard University) in Costa Mesa. At the age of 51 I graduated with honors in the same month my youngest daughter graduated from California State University, Fullerton.

Along the way, I have had some wonderful experiences. I was elected to the Costa Mesa City Council in 1984, serving twelve years – including two as mayor. In 2005 I was appointed to the Coast Community College District board, then elected and am now serving my 17th year. Remembering my educational roots has helped me as a trustee.

I can identify with the students who are on a non-traditional path to education. I know giving them strong roots will help them grow their own strong branches.





DR. MORENIKE ADEBAYO-IGE

Professor
Antelope Valley College

My Profession, My Culture: The Meeting Point

In the Yoruba culture of southwestern Nigeria when I was growing up, teachers are held in great honor and respect.

Known as *Olùkòṣì*, which means “One who teaches another,” southwest Nigerian teachers not only impart knowledge, but guide, nurture, and live exemplary lifestyles. They are the community sages, illuminating every child’s future and sometimes mediating between parents and their troublesome wards. These factors strengthened my resolve to be a teacher — to guide, nurture, and serve as a bridge. They still influence my teaching philosophy, and my belief that you cannot teach me unless you know me. In other words, the affective precedes the cognitive.

Many years after this realization, I became a teacher, earning a combined bachelor’s degree in English and education at the University of Ilorin in Kwara State, Nigeria. I started my career at a Nigerian tertiary institution, similar to an American community college.

When my family emigrated to the United States in the mid-1990s, I taught in middle and high schools on the East Coast for a few years. However, I decided to try college when we moved to California in 2008, because I had already earned my master’s degree from Lincoln University, near Philadelphia. Though my experience as an American secondary school teacher was a huge shock compared to my cultural background, I never forgot my responsibilities to my students as *Olùkòṣì*. The more I felt like quitting teaching, the more my heart reached out to my students and their needs, giving me the willpower to continue.

Teaching at the college level was a lot easier, given the maturity of the students. Still, my role has remained the same, from my years as an adjunct in several community colleges in Southern California’s Inland Empire to my current full-time faculty position at Antelope Valley College in Lancaster.

The Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges, known as the RP Group, lists six student success factors in no particular order: Directed, Nurtured, Focused, Guided, Valued, and Engaged — all of which I can tie to the role of *Olùkòṣì*, though under different settings and strategies.

Because of my cultural background, I value my students enough to learn to call them by their first names within the first few weeks of the semester, thus building engagement. Valuing them ensures everyone is heard, and every culture is celebrated via the literary genres I assign for reading, writing, or discussion. This creates a sense of connection and community within the class, whether in-person or online.

This validates how collaboration is crucial in my culture, as the *Olùkòṣì* joins with the parents to guide their students in the direction best for them — a precise interplay between formal and informal education, the latter being the training received from home. Hence, my culture guides my responsibilities as a faculty member to care for my students’ academic needs by going the extra mile to create the ideal classroom environment for teaching, learning and collaborating.

My culture also reminds me to model leadership traits, such as kindness, hard work, reflection, etc., for my students to exhibit these traits in their academic and life success. This is the attribute of “walking the talk,” which is crucial because education in my culture goes beyond learning to read and write; it is having a holistic growth and success mindset.

The *Olùkòṣì*, as a model of those traits, is the epitome of excellence and honor. A saying in my Yoruba culture is, “*Èṣin iwájú ni tẹ̀yìn ń wò sàré,*” meaning the horse behind watches the one at the front to run. This is a metaphor for several life lessons. In this context, I am the horse at the front who must live an exemplary life and pave the way for my students’ success as they run to be where I am and hopefully surpass me — another culturally welcoming desire.

John Maxwell, a world-renowned leadership guru and author, stated that “Culture eats strategy for breakfast,” affirming the power of individual cultural forces over any career or business strategy. My culture is my story and who I am, and no matter how many strategies I learn, they will most likely not work for me until I fit them into who I am.

I can boldly state that my cultural values as an educator from the southwestern part of Nigeria prepared me to support my students for college success, just as listed by the RP Group. Thus, a teacher remains the same, whether in the world’s most advanced country or the remotest village in developing nations.

Teaching is a calling and a profession of the heart more than that of the head — and so my African teaching heartbeat made me a better educator in the American educational system.



SHANE LARA

Student
Fresno City College

Unfinished Goals

I fought for years to have a sense of belonging, yet it is easy to feel defeated, it's too easy to become pissed and heated when my resources have been feeling depleted with my failures being repeated.

