

Date: June 2021
To: CSU Faculty, Staff, and Administrators
From: Connie Tan, CSU Student Success Network
Topic: The Need for a Humanizing Pedagogy: A Conversation with Dr. Allyson Tintiango-Cubales

Across the California State University (CSU), there have been calls to improve racial justice work, from implementing an ethnic studies requirement to increasing racial representation among campus leadership, faculty, and staff. This interview with Dr. Allyson Tintiango-Cubales, professor in the College of Ethnic Studies and affiliated faculty in the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program at San Francisco State University, explores the context for and implications of racial equity work in the CSU system. Other interviews by the CSU Network addressing equity in the CSU include conversations with Dr. Frank Harris III, Dr. Leece Lee-Oliver, Dr. William Franklin and Dr. J. Luke Wood, and a student plenary at the CSU Network Conference in 2020.

For the past 17 years, Dr. Tintiango-Cubales has been teaching in the Asian American Studies Department with a focus on community responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching and evaluation, and Filipina/o/x American Studies. In this interview, Dr. Tintiango-Cubales encourages faculty, staff, and administrators to examine and understand the structures that create inequities in the CSU system, develop specific and clear equity goals and antiracist campus plans, understand the wealth of knowledge that students bring to campus by actively listening to what they say about their needs and perspectives, and take actions to address student concerns, including implementing a humanizing pedagogy.

This Knowledge Center memo is one in a series created by the CSU Student Success Network. The Knowledge Center is an online resource—to be fully launched later in 2021—created by the CSU Network that will provide curated, synthesized, and succinct information and links to support faculty, staff, and administrators in adopting equity-minded and student-centered approaches on their campus. The CSU Network was created by and for CSU faculty, staff, administrators, and students to advance equitable student learning, engagement, progression, and success. It is facilitated by the Education Insights Center (EdInsights) at Sacramento State, an independent research and policy center devoted to student success and the public benefits of education.



Connie Tan (CT): How do you define equity in your work?

Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales (ATC): I believe equity can be a way of life, and it has the potential to be transformative, but only if it is about making sure that the world we live in is more humanizing, loving, and hopeful. We all know that equity is not the same as equality and we know it is not about giving equal or the same treatment or resources to each person, no matter their needs. Equity, rather, is dependent on people, on us—educators, administrators, middle leaders—to creatively imagine how to provide what students need, when they need it. This is highly contingent on every context—every CSU is different, every classroom is different. So context matters, the context in which we teach and where we lead in the CSU. I believe that equity is an empty act without having a direct purpose. My version of equity is in union with racial justice, the healing of racial soul wounds that have been passed down from generation to generation, and the hope for this union between equity and racial justice is that it produces opportunities for wellness. Wellness is directly related to liberation and joy for the most vulnerable and marginalized. So true equity to me is commitment to a lifetime of struggle until all youth and all students and even us as adults have the opportunities to support our wellness.

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CT: In what ways do you think structural racism and oppression manifest in higher education, particularly in the CSU?

ATC: Let’s say that equity’s goal is to give people what they need, when they need it. That requires us at the CSU to have a deep inquiry into what students really need and what provides them the opportunity to achieve self-actualization or self-determination, and alongside that, community actualization and cultural perpetuity. Unfortunately, equity is easily watered down in institutions that serve the structure that we are currently living in. This type of equity is haphazardly pursued without a critical interrogation of its intention, purpose, and outcome. This is equity that only contributes to the perpetuation of a system that is already flawed, a system that is based on white supremacy, a system that is inherently inequitable and oppressive. So using equity as a means to maintain the current structures is obviously problematic. For example, we measure equity as an outcome, such that this particular group is not doing as great as that group and we need to give them these resources to do well. That is our basic process of implementing equity, but we have not even interrogated the system in which they are not doing well. So we are really using equity as a means to uphold the system that is currently in place. Equity needs to have a really clear goal, one that is rooted in a humanizing education and liberation.

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This form of education uses equity not only to give students what it takes to do well in the systems that we're currently living in, but it also provides equity as a way to achieve ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized transformation and justice for communities that have been historically and contemporarily oppressed.

CT: What advice do you have for middle leaders to address structural racism in the CSU? Where are the key opportunities to engage them in this work?

ATC: I would start by saying our job is to listen first. When it comes to issues of racial justice on our campus, and students are speaking, we should listen. It is also important for middle leaders to listen to their colleagues—especially colleagues who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color—who are speaking from their experience, expertise, or background. It is also really important to be careful and mindful and that responses should come from a place of humanizing people.

