EQUITY-MINDED INQUIRY SERIES

Document Review

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ADDITIONAL TOOLS
For additional inquiry tools, please contact cue.media.communications@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS DOCUMENT REVIEW?

Colleges produce countless documents for different purposes and audiences. For example, institutional plans and reports (e.g., strategic plans, accreditation self-studies) are developed by campus committees and submitted to boards of trustees, state governing bodies, or visiting peer review teams. Program reviews are created each year by departments and presented to program review committees and campus leaders as evidence of what has been accomplished and what will be done in the upcoming year. Campus offices produce brochures and pamphlets describing services for faculty, staff, and students.

Beyond their primary purpose, such documents are useful for their *content*—that is, for the information they offer about different aspects and areas of a college. Doing a content analysis of what is *explicitly* stated and presented in a document can reveal the messages being transmitted and the relative importance of those messages (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, documents can be analyzed for what they *implicitly* communicate about the aims of education, who belongs and/or does not belong in the campus community, what qualities must be demonstrated to be fully included, and more. Such an analysis frames documents as *artifacts of practice* that are embedded with taken-for-granted attitudes, assumptions, expectations, and norms.

DOCUMENT REVIEW FOR INQUIRY INTO RACIAL/ETHNIC INEQUITY
In the Center for Urban Education's (CUE) Document Review Guide, document analysis is approached as a method of **inquiry** into racial/ethnic inequity. Specifically, document review provides practitioners with a structured process through which to:

- Examine whether and how campus documents communicate commitment to and actions that advance racial/ethnic equity;

- Reveal whether and how colleges present and talk about racially minoritized students (i.e., Blacks, Latinx, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders); and
- Consider whether and how campus documents are associated with equity gaps experienced by racially minoritized students.

This guide takes practitioners through a step-by-step process of identifying documents and conducting an **equity-minded** content analysis. "Equity-minded" refers to a way of examining artifacts of practice that emphasizes:

- Critical race-consciousness;
- Awareness that practitioner beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and approaches are racialized and can have racial consequences, typically to the disadvantage of racially minoritized students;
- Awareness that norms, policies, and practices that are taken for granted in higher education can perpetuate racial hierarchies and inequalities, even in the absence of explicit racism; and
- Willingness to reflect on racialized outcomes and exercise agency to produce racial equity.

According to Estela Bensimon (2012; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015), an equity-minded approach to practice is necessary to realize racial/ethnic equity. An equity-minded document review can help practitioners:

- Become aware of whether, and in what ways, race is treated in campus documents;
- See whether racial patterns are reflected in documents;
- Reflect on whether and how documents work to advance the success of racially minoritized students; and
- Identify changes to documents that promote racial/ethnic equity.

A key piece of this document review is to examine whether, and in what ways, documents reflect equity-minded practices that can help advance racial/ethnic equity. These practices are described on the next page.

EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES
FOR DOCUMENTS

WELCOMING: The document communicates through words, images, tone, and design that students are welcome and will be cared for.

DEMYSTIFYING: The document communicates program/department /institution policies in clear and approachable ways.

CREATING A PARTNERSHIP: The document communicates through words, images, and tone that the program/department/ institution is mutually responsible for student success.

VALIDATING: Document words, images, and tone actively support and encourage students' ability to be successful.

REPRESENTING: The webpage content and images reflect a range of racial/ethnic identities and experiences.

DECONSTRUCTING: The document counters the common presentation of whiteness as the norm.

THE PROTOCOL

The document review protocol outlines a four-step process for practitioners to follow.

1. Select documents to review
2. Review documents using the prompts
3. Reflect on document review findings and process
4. Present and disseminate findings

1. SELECT DOCUMENTS TO REVIEW

The document review process begins with selecting documents associated with a particular racial/ethnic gap. This is your **focal equity gap.** If you haven't done so already, identify racial/ethnic equity gaps on your campus using the Percentage Point Gap (PPG) method presented in CUE's Data Tools Guide.