*Inside my head when setbacks once again struck, telling me I'm not enough
but I wanted that relationship to place, a safer space
that I wanted to reside among me, the sense of culture gave me a drive and kept me hungry
while others couldn't even stomach me, twenty years old when I made it home and I didn't
have the luxury.*

*To be born with my language and my pride, I wanted to be unseen I wanted to hide because I felt
silenced from all of the verbal violence.*

*Cause I've been hurt, and I've been burned, I am a college student who left but now I've returned
because my professors gave me everything to ignite my passion to learn
and I consider myself blessed and lucky, to return and flourish in my major of American Indian studies.*

*I am blessed, that the rain program praises my success
yet keeps me humble, stands by my side when I academically struggle
and make the process a bit more clear 'cause without the guidance I wouldn't be standing here.*

*I fight to spread the message as a poetry combatant, they gave me a platform to share and
nurture my talents helped paint my future with more than just an image, it truly takes a village
to make a successful student, to build a leader who will continue the movement.*

*Because money is material and greed is forever tempting, it's the guidance we are depending, the
feeling of not being heard is what makes us start resenting
like having a chip on your shoulder refusing to move it, yet they gave me this here mic and
told me to use it to express yourself, defend yourself, they lighting sage to bless myself.*

*To ease my stresses, ease my triggers, guide to me to be something bigger, and I write with so
much vigor because my professors became my mother and father figures
because my traumas left me hollow, no example up to follow
but with these teachings I can find some closure, keep my education sober.*

*And have a sense of unity, have a sense of community have a sense that I'm standing with mother earth,
that I can succeed if I put in the work and learn the joy of seeking knowledge when I
explore ready for that next step just bring me to the door.*

*So, I may continue my Destiny because my tribe brings out the best of me makes it feel like the
whole world isn't trying to bring distress against me.*

*My academics free me from the bondage of self-doubt, so I will never stop the words and phrases
that drop my mouth for an honest voice is nourishment for the soul, my trauma's push and
pull, there's no learning when your glass is already full, so I come with my cup empty to
enroll standing tall to finally finish my unfinished goals.*



MELANIE DIXON

*Vice President of Diversity,
Equity and Inclusion*

*Shoreline Community College
Shoreline, Washington*

The Roots that Shaped my Professional journey

As an African American woman, I always find myself being the exception and not the rule. For example, I am one of just eight African American female CEOs in the California Community Colleges system, which employs 139 CEOs.

I was raised in a single-parent home in Northeast Portland, Oregon, the youngest of three and the only girl – there were few things my mother was able to pass down. I recall the hand-me-down clothes, family values and most important work ethic. Having less in many respects has allowed me to do more.

Reflecting on my educational and professional journey, those rare hand-me-downs transformed me and created the path to step into the one of eight seats held by an African American female CEO.

I attended my first day at a community college campus when I was 4 years old and my mother was pursuing a certificate. I was able to watch her day in and day out commit to education for the love of family and community. I later earned my GED and associated degree for transfer from the same community college my mother did. I assumed my first job at the community college as a student leader, and later worked as a receptionist.

Those two roles set the stage for my love affair with education and transforming neighborhoods through the community college system – the system that helped my mother climb out of poverty; the system that highlighted my abilities versus many deficiencies; the system that showed me that empathy and compassion could transform lives.

After I transferred to Portland State University in summer 2005, I assumed various classified positions as a mechanism to serve and develop professionally. Always relying on the lessons my mother taught me about hard work and dedication to craft, I began to take risks professionally as a result of the limited role models I saw in the work place.

There were no Black women in the offices where I worked to show me the ropes or point out the pitfalls. I had to figure it out and press forward. This courage and persistence were acquired in my community, where I watched many families throw caution to the wind to survive day-to-day. This could be seen at the local grocery store where community members returned cans to provide a meal for their family, or on the local corner where drugs were sold to cover the cost of rent. These life experiences prepared me for my professional journey in ways I never imagined: I pursued an admissions position recruiting students of color, then became an advisor, an academic coach, an instructor, a dean, a vice president, an associate vice chancellor, and in January 2021 a college president. The risks paid off through the lessons learned from my mother, community and serving as a classified professional.

I have come to learn the importance of the classified professional and the value to students when they see people who reflect their identity. Whether being a woman or Black, I found as a classified professional my mere presence as the exception had created a new rule. The lesson is knowing your value as a classified professional and that where you start does not dictate where your journey will end. Use your voice as a tool, use your experience as a resource, and use your passion as a gift.

Be unapologetically you and acquire a work ethic that acknowledges where you stand today, but celebrates where your ethic will take you tomorrow. Embrace the gifts your roots provide as we stand on the shoulders of many, which allows us to truly be our ancestors' wildest dreams.