I also think it is dangerous to come out with antiracist statements without really thinking about a plan to become antiracist as an institution. So my advice to middle leaders, to faculty, to the whole campus is to spend the time to think about how we are going to go about becoming antiracist and then actually implementing the changes, reflecting on them, seeing our mistakes, and then implementing again. It should be an ongoing process.

CT: What role can students serve in surfacing these issues on their campus? How can the campus engage students in this work, especially students of color and those from marginalized groups, without creating harm or unintended consequences?

ATC: The majority of students in my classroom are students of color, and my goal is not to put them through the ringer and assimilate them into San Francisco State. My goal is to provide opportunities for them to really find themselves by looking at their own histories, their own stories, their own legacies. I look at what they bring, the wealth that they bring. I want students to find the wealth that they bring into this space and share it and then build upon it. But to me, celebrating their stories and their narratives is really the content I teach. To me, that is where equity and racial justice come together to provide spaces for people, specifically students of color, to be centered in the classroom.

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The students at San Francisco State are not afraid to speak their minds. They are at the forefront of pushing our dialogue around racial justice, and now their voices are amplified with our current moment. It is not my job to tell students what they should or should not do for racial justice, but it is my job to listen. It is our job to hear them.



It is our job to understand them, celebrate their courage, encourage them to speak their minds, and provide them with resources and support so they can gather more evidence for their points of view.

CT: As the CSU continues to offer virtual instruction and support, what are some key priorities that middle leaders should keep in mind to ensure equitable learning opportunities for students in the CSU?

ATC: I will start with a quote: “Teachers must give creative wings to their imaginations, obviously in disciplined fashion. From the very first day of class, they must demonstrate to students the importance of imagination for life. Imagination helps curiosity and inventiveness, just as it enhances adventure, without which we cannot create... The imagination that takes us to possible and impossible dreams is always necessary” (Freire, 1998, p.93).

I return to this quote every semester to get inspired and to also remember that we have to be imaginative. But teaching during these global pandemics means that we are teaching in a time of crisis and chaos. So teaching in this time where Black and Brown lives are at the mercy of government-sanctioned violence, where Indigenous People face erasure every day, where immigrants are criminalized, where women, queer, and trans bodies are consistently under attack and where we have a former president who grossly blamed COVID-19 on Chinese people—it is obvious that we are in a time of crisis, a time where white supremacists can charge the U.S. Capitol with so much freedom, a time of chaos. So when I think about Freire’s quote, this idea of imagination is even more urgent as we are entering into virtual classrooms where the unknown is expected. The only thing that we know is that things are unknown and that humanizing pedagogy is the only pedagogy that will work for our current situation.

Reflection Questions

For faculty, staff, or administrators interested in starting conversations about racial equity on your campus, we offer the following questions as potential prompts, based on this interview:

- How are my colleagues and I evaluating what equity means in our work and what structural inequity means for our campus? Are there spaces on campus where we can collectively explore these issues together?
- What type of cultural and community wealth do students bring to my campus? Beyond the students that I interact with, how do I gather and share data about student populations and student experiences on my campus?
- Are there regular forums in my department or division for students to share their ideas



and perspectives? Are there campus-wide forums for students to share their perspectives about inequities they face? If not, how can we create these forums?

- How have we as faculty, staff, and administrators responded to student concerns at the department, division, and campus levels? How can we respond to these concerns more effectively?
- How is my campus talking about antiracism? Is there a plan to address racial and other inequities on campus? How are we implementing and evaluating the plan?
- How can I support my campus in having difficult and honest conversations about racism and other forms of structural inequities? Who are allies on campus in this endeavor?
- What does it mean to develop and use a humanizing pedagogy in my discipline? In what ways can I meaningfully collaborate with others in my program or department about this?

Resource List

Dr. Tintiangco-Cubales recommends these equity-minded resources for educators:

- Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Avalon Publishing.
- San Francisco State's [Center for Equity and Excellence in Teaching and Learning](#)

Acknowledgments

This brief would not be possible without Dr. Tintiangco-Cubales's time and willingness to share her expertise. Thad Nodine provided valuable writing support and editorial guidance. The Knowledge Center team—Breanna Alexander, Jaquelyn Caro-Sena, and Keena Walters—provided excellent support and feedback in reviewing the memo. Pat Davis Design Group's layout and design skills, Terra Thorne's final review, and Kalifa Madden's publication support helped pull this memo together.

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