For example, based on PPG analysis, you find that Black students are experiencing an equity gap in transfer to the flagship public university in the state, relative to white students. With this information in hand, you first search for documents directly associated with transfer. These include documents produced by the college's transfer office, such as articulation agreements and curricular requirements for transfer. As part of your search process, you see that academic departments that have a strong track record of students transferring to the flagship public produce department-specific transfer documents. Documents like these should also be part of your review, and in general, cast your document search widely. See page 7 for additional examples of documents to review based on focal equity gaps.

To consider: individual or group review?
At this stage, in addition to selecting documents related to the focal equity gap, you should consider whether to proceed with document review on your own or with a team of practitioners.

Individual document review is useful for practitioners who routinely produce documents for their area of practice, such as instructors who create course syllabi and assessments for their classes. (See CUE's Syllabus Review Guide for Equity-Minded Practice for instructions on how to do course syllabi inquiry.) Conducting inquiry into documents you produce means the findings that emerge are immediately relevant for your practice.

Group document review is beneficial when there are a number of documents related to the focal equity gap to review. With a group, practitioners can divide the documents, thus reducing the individual workload. Beyond this practical consideration, group document review allows documents to be viewed from multiple practitioner perspectives, potentially resulting in a more thorough and comprehensive equity-minded review. In addition, group document review carries the message that addressing equity gaps is the shared responsibility of practitioners.

EXAMPLES: DOCUMENTS TO REVIEW BY EQUITY GAP

COMPLETE APPLICATION EQUITY GAP

- Application forms
- Recruitment brochures
- Financial aid forms

COURSE COMPLETION EQUITY GAP

- Course syllabi
- Assessments (e.g., tests)
- Tutoring center brochure

HONORS PROGRAM PARTICIPATION EQUITY GAP

- Application forms
- Program brochures
- Program criteria

2. REVIEW DOCUMENTS USING THE PROMPTS

This step is the heart of the document review process. The prompts are grouped into four areas:

- **Area 1: Initial Review**, which asks you to do a first-round review of the document aim(s), content, language, and tone.

- **Area 2: Addressing Students**, which asks you to focus specifically on how the document describes students.

- **Area 3: Addressing Equity**, which asks you to assess how the document talks about equity.

- **Area 4: Equity-minded Practices**, which asks you to assess whether and in what ways the document reflects the following six equity-minded practices: welcoming, demystifying, creating a partnership, validating, representing, and deconstructing.

Do note that the prompts are important insofar as they **focus** and **structure** your inquiry in a **systematic** way. That said, the prompts are *not* meant to be exhaustive of all the possible things you could attend to; they're merely a starting point. As you become more familiar and expert with the document review process specifically and equity-minded inquiry generally, expect that additional prompts will emerge that you may want to incorporate going forward. Until then, we suggest you try out the prompts in the order suggested.

On pages 9-21, we provide worksheets with the document review prompts.

WORKSHEET

DOCUMENT REVIEW

BASIC INFORMATION

1. Document description

2. How does this document relate to the focal equity gap?

AREA 1: INITIAL REVIEW

1. First impression: How is the reader of the document greeted? What words and type of language are used?

2. Purpose: From your perspective as a reader, do you have a clear understanding of what this document is communicating? Is the purpose/goal of the document well-articulated?

3. Explicit content: What information is presented? Missing?
   o What policies are (not) addressed?

   o What practices are (not) addressed?

   o What resources are (not) presented?

AREA 1: INITIAL REVIEW

4. Language: What technical, specialized, or jargon language is used in the document?

5. Tone: What is the overall tone of this document? For example, is the tone respectful and encouraging of students?

6. Conclusion: How does the document conclude? What words and type of language are used?

AREA 2: ADDRESSING STUDENTS

1. What words or phrases are used to describe students?

2. Does this document target a specific student population, explicitly or implicitly? If yes, how is that student population described?

3. Do the names of racially minoritized student groups appear in the document (e.g., African American/Black, Latinx/Latina/Latino, Native American, Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian)?

   a. In what ways? (e.g., in a description of who the program serves; in the name of a program, such as "Black Student Union'" or "Latinx Student Association")

4. Are the needs of students from specific racially minoritized groups addressed in the document?

5. Does the document make assumptions about what students should know? In what ways?

AREA 3: ADDRESSING EQUITY

1. Does the word "equity" appear in the document? Does it appear throughout the document, or only in specific parts?

2. If equity is mentioned, is it defined? How is it defined?

3. Are there words or phrases in the document that you feel denote/speak to equity even if the word 'equity' is not mentioned? If yes, write these words or phrases in the table below. Include a count of the number of times the words or phrases appear, in the "Frequency" column.

