

The Power of Policy

By Lois Elfman

President of The Campaign for College Opportunity (CCO), a California organization engaged in supporting common sense reforms to the state's higher education system, **Michele Siqueiros** is determined to see more students complete their college educations. The first in her family to graduate college, she works to expand access and student success by bringing attention to the challenges facing students of color, low-income students and first-generation students.



In March, CCO was integral in the introduction of Assembly Bill 928, the Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act of 2021, which proposes to make the transfer process from two-year to four-year institutions clear by creating consistent and readily understandable pathways.

"Students everywhere deserve a clear path to transfer," says Siqueiros. "Most students who start at a community college want to transfer to a four-year university, and they shouldn't need an advanced degree to get to transfer. That's how complicated transfer continues to be."

"It's unnecessary for us to have these hurdles in place that don't make the process work for students," she adds. "If we want to ensure access to college, if we want to improve practice in terms of pushing for the reforms [that] we believe are necessary and if we want to truly close the racial equity gaps that persist in higher ed, we will need to work at [policy reform] for the long haul."

Mobilization and Implementation

There are 116 community colleges in the state of California. A decade ago, CCO played a vital role in the passage and implementation of the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT), which guarantees priority admission to a California State University (CSU) institution for community college students who meet a minimum eligibility requirement. It streamlines the process so that students don't take unnecessary credits. As of October 2020, the more than 280,000 students that have earned an ADT accrued six fewer credit units on average, leading to millions of dollars in savings in the 2018–2019 academic year alone.

In getting the ADT passed, CCO mobilized a broad base of support among civil rights, education and business leaders to endorse the legislation, as well as student groups throughout California. CCO has monitored implementation through research and analysis. Siqueiros notes how crucial data analysis is, pushing for the disaggregation of data, highlighting inequities and showing how some policies exacerbate inequities.

Despite the proven success of ADT, transfer rates from two-year to four-year institutions remain low. That is why CCO is advocating for AB 928, which would make the CSU and University of California (UC) systems work together to

develop a singular general education transfer pathway.

"To ensure that there's improvement and strengthening of transfer in California, including calling for an intersegmental implementation committee that would be composed of our community colleges, Cal State and UC leaders," says Siqueiros.

CCO's Purpose

To support the policies and practices for which CCO advocates, they frequently engage the media, including writing op/eds. Siqueiros shares her own story. Having mentors who believed in her ability to go to college and guided her through the process proved integral to her success.

Teachers and college students visiting her high school helped her understand how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and apply to college. Siqueiros received federally subsidized loans and grants.

"Also, the support at my college (Pitzer College CA) once I enrolled as a first-gen student...allowed me to see myself as being able to complete really rigorous work," says Siqueiros.

She witnessed others of her generation not getting the information or needed support, and that continues. "We hear from students all the time that they don't believe they can go, or they don't even know there's financial aid available," Siqueiros says. "The pandemic has further exacerbated this."

Siqueiros was the second hire after CCO's founding, joining as associate director in 2004. Prior to that she worked for the City of Los

Angeles Department of Neighborhood

Empowerment, helped co-found Public Allies-Los Angeles and worked for the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials. She became CCO's president in 2008. Under her presidency, CCO has advocated for increased access to Pell grants, protected Cal grant funding and supported undocumented students, in addition to reforming community college pathways.

Propelling College Success

"We want students to be persistent and work hard, but we should also ensure that the systems are doing the same thing," says Siqueiros. "I'm involved in advocacy because I'm really passionate about this issue. I feel in many ways that I was very lucky. We shouldn't have to rely on luck."

A lot of the policies and practices do not serve the best interest of students, she says. The remedial course failure rate is high, and it frustrates Siqueiros that institutions accept that and don't question the effectiveness.

"By eliminating remedial ed courses in community colleges, we're seeing huge positive effects, especially for Black and Latinx students," says Siqueiros, noting 50% to 70% pass rates of college-level math and English by students who would have been put in these remedial courses.

