

EQUITY-MINDED INQUIRY SERIES

# Web Scan



CENTER *for* URBAN  
EDUCATION

**USC** Rossier  
School of Education

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The inquiry tools presented in this guide are the product of the staff who worked at the Center for Urban Education (CUE) from 1999 to 2018. The tools evolved over time, in response to what CUE staff learned from using the tools at campuses across the country, as well as from research on race, racism, and racial equity. Presented here is a collection of CUE's most impactful tools, organized and edited by Cheryl D. Ching, PhD., who served as a research assistant at CUE from 2012 to 2017 and as a post-doctoral scholar from 2017 to 2018.

## **HOW TO CITE**

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## **ADDITIONAL TOOLS**

For additional inquiry tools, please contact [cue.media.communications@gmail.com](mailto:cue.media.communications@gmail.com).

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## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS WEB SCAN?

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Just about every college and university in the United States has a website that provides key institutional information, for example: Who leads the college? How do prospective students apply to the college? Who are on the faculty? What academic departments and majors does the college offer? What is the college's tuition? What financial aid is available? What is the college's mission and vision? Seeking answers to these questions and others is perhaps the reason most people visit college and university websites.

The Center for Urban Education's (CUE) Web Scan Guide takes a different view of websites. Rather than seeing them primarily as sources of information, the Web Scan Guide approaches websites as **artifacts of practice** that:

- Reflect colleges' taken-for-granted attitudes, assumptions, expectations, and norms;
- Cultivate a sense of the learning and campus environment that colleges strive to create for members of their community; and
- Communicate who belongs and does not belong to their community, as well as what is required to fully participate.

Since a college's website is one of the first artifacts of practice students engage with, it is important that web pages convey the message that students—particularly racially minoritized students who have experienced exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and oppression in educational settings and elsewhere—are **welcome** at the college. Moreover, it is vital that web pages help **demystify** the college and explain what the college does, how the college works, and what students who enroll can expect from the college. One expectation that web pages can convey to students is that their abilities and efforts will be **validated** and that their success comes from a **partnership** between them and the college. Finally, from a critical race-conscious perspective, web pages can **represent** the identities and experiences of racially minoritized students, and **deconstruct** the

presentation of white students and white experiences as the norm.

## EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES FOR WEBSITES

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

**DEMYSTIFYING:** The web page communicates program/department/institution policies in clear and approachable ways.

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

**VALIDATING:** The web page words, images, and tone actively support and encourage students' ability to be successful.

**REPRESENTING:** Web page content and images reflect a range of racial/ethnic identities and experiences.

**DECONSTRUCTING:** The web page counters the common presentation of "whiteness" as the norm.

Welcoming, demystifying, validating, partnering, representing, and deconstructing are six **equity-minded** practices colleges can implement in order to advance racial/ethnic equity. According to Estela Bensimon (2012), equity-minded is characterized as being:

- Critically race-conscious;
- Aware that practitioner beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and approaches are racialized and can have racial consequences, typically to the disadvantage of racially minoritized students;
- Aware 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
- Willing to reflect on racialized outcomes and exercise agency to produce racial equity.

By bringing an equity-minded perspective to college websites, and by assessing web pages for the presence or absence of equity-minded practices, practitioners can see whether and in what ways these online artifacts of practice are facilitators of, or barriers to, racial equity.

CUE's Web Scan is a method of inquiry that outlines specific steps for practitioners to (a) examine, discuss, and reflect on whether and in what ways equity-minded practices are embedded in their college's website; and (b) consider whether and in what ways the website plays a role in the equity gaps experienced by racially minoritized students. Ultimately, engaging in the Web Scan process will:

- Raise practitioner awareness of racial patterns reflected on college websites;
- Promote self-reflection on how college websites work or do not work for racially minoritized students; and
- Inspire changes to the website that advance racial/ethnic equity.

# THE PROTOCOL

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The Web Scan protocol outlines a four-step process that practitioners would follow.

1. Select Web Pages to Scan
2. Scan Web Pages for Equity-minded Practices
3. Reflect on Web Scan Findings and Process
4. Present Findings to Campus

## 1. SELECT WEB PAGES TO SCAN

The web scan process begins with selecting web pages that are associated with a particular racial/ethnic equity gap. If you have not done so already, conduct a percentage point gap (PPG) analysis of retention and success outcomes to identify gaps by race and ethnicity; instructions are provided in CUE's Data Tools Guide.