BEST PRACTICE COLUMN

DR. SHELLY HSU
INTERIM REGISTRAR, CSUF

With the growing demand for postsecondary degrees, community colleges become an ideal cost-efficient entry point for students compared to four-year universities.

At Cal State Fullerton, we accept roughly 4,000 transfer students for the fall semester, and 2,500 to 3,000 for the spring.

Ensuring transfer credit applicability and efficiency becomes a crucial factor for baccalaureate degree completion. To better expedite the transfer process within California postsecondary education, I examined transfer credit applicability among the associate degrees for transfer, known as ADTs, and revealed how institutional practices can enhance efficient baccalaureate degree completion for all students.

An ADT degree guarantees that the incoming student can earn a bachelor's degree in 60 or fewer units. That's a major reason that community college transfer students with ADTs have better graduation rates compared to their counterparts – and a potentially huge financial incentive for both students and universities.

The number of transfer students who are depending on timely and accurate processing of ADTs has skyrocketed.

One striking statistic: The percentage of transfer students arriving at Cal State Fullerton with ADTs (either AA-T or AS-T) increased from nearly none in 2012 to 53% in 2020. In 2022, the transfer rate reached 82.3%.

I investigated whether the curriculum alignment based on the ADTs' implementation affects transfer students' time to graduation at a California state university. The results confirmed that transfer students with an earned ADT shorten their time to degree completion. Today, most students in California attend more than one college or university prior to completing a baccalaureate degree. Improving transfer credit applicability – a course student taken from college A can be used to complete a degree requirement in college B – is the key to transfer student success.

The spirit of state Senate Bill 1440, which in 2010 created ADT, is to smooth transfer credit applicability in the most popular majors. I studied ADT successes resulting from the collaboration between California Community Colleges and California State University, and how they streamlined transferring more courses and majors to benefit all students.

To better support community college students by reducing equity gaps, we cannot solely rely on the articulation officers; the initiative for transfer credit applicability should be a movement for everyone – students, staff, faculty, and administrators – to embrace and push forward.



DR. WILLIAM VEGA

*Assistant Professor,
Business Administration
Long Beach City College*

A family tree grows deep community college roots

Education is deeply entwined within the roots of my family.

My grandmother was the only Latina graduate in her high school class in Poteet, Texas, near San Antonio. While my grandfather had only an 8th grade education, together they sent eight of their nine children to college. They saw education as a way to a better life, and they were right. Consequently, my extended family is highly educated, and I am fortunate to count scientists, lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and educators among my cousins.

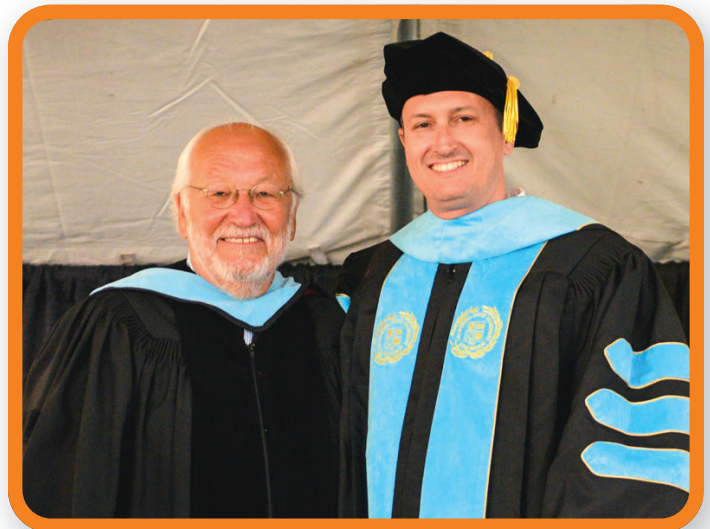
My father, Bill, had a long career in the California Community Colleges system, retiring as chancellor of the Coast Community College District in Orange County. Apparently, one doesn't simply retire from a career in education: In 2007, my father began serving students and the community college system again as a distinguished professor in the new Ed.D. program at California State University, Long Beach.

Growing up, I remember listening to my father having executive-level conversations about challenges and issues they were working through in the system. As a child, it sounded incredibly complicated and difficult, but as I grew up I began to understand how important the work of education really is. As an adult, I knew that I wanted to do work that helped people in meaningful ways and the goal of also making a career within the community college system came into focus. My climb began with a bachelor's degree from UC Berkeley.

As my commitment to a career within the community college system grew stronger, it became clear that I would need to further my education and enroll in the doctoral program at Cal State Long Beach.

One of the highlights of my experience in the doctoral program was taking my father's leadership class – only to discover that I had been taking that class for over 40 years. I realized that I had been learning from him, as well as a number of other prominent community college educators for a very long time. Needless to say, I passed the class, eventually completed the program, and had the honor of being hooded by my father.