Siqueiros notes that racial equity is a big issue, citing inequality in college preparation, attendance and success.


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"Students everywhere deserve a clear path to transfer."

more helpful for solving problems.

"If we can separate those dimensions out, I think we can solve the gender issue," she says. "We're losing people who don't want to be competitive ... who would be better at the job."

The wrong people are being favored. The wrong things are being rewarded,

Her new career "perfectly suits my abilities," says Cheng. "I believe that I can make a better contribution to society." 

IN HER OWN WORDS: Getting Personal: The Art of Autoethnography, *continued from page 6*


In this manner, the student became more aware of the ways in which the wide spectrum of human identities has been reduced to reflect only a fraction of human experience.

Seeing the benefits of research and analysis on such a personal level has an immediate impact on students and also gives students a way to understand and analyze situations, problems and issues in other contexts. It also helps them approach their other classes with a more critical eye.

It is one of the goals of anthropology to add as much to the knowledge of human experience as possible. What better way to start than a writing assignment that deepens student engagement with research, analysis and writing overall?

Writing autoethnographies provides students an opportunity to begin to unpack some of the layers of social structure and power and how these can affect them on the many different levels of their own experience(s).

Through having a safe space to discuss the sociocultural construction(s) of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, ability and age and how all of these categories affect us on individual levels, students find not only that the personal is political, but that it is profoundly intertwined with social structure(s) and enculturation.

For these and still many other reasons, the use of autoethnography is invaluable for increasing student engagement and developing critical thinking and analysis, which are indispensable skills in any discipline. 

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Women on the Move, *continued from page 10*

Hollins University VA.


- **General Twanda Young** moves from deputy commanding general for the Human Resources Command of the U.S. Army to executive-in-residence at Bowie State University MD.

- **Dr. Amy Zieziula** moves from director of housing and residence life at Broome Community College of the State University of New York to deputy Title IX coordinator at Binghamton University NY. 

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Although her focus is on California, she is certainly pleased if her policy work has national impact.

"We know those challenges are not unique to our state," she says. "We hope as we advance and champion some of these reforms to see them expanded across other states. We're also always in learning mode. We're very interested in what other states are doing that we should be thinking about doing in California."

"The future of our state will depend on our ability to ensure that we close those gaps that persist in our education system," she continues. "We will continue to persist on implementation of reforms so that the vision and dream that we have of creating a clear transfer path for students and eliminating unnecessary obstacles like remedial education course requirements—that we see those through to fruition." 

Salem College Shifts Academic Focus to Health Leadership, *continued from page 9*

scientific literacy, ethical reasoning—through the lens of topics around health.

"We think we're producing scholar leaders, people who will be intellectually rich, bring ideas to practice and lead in whatever setting they emerge in," she adds. 

PROFILE: Temple Administrator Loves the Law and Education, *continued from page 12*

well as those abroad.

In London, she was part of the team training attorneys to handle the outcomes of the Darfur Crisis. She traveled to Temple's Tokyo campus and trained 20,000 Japanese lawyers in jury trial advocacy as well as training Chinese lawyers enrolled in Temple's LL.M. program in Beijing.

Among the many awards she has received, Epps is proudest of the awards she's received from the Philadelphia Bar Association, the Justice Sonia Sotomayer and the Sandra Day O'Connor awards. The Philadelphia Barristers Association, the local Black bar association, even named an award for her.

It's evident that she loves the law. "Our legal system is the bedrock of this nation and being a part of it is a real opportunity to contribute to the world in which we live," she said.

Epps also loves education, saying "education is the key for joy for life no matter where you go." She says, "I'm a real believer in education and if that's going to work, you have to shape the structures." Jobs in both the law and education are "privileged" ones. Both enable those who practice in those professions to "put fingerprints on the world to come."

Adamant about not taking credit for her career, Epps noted that it's been a "collective effort." "I've been blessed," she says. 