For example, based on an analysis of outcomes data disaggregated by race and ethnicity, you find that Latinx students are experiencing an equity gap in study abroad participation, relative to white students. With this information in hand, you would identify web pages associated with study abroad, such as those managed by the college's study abroad program office.

You should cast your search of related web pages widely, focusing not only on the likely suspects, but also web pages where students may seek information on a particular campus program or service.

Returning to the example of study abroad, you should also look at the web pages of academic departments that have a track record of encouraging students to pursue study abroad opportunities (e.g., language departments).

## 2. SCAN WEB PAGES FOR EQUITY-MINDED PRACTICES

Once chosen, develop inquiry questions that help unpack whether and in what ways the web pages demonstrate the six equity-minded practices. As noted, these practices aim to foster more equitable educational experiences and outcomes of racially minoritized students who are prone to exclusion, marginalization, discrimination, and oppression on college campuses.

On pages 7-14, we provide a worksheet with general inquiry questions that can be applied to any college web page, and which practitioners can use to conduct their web scans. Consider these inquiry questions a starting point; they can be adapted, customized, and/or expanded to suit the web pages you'll review.

The inquiry questions are designed as yes/no questions. You can note your answers to the questions by circling "yes" or "no." If the question doesn't apply to the web page, circle "NA."

For each question, we ask you to elaborate on your response. Here you can share the rationale for your response, as well as provide evidence to support why you said "yes" or "no."

# WORKSHEET

## WEB SCAN

### BASIC INFORMATION

1. Web page description and URL

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



# WORKSHEET

## WEB SCAN

### WELCOMING

1. Does the web page use language and/or images that suggest a welcoming tone? Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

2. Is the information communicated in such a way that a student could feel that this program/department/office cares about their well-being and success? A racially minoritized student? Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

3. Does the web page send messages that may make racially minoritized students feel unwelcomed? Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

# WORKSHEET

WEB SCAN

## DEMYSTIFYING

1. Does the web page explain the purpose of the program/department/office in clear and plain language?  
In what ways? Yes | No | NA
  
2. Does any part of the web page use academic jargon that a student with little familiarity with higher education may not understand?  
In what ways? Yes | No | NA

# WORKSHEET

## WEB SCAN

### CREATING A PARTNERSHIP

1. Does the web page suggest that the program/department/office seeks to assist students in their educational journeys? Racially minoritized students in particular? Yes | No | NA
- In what ways?

2. Does the web page provide information on resources for racially minoritized students in particular? Is this information clearly communicated? Yes | No | NA
- In what ways?

3. Does the web page use language that is respectful in tone? Yes | No | NA
- In what ways?

# WORKSHEET

WEB SCAN

## 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 web page feature or link to a “frequently asked questions” section? Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

# WORKSHEET

WEB SCAN

## VALIDATING

1. Does the web page include language and/or images that communicate support for students' academic efforts and goals?

Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

# WORKSHEET

WEB SCAN

## REPRESENTING

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

Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

2. Does the web page feature images of racially minoritized students?

Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

# WORKSHEET

WEB SCAN

## DECONSTRUCTING

1. Does any part of the web page reflect a view of white students as the “normative” college student?

Yes | No | NA

In what ways?

2. Does any part of the web page 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 WEBSKAN FINDINGS AND PROCESS

After the web scan is complete, review and reflect on your responses.

Consider the following reflection questions:

- What did you learn about the program or department from the web scan? What was surprising? Not surprising?
- Does the web page clearly communicate policies and processes? If yes, in what ways?
- Does the web page communicate that students will be supported in their endeavors? If yes, in what ways?
- Were there patterns evident by race and ethnicity in terms of:
  - Who is (not) represented?
  - Who is (not) welcomed?
- In what ways do the web pages validate racially minoritized students, if any?
- On the whole, would you say that the web page speaks more to the white student experience, or is there evidence that the web page deconstructs “whiteness” as the norm?
- How might the web page content and the way the content is presented contribute to the racial/ethnic equity gaps in the focal area?
- Based on your web scan findings and reflections, what recommendations do you have for practitioners who oversee the program or department? How will these recommendations improve the program or department for students from racially minoritized groups?



#### 4. PRESENT FINDINGS TO CAMPUS

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 web page reveal?  
Toward students from racially minoritized backgrounds? What are some issues that should be raised for program/department/office discussions?
- What changes, if any, would you recommend be made so the web page better serves all students, in particular students from racially minoritized groups? 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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Bensimon, E. M. (2012). The Equity Scorecard: Theory of change. In E. M. Bensimon & L. Malcom (Eds.), *Confronting equity issues on campus: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in theory and practice* (pp. 17-44). Stylus Publishing.



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