EQUITY-RELATED WORDS AND PHRASES	FREQUENCY

AREA 4: EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES

Welcoming

1. Does the document use language and/or images that suggests a welcoming tone?

   In what ways?

   Yes | No | NA

2. Is the information communicated in such a way that a student could feel that this program/department/office cares about my well-being and success? What about for a racially minoritized student?

   In what ways?

   Yes | No | NA

3. Does the document send messages that may make racially minoritized students feel unwelcomed?

   In what ways?

   Yes | No | NA

Demystifying

1. Does the document explain the purpose of the   Yes **|** No **|** NA
    program/department/office in clear and plain language?

    In what ways?

2. Does any part of the document use academic jargon that a student   Yes **|** No **|** NA
    with little familiarity with higher education may not understand?

    In what ways?

Creating a Partnership

1. Does the document suggest that the program/department/office seeks to assist students in their educational journeys? What about for racially minoritized students in particular?

   In what ways?

   Yes | No | NA

2. Does the document provide information on resources for racially minoritized students in particular? Is this information clearly communicated?

   In what ways?

   Yes | No | NA

3. Does the document use language that is respectful in tone?

   In what ways?

   Yes | No | NA

Creating a Partnership

4. Is the contact information for a specific practitioner provided for students who have additional questions?   Yes | No | NA

    In what ways?

5. Does the document feature or link to a "frequently asked questions" section?   Yes | No | NA

    In what ways?

Validating

1. Does the document include language and/or images that   Yes | No | NA
   communicate support for students' academic efforts and goals?

   In what ways?

REPRESENTING

1. Does the document feature the stories and/or experiences of racially minoritized students? If not, whose stories and/or experiences are featured?

   In what ways?

   Yes **|** No **|** NA

2. Does the document feature images of racially minoritized students?

   In what ways?

   Yes **|** No **|** NA

DECONSTRUCTING

1. Does any part of the document reflect a view of white students as the "normative" college student?   Yes | No | NA

   In what ways?

2. Does any part of the document reflect a view of racially minoritized students as the "other" (i.e., as different, as not belonging)?   Yes | No | NA

   In what ways?

3. **REFLECT ON DOCUMENT REVIEW FINDINGS AND PROCESS**

   After the document review is complete, review and reflect on what you discovered. Consider the following reflection questions:

   - What did you learn about the practitioner, program, department, or committee that created the document? What was surprising? Not surprising?

   - What does the document reveal about attitudes toward students? What about racially minoritized students?

   - Does the document clearly communicate policies and processes? If yes, then in what ways?

   - Does the document communicate that students will be supported in their endeavors? If yes, then in what ways?

   - Were there patterns evident by race and ethnicity in terms of who is (not) represented or welcomed?

   - How could the document benefit one student group over another/others?

   - In what ways does the document validate racially minoritized students, if any?

   - On the whole, would you say the document speaks more to the white student experience, or is there evidence that the webpage deconstructs "whiteness" as the norm?

   - Think about the equity gap you're addressing. How might the content of the document and the way the content is presented contribute to the racial/ethnic equity gaps in the focal area? What should be changed to better support the students experiencing the equity gap?

   - What recommendations do you have for the practitioners/program/department that created the document? How will these recommendations advance racial/ethnic equity?

4. **PRESENT AND DISSEMINATE FINDINGS**

    Consider sharing your findings, reflections, and recommendations with the practitioners who oversee the program or department, as well as campus leaders who can help implement your recommendations. The following questions can help frame the presentation:

    - What attitudes toward students does this document reveal? What about toward students from racially minoritized backgrounds? What are some issues that should be raised for practitioner/program/department/committee discussions?

    - What changes, if any, would you recommend be made so the document better serves students—in particular, students from racially minoritized groups who are experiencing equity gaps? If changes are recommended, who would make the changes? What is the process to implement those changes?

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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