

# Educational Equity Syllabus Statement

## College of San Mateo

### Background

In the wake of a contentious and vitriolic election, students from all three SMCCCD campuses asked the Board of Trustees to affirm their commitment to educational equity and to take steps to ensure that our students have a safe, equitable learning environment. In response to these students' requests, the Board created the document "Affirmation of Commitment to Social Justice," which was adopted on December 14, 2016. Among other things, the Board "committed to removing barriers to student success" and "promoting, encouraging and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion inside and outside of the classroom." The Board recognizes the diversity of our student body and "values the unique characteristics of our students, and is committed to meeting our students where they are and to providing them the quality education and support services that best support their individual needs and circumstances."

The Board's "Affirmation" would be tested later that academic year when Skyline College experienced a blackface incident in one of its classrooms. After several Skyline faculty visited the Board to express their concern about the incident, the Board challenged the Academic Senates at all three campuses to take positions on social justice, diversity, and educational equity. Skyline's Academic Senate took the lead and passed an equity resolution in fall 2017. The Skyline resolution was very results-oriented. It committed their Academic Senate to offering more professional development on race, bias, and educational equity and to creating curriculum on race relations, among other goals.

Our Academic Senate followed suit, but we found that the term *educational equity* was still not understood by a majority of our colleagues and students. As a result, we drafted a resolution that affirmed our commitment to serving a diverse student body; that defined educational equity for the campus community; and underscored the urgent need to promote equitable teaching and learning practices. In other words, the CSM equity resolution was more a foundational document that continues to guide the Senate's decision-making and policies.

The "Syllabus Statement on Equity" was the Senate's first step toward promoting a culture of educational equity at CSM. Because every course requires a syllabus, we believe the best way to disseminate our commitment to educational equity and to help our colleagues and students understand this term is to include it in our syllabi. This will afford faculty and students a moment to discuss what educational equity is and how students can take more responsibility for their learning and self-advocacy if they feel like their educational needs are not being met.

Below is the syllabus statement created by the Academic Senate Equity Task Force and adopted by the Academic Senate on March 13, 2018.

## Syllabus Statement on Equity

*The faculty at College of San Mateo affirm that students are entitled to an equitable learning environment that celebrates their voice, fosters their agency, and develops their capacity for self-advocacy, and that is free of unfair practices.*

*If you feel you are in an environment that is not conducive to your learning or you want to learn more about educational equity, please come talk to me. You may also contact CSM's Director of Equity ([collegeofsanmateo.edu/equity](http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/equity)) to explore your options.*

The Academic Senate wants to make sure that this syllabus statement matches the tone and individuality of your syllabus. As a result, we'd like to invite you to revise the first part of the statement to your liking (or if you believe you can explain educational equity better). However, we'd like all syllabi to contain the second part as it is written.

We'd like to highlight two important components of the statement: the students' responsibility in gauging their own learning and the professor as the students' first point of contact. We want to make it clear that this statement is **not** about students complaining about their professors to administration. Instead, we want students to understand that there are resources available if they feel like they are not effectively learning. This could be due to an undiagnosed learning disability, it could be due to stress from work or home, or it could be because the classroom environment is not welcoming. The bottom line is that we want students to tell someone so they can be directed to the resources they need to succeed (this is a major component of educational equity).

Second, we want to make sure that the classroom instructor is the first point of contact. We work more closely with our students than anyone else on campus and many of us are very familiar with the support services at CSM. Furthermore, we want students to approach us if they are having a hard time learning in our classrooms. We hope that this syllabus statement will make it clear to all students that the faculty is committed to making sure they have what they need to learn and that we are open to discussing teaching and learning with them. With that being said, if a student is afraid to approach their instructor, the statement directs them to the Director of Equity, who will then direct them to the proper resources or procedures.

## What is "educational equity"?

CSM's Director of Equity Jeremiah Sims distinguishes equity from equality in the following way: "Equality is giving all people the same thing, no matter what their true need is; equity, on the other hand, is providing people with what they actually need in order to be successful" ("Overview").

In a nutshell, educational equity requires college faculty and staff to understand that many of our incoming students have experienced socio-economic and educational barriers due to their identities and that many of our college's policies, procedures, and pedagogies continue to

disadvantage these students. The touchstone of educational equity, however, is that we not only recognize these inequities but that we also work to mitigate them. In other words, an equity-centered approach to our pedagogy, our centers, or our programs, as the Board notes, require we meet the “students where they are.” And even if you don’t know what your students need, there are colleagues and resources who do know. At the very least, you can direct students to the Director of Equity.

## How to include the syllabus statement on equity in your syllabi

The syllabus statement on equity is the perfect companion for the Title IX syllabus statement. We recommend that the two statements are side by side in your syllabus. The intent of both statements, though very different in nature, assert our campus’s commitment to creating a safe learning environment free from discrimination, prejudice, and apathy.

We also recommend taking a moment to discuss the statement with your students. However, if you are uncomfortable with doing so, the students can easily refer to the equity webpage for information on what educational equity is and what that means for their educational pursuits.

## If you have questions . . .

If you have a question or concern about the equity syllabus statement, please contact Academic Senate President Jeramy Wallace ([wallacej@smccd.edu](mailto:wallacej@smccd.edu)) or your division representative. You may also contact Director of Equity Jeremiah Sims. We are happy to help you with this initiative.

## Sources

“Affirmation of Commitment to Social Justice.” San Mateo County Community College District Board of Trustees. December 14, 2016. <http://smccd.edu/boardoftrustees/affirmation.php>

“Commitment to Educational Equity at College of San Mateo.” College of San Mateo Academic Senate. December 5, 2017. [https://collegeofsanmateo.edu/academicsenate/Resolution03.01F17\\_Equity.pdf](https://collegeofsanmateo.edu/academicsenate/Resolution03.01F17_Equity.pdf)

“Overview.” College of San Mateo Office of Equity. <http://collegeofsanmateo.edu/equity/>

“Resolution on Equity.” Skyline College Academic Senate. December 7, 2017. [http://www.skylinecollege.edu/academicsenate/assets/fall2017/120617/08Resolution%20on%20Equity\\_Skyline%20Academic%20Senate\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.skylinecollege.edu/academicsenate/assets/fall2017/120617/08Resolution%20on%20Equity_Skyline%20Academic%20Senate_FINAL.pdf)