



# Infusing Culturally Relevant Content in Gateway Courses in Postsecondary Education

*Findings and Insights From College Faculty*

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# About Our Organizations



## About the Community College Equity Assessment Lab

CCEAL is a research and practice laboratory in the College of Education at San Diego State University. CCEAL's mission is to partner with community colleges across the United States to institutionalize equity efforts and to build the capacities of all educators to serve equitably and responsibly students who have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education. Advancing student success for men of color has been a core component of CCEAL's mission since its founding in 2011. Please visit [cceal.org](https://cceal.org) for more information.



## About CORA Learning

CORA Learning is professional learning organization whose mission is to empower educators and organizations with strategies, tools, and resources to transform learning spaces into equitable, antiracist environments and places for healing. Please visit [coralearning.org](https://coralearning.org) for more information.



## About Every Learner Everywhere

Every Learner Everywhere is a network of partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies, curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for Black, Latino, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work aims to advance equity in higher education centered on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institutional practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitizing higher education through digital learning, visit [everylearnereverywhere.org](https://everylearnereverywhere.org).





# Purpose

The goal of this project was to examine how exposure to culturally relevant content and teaching practices have impacted the experiences and success of diverse learners<sup>1</sup> in postsecondary education, with a particular focus on faculty who teach general education and gateway courses that have traditionally yielded high D, F, and withdrawal (DFW) rates. In this report, we define gateway courses as the top 20 introductory courses with the highest student enrollment, which include:

1. Introductory English Composition
2. Introductory / General Biology
3. Introductory / Chemistry
4. Calculus (Single & Multivariate)
5. Introductory Psychology
6. U.S. History Survey (All Periods)
7. Introductory Probability & Statistics
8. Introductory Physics
9. Introductory Anatomy & Physiology
10. Introductory Accounting
11. College Algebra
12. Liberal Arts Math
13. American Government / Politics
14. Introductory Sociology
15. Macroeconomics Principles
16. Introductory Business Finance
17. Microeconomics Principles
18. Marketing Principles
19. Precalculus
20. Introductory Computer Science

Gateway courses are intended to provide students with the foundational knowledge and skills they need to advance through curricula in postsecondary education; however, these courses often serve as barriers to student persistence and success, especially for diverse students. As Kwak (2020)<sup>2</sup> noted:

Ideally, gateway courses welcome students into a domain where they learn the foundational skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in the rest of their college careers. In practice, however, gateway courses can act as choke points that slow down student progress or take a lasting toll. And data shows that underrepresented college students are disproportionately held back by gateway courses, leading to lower graduation rates. (para. 5)

Given their impact on student success for diverse learners, gateway courses are important sites for equity-focused inquiry and intervention.<sup>3, 4, 5</sup>

The study sought insights from faculty who teach these courses and who have observed how culturally relevant content impacts diverse learners in their courses. This project was informed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's (BMGF) Target Product Profile (1.1 – Culturally Responsive, Inclusive, and Affirming Content, Activities, and Assessments). Renowned scholars like Gloria Ladson-Billings<sup>6</sup> and Bryan Brown<sup>7</sup> have demonstrated the promise of culturally affirming pedagogies, and the importance of recognizing the sociocultural contexts from which diverse learners enter postsecondary education, to affirm their lived experiences.

1 In the context of this study, we identified “diverse learners” as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and poverty-impacted students.

2 <https://www.everylearnereverywhere.org/blog/what-are-gateway-courses-and-why-do-they-matter-to-equity-in-higher-ed/>

3 Wiley, K., Neisler, J., & Means, B. (2023, February). *Partnering to promote equity and digital learning*. Digital Promise. <https://doi.org/10.51388/20.500.12265/167>

4 Yuan, L., NeJame, L., Fox, K., Dorn, H., & Nguyen, A. (2022, July 11). *Time for class – 2022*. Tyton Partners.

5 Gable, T., Holiday, T., O'Sullivan, P., & Sims, J. J. (2021, June 1). *Getting started with equity: A guide for academic department leaders*. Every Learner Everywhere.

6 Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: Aka the remix. *Harvard Education Review*, 84(1), 74–84.

7 Brown, B. A. (2019). *Science in the city: Culturally relevant STEM education*. Harvard Education Press.

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Culturally affirming practices not only recognize the many contributions of mathematicians, scientists, poets, authors, and key figures in history but also allow students to describe the various concepts in the language that best helps them understand the concepts. This project provides insight into how faculty in postsecondary education create a “sense of belonging” for diverse students. Sense of belonging is 1 of 6 core evidence-based teaching practices (EBT) identified by researchers affiliated with the **Every Learner Everywhere** network.<sup>8</sup> According to Rodgers and O’Sullivan (2023),<sup>9</sup> “Creating a sense of belonging and an inclusive learning environment requires intentionally using practices that enable all students to feel that they, with their unique backgrounds, have a place in the classroom and in the discipline” (p. 11).