The trajectory of my life was set into motion by my grandparents and the value they placed on education. At home, I do my best to make sure my own children value education and understand its power. Sometimes, my oldest daughter will tell me that she wants to become a dance teacher when she grows up. I smile and say we teach that at community college, too. The community college system has its roots well into my family (shout out to Cousin Greg at Cuyamaca College in Rancho San Diego!) and it remains to be seen how deep they will go.



These last few years have been challenging as an educator. There haven't been a lot of good choices, but it is still possible to make good decisions. When I'm faced with difficult decisions in my professional life, I reflect on the power of education to make a multi-generational impact on students' lives.

Then, I apply some of my father's best advice: *"Make decisions that benefit your students and everything else will work itself out."*



DR. ABDIMALIK BUUL

*Visiting Executive of Educational Excellence
Equal Employment Opportunity Program
Student Equity & Success
California Community College Chancellor Office*

Defeating fear can foster equity in education

An African proverb says, “When the roots are deep there is no reason to fear the wind”.

This saying is ever more salient in these times where diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility efforts are transitioning from theories to practice.

In my current role as the visiting executive of educational excellence and equal employment opportunities at the California Community Colleges chancellor’s office, I am blessed and privileged to work with a dynamic team deeply committed to justice work and diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. Despite the tumultuous terrain that results from change, we stand firm with courage driven by the desire to effect institutional change.

Recent regulatory changes regarding equal employment opportunities and tenure review are a direct result of the board of governors and the chancellor’s office’s commitment to creating systemwide conditions to foster change locally. They encourage efforts that ultimately impact the core of our work, our collective why: student success.

Nelson Mandela once said “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

As a former counselor and professor, I recall many conversations with students where we jointly created their educational plans. Often, my students were unsure of their career aspirations.

After a few semesters I witnessed students either fall through the cracks or petition to graduate and transfer. Forward-thinking legislation such as the Student Transfer Achievement

Reform Act of 2021, known as Guided Pathways or AB 928; the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012, known as AB 705; and other laws radically transformed the lives of our students. Presenting students with an educational plan previously felt like offering them an obstacle course of math and English classes that they had to endure to earn a transferable degree.

AB 705 shifted the path. Counseling sessions and educational plans are no longer meetings filled with fear and trepidation where students left with their shoulders shrugged in disappointment and despair; instead, they leave with a smile, having been given a clear and timely academic pathway.

I experienced this fear of the unknown that causes hesitation. Now the data is evident: It clearly indicates that we can be doing much more to serve those who are disproportionately impacted by the status quo.

As a product of the largest system of higher education in the nation, I am the fruits of this system. This experience drives my deep commitment and gratitude to the roots that sprouted me to become the change agent I am today.

This system has the ability to transform communities by providing socioeconomic mobility and opportunity to millions of people; it must serve as an equity engine of justice, firmly rooted in unapologetic policies and practices that garner results. I am encouraged by system partners, colleges, districts as well as associations that have picked up the torch and exemplify model practices of equal employment opportunity.

Upon working on the newly released equal employment opportunity handbook of best practices, I was inspired by the recruiting and hiring practices that institutions have adopted to move the needle and center their efforts on equity.

I am also intrigued by efforts that demonstrate the inextricable connection between historic funding, legislative advocacy, diverse hiring practices and student success. As we move into the post-pandemic era, it is vital that we remain firmly rooted in our quest for justice and equity.

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O N T H E C O V E R



ARTIST Erik Escovedo
Professor
American Indian Studies Program
Fresno City College

Professor Erik Escovedo is the American Indian studies instructor at Fresno City College. The American Indian Studies program blends Indigenous pedagogical methods into curriculum to give students an opportunity to learn the value of Native American approaches to education.

The American Indian Studies program at Fresno City College offers four courses: American Indian Art is one of the most popular courses offered for the certificate and associated degree. In this lecture-based course, Professor Escovedo uses examples of Indigenous artwork to teach students about core principles in the American Indian Studies discipline, such as relationship to place, which is a concept that links culture, spirituality, episteme, language, and community to the land. The highlighted artwork is a part of Prof. Escovedo's art exhibition "Decolonizing Place and Time", which showcases paintings inspired by Native American activism and family.

Professor Escovedo believes that ethnic studies courses offer a unique opportunity for students (both Native and non-Native) to reconnect to their own cultural roots, while acknowledging and appreciating the similarities and differences. Shane Lara, an American Indian Studies major, has written a poem to express what education and American Indian Studies has done for him as a student and a reconnecting Native who is trying to learn about where he comes from.