In this report, we first describe our survey design. Second, we discuss the survey respondents’ demographic data. Third, we present the survey results broken into two main sections: one focused on use of culturally relevant instructional practices and one focused on use of culturally relevant course materials. This report concludes with implications for practice and future research on culturally relevant content in postsecondary education and gateway courses.

## Survey Design

The first stage of our survey design included a thorough review of the literature to inform the current best teaching and learning practices being implemented in gateway courses. We further explored previously validated survey instruments utilized in our previous studies to determine the appropriateness of use in this project. We determined a number of items to be relevant and accurate with some slight modifications. Next, we pretested the 22-item survey instrument with the help of six college faculty from a variety of disciplines. We asked these individuals to review and complete the survey and to provide feedback on its content, construct validity, and available response options. We used this feedback to strengthen the precision of the items and, in a few cases, to expand the response options. After several revisions by the research team, the San Diego State University Institutional Review Board approved the survey for distribution.

## Survey Respondants

In the fall of 2023, we distributed the survey through a listserv of approximately 3,040 college faculty and administrators who had previously demonstrated interest in and/or had been involved in research on equity-centered teaching and learning practices in postsecondary education. Survey respondents included 516 postsecondary faculty represented across 28 states and 28 disciplinary fields of study. We narrowed the focus of this report to 261 faculty who teach gateway courses. Regarding gender identity, 67.8% of respondents identified as women, 29.7% as men, and 2.5% identified as gender nonconforming or transgender. In terms of racial identity, 43.3% identified as White/European, 18.8% African American/Black, 11.5% Latina/o/e/x, 3.8% Native American/Alaska Native, 3.4% Asian American or Pacific Islander, 1.9% Middle Eastern, and 17% other or missing, with qualitative text specifying their racial identity. In terms of course modality, 53.3% taught fully in person, 30.3% taught online (either synchronously or asynchronously), and 16.5% taught hybrid courses (both in person and online).

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<sup>8</sup> DaVinci, L. (2023). *The impact of digital learning on minoritized and poverty-affected college students: A literature review*. Every Learner Everywhere.

<sup>9</sup> Rodgers, A. J., & O’Sullivan, P. (2022). *An equity-first approach to evidence-based teaching practices*. Every Learner Everywhere.

# Survey Results

## Instructional Practices Among Gateway Course Faculty

In this section, we explore our research questions:

1. What are the top instructional practices used by faculty teaching gateway courses to infuse culturally relevant content?
2. What is the impact of these practices on the success of diverse learners in gateway courses?

To answer the first question, we explored the means and standard deviations of the 261 survey respondents. We asked respondents, “When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that (a) positively reflect the identities of diverse learners, (b) reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners, (c) honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners, (d) are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners, (e) express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners, (f) provide collaborative learning opportunities for diverse learners, and (g) provide experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners.”

### “When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that . . .”

positively reflect the identities of diverse learners

express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners

reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners

provide collaborative learning opportunities for diverse learners

honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners

provide experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners

are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners



**Table 1.**

*Top Instructional Practices Used by Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	1	4	3.81	0.560
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.74	0.650
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.66	0.759
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.61	0.763

*Note.*  $n = 238$ . Survey item: “When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that” (4 = *Weekly* to 1 = *Never*).

As presented in Table 1, the most used instructional practices are those that “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.81$ ) followed by those that “positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.74$ ). “Providing collaborative learning opportunities” ( $M = 3.66$ ) and “expressing differing cultural viewpoints” ( $M = 3.61$ ) were third and fourth, respectively. When asked to rate each culturally relevant practice’s impact on student success for diverse learners (see Table 2), respondents assessed in the exact same order as their use of instructional practices, with “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.74$ ) and “positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.55$ ) rated as most impactful for student success. Third and fourth were “providing collaborative learning opportunities” ( $M = 3.50$ ) and “expressing differing cultural viewpoints” ( $M = 3.49$ ). This finding may indicate faculty use practices they believe will have the most impact on student success based on their understanding of culturally relevant content.



**Table 2.**

*Rating of Impact For Student Success for Instructional Practices Among Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	1	4	3.74	0.587
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.55	0.685
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.50	0.719
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.49	0.730
Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.28	0.793
Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.21	0.802
Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship, field trip, community activity) that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners	1	4	2.92	0.871

Note.  $n = 222$ . Survey item: "From your perspective, when designing and teaching your course, how impactful is the use of instructional practices that" (4 = *Critical to student success* to 1 = *Does not contribute to student success*).

Our second analysis explored the following research questions:

1. **What culturally relevant practices are not used as widely by faculty teaching gateway courses?**
2. **What are the reasons why each practice is not used?**

As presented in Table 3, results indicated "providing experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners" ( $M = 2.10$ ) was the least used culturally relevant instructional practice. There was also a sizable gap between experiential learning and "honor the contemporary contributions" ( $M = 3.33$ ) and "reflect the historical contributions" ( $M = 3.33$ ). Among those who selected they "never" used an instructional practice, we asked respondents why (see Figure 1). The most frequently cited reason why culturally relevant instructional practices were not used was "limited capacity/time" ( $n = 68$ ). This finding suggests faculty who teach gateway courses have limited time to infuse culturally relevant practices into the curriculum. The second most cited apprehension to using culturally relevant practices was "limited access to resources and/or experts" ( $n = 42$ ) followed by "lack of institutional support" ( $n = 27$ ). A lack of institutional support may indicate colleges are not providing adequate time to faculty to develop culturally relevant content and a possible lack of professional development opportunities to explore these possibilities.

**Table 3.**

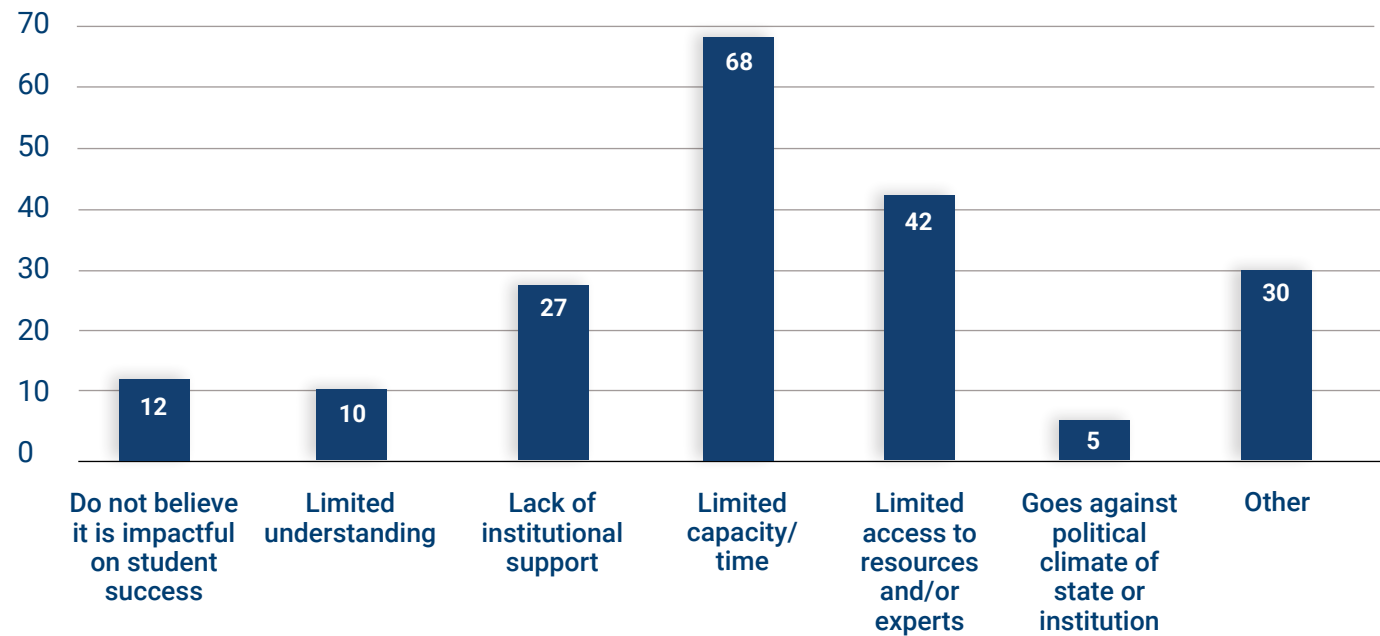
*Instructional Practices Least Used by Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship, field trip, community activity) that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners	1	4	2.10	1.137
Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.33	0.925
Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.33	0.919

Note.  $n = 238$ . Survey item: “When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that” (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never).

**Figure 1.**

*Reasons Why Culturally Relevant Practices Are “Never” Used*



## Instructional Practices Among Math and English Gateway Course Faculty

In this section, we investigate the instructional practices among gateway courses in mathematics (including statistics<sup>10</sup>) and English. As presented in Table 4, the most used instructional practices among faculty who taught math courses were those that “provide collaborative learning opportunities” ( $M = 3.73$ ) followed by those that “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.33$ ). The third most used instructional practices was “positively reflecting the identities” ( $M = 3.26$ ), and the fourth was “expressing differing cultural viewpoints” ( $M = 3.00$ ). These results show disaggregating mathematics from the other disciplines captured differences in frequency because collaborative learning was the top strategy in math but third when aggregated with other fields of study.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics was combined with mathematics because statistics courses are often housed in math departments and fulfill quantitative reasoning requirements.

**Table 4.**

*Top Instructional Practices Used By Math (Including Statistics) Faculty Among Participants Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.73	0.708
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	1	4	3.33	1.028
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.26	1.037
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.00	1.072

Note.  $n = 41$ . Survey item: "When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that" (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never).

Next, we looked at instructional practices among faculty who taught English. As observed in Table 5, the top instructional practices were more tightly grouped with relatively low standard deviations (i.e.,  $< 0.50$ ) in 3 of the 4 practices. The most used instructional practices among faculty who taught English courses were those that "are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners" ( $M = 3.93$ ), trailed by those that "positively reflect the identities of diverse learners" ( $M = 3.87$ ), "express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners" ( $M = 3.80$ ), and "provide collaborative learning opportunities" ( $M = 3.79$ ).

**Table 5.**

*Top Instructional Practices Used by English Faculty Among Participants Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	3	4	3.93	0.258
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.87	0.444
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.80	0.494
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.79	0.558

Note.  $n = 99$ . Survey item: "When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that" (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never).

## Instructional Practices Among Part- and Full-Time Faculty

In this section, we examine differences in using culturally relevant instructional practices between part- and full-time faculty. To explore these differences, we ran several cross tabulations of faculty status related to frequency of use of culturally relevant instructional practices. Results indicated part-time faculty provided fewer collaborative learning opportunities, with 65% indicating they do so weekly compared to 82% of full-time faculty who do so weekly. A Pearson's chi-squared value of 12.81 was found to be statistically significant at the probability of less than 1% that these differences between part- and full-time faculty were due to chance. This was the only statistically significant difference we found between part- and full-time faculty.

**Table 6.**

*Cross Tabulation of Collaborative Learning Instructional Practice Used by Part- and Full-Time Faculty Among Participants Who Taught Gateway Courses*

		Part-Time	Full-Time	Total
<b>Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners.</b>	<b>Never</b>	2	8	10
	<b>Once a Month</b>	4	1	5
	<b>Once a Semester</b>	10	17	27
	<b>Weekly</b>	30	122	152
<b>Total</b>		<b>146</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>194</b>

Note.  $n = 194$ . Survey item: "When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use instructional practices that" (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never). Pearson chi-square = 12.81 ( $p < .01$ ).





## Instructional Practices Based on Course Modality Offering

In this section, we explore the differences in culturally relevant instructional practices and the role of course modality offering (i.e., in person, fully online, hybrid). To explore the differences, we ran several cross tabulations of course modality related to frequency of use of culturally relevant instructional practices among faculty in gateway courses. Interestingly, 5 of the 7 culturally relevant practices had a statistically significant difference to report, which included “positively reflect the identities,” “reflect the historical contributions,” “honor the contemporary contributions,” “express differing cultural viewpoints,” and “are relevant to the lives and experiences.”

**Table 7.**

*Cross Tabulation of the Instructional Practice “Positively Reflect the Identities of Diverse Learners” Used by Faculty Across Course Offering Modalities Among Gateway Courses*

		In person	Fully online synchronous	Fully online asynchronous	Hybrid (combo in person/online)	Total
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners.	Never	6	0	0	0	6
	Once a Month	8	1	0	1	10
	Once a Semester	14	1	6	3	24
	Weekly	103	15	46	39	203
Total		131	17	52	43	243

Note.  $n = 243$ . Survey item: “Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never). Linear-by-linear association chi-square = 7.62 ( $p < .01$ ).

First, “positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” was compared among in-person, fully online synchronous, fully online asynchronous, and hybrid (combination of in person and online) course modalities. Engaging “weekly” with this culturally relevant practice was reported 78.6% among faculty who taught gateway courses in person compared to 88.2% among fully online synchronous, 88.5% among fully online asynchronous, and 90.7% among hybrid course offerings. A linear-by-linear association chi-squared value of 7.62 was found to be statistically significant at the probability of less than 1% that these differences between course modality were due to chance. Therefore, faculty who taught gateway courses in person engaged in “positively reflecting the identities of diverse learners” less frequently than faculty who taught fully online (synchronous and asynchronous) and hybrid.



**Table 8.**

*Cross Tabulation of the Instructional Practice “Reflect the Historical Contributions of Diverse Learners” Used by Faculty Across Course Offering Modalities*

		In person	Fully online synchronous	Fully online asynchronous	Hybrid (combo in person/online)	Total
<b>Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners.</b>	<b>Never</b>	14	0	3	1	18
	<b>Once a Month</b>	13	2	3	3	21
	<b>Once a Semester</b>	36	6	12	12	66
	<b>Weekly</b>	67	9	34	27	137
<b>Total</b>		130	17	52	43	242

*Note.*  $n = 242$ . Survey item: “Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners” (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never). Linear-by-linear association chi-square = 5.45 ( $p < .05$ ).

Next, “reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners” was compared among in-person, fully online synchronous, fully online asynchronous, and hybrid (combination of in person and online) course modalities (see Table 8). Engaging “weekly” with this culturally relevant practice was reported 51.5% among faculty who taught gateway courses in person compared to 52.9% among fully online synchronous, 65.4% among fully online asynchronous, and 62.3% among hybrid course offerings. A linear-by-linear association chi-squared value of 5.45 was found to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Consequently, faculty who taught gateway courses in person and fully online synchronously engaged in “reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners” less frequently than faculty who taught fully online asynchronous and hybrid.

**Table 9.**

*Cross Tabulation of the Instructional Practice “Honor the Contemporary Contributions of Diverse Learners” Used by Faculty Across Course Offering Modalities*

		In person	Fully online synchronous	Fully online asynchronous	Hybrid (combo in person/online)	Total
<b>Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners.</b>	Never	14	0	2	3	19
	Once a Month	12	3	2	2	19
	Once a Semester	40	2	15	10	67
	Weekly	64	11	32	28	135
<b>Total</b>		<b>130</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>240</b>

*Note.*  $n = 240$ . Survey item: “Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners” (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never). Linear-by-linear association chi-square = 5.22 ( $p < .05$ ).

Alongside historical contributions, “honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners” was compared among in-person, fully online synchronous, fully online asynchronous, and hybrid (combination of in person and online) modalities. Engaging “weekly” with this culturally relevant practice was reported 49.2% among faculty who taught gateway courses in person compared to 68.8% among fully online synchronous, 62.7% among fully online asynchronous, and 65.1% among hybrid course offerings. A linear-by-linear association chi-squared value of 5.22 was found to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, faculty who taught gateway courses in person engaged in “reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners” less frequently than faculty who taught fully online (synchronously or asynchronously) and hybrid.



**Table 10.**

*Cross Tabulation of the Instructional Practice “Express Differing Cultural Viewpoints That Center the Voices of Diverse Learners” Used by Faculty Across Course Offering Modalities*

		In person	Fully online synchronous	Fully online asynchronous	Hybrid (combo in person/online)	Total
<b>Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners.</b>	Never	10	0	0	1	11
	Once a Month	5	0	1	2	8
	Once a Semester	27	6	5	8	46
	Weekly	89	11	44	32	176
<b>Total</b>		<b>131</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>241</b>

Note.  $n = 241$ . Survey item: “Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners” (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never). Linear-by-linear association chi-square = 4.98 ( $p < .05$ ).

As presented in Table 10, “express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners” was compared among in-person, fully online synchronous, fully online asynchronous, and hybrid (combination of in person and online) course modalities. Engaging “weekly” with this culturally relevant practice was reported 67.9% among faculty who taught gateway courses in person compared to 64.7% among fully online synchronous, 88% among fully online asynchronous, and 74.4% among hybrid course offerings. A linear-by-linear association chi-squared value of 4.98 was found to be statistically significant at the probability of less than 5% that these differences between course modality were due to chance. Accordingly, faculty who taught gateway courses in person and fully online synchronously engaged in “express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners” less frequently than faculty who taught fully online asynchronous and hybrid.







**Table 11.**

*Cross Tabulation of the Instructional Practice “Are Relevant to the Lives and Experiences of Diverse Learners” Used By Faculty Across Course Offering Modalities*

		In person	Fully online synchronous	Fully online asynchronous	Hybrid (combo in person/online)	Total
<b>Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners.</b>	<b>Never</b>	4	0	0	0	4
	<b>Once a Month</b>	3	2	1	1	7
	<b>Once a Semester</b>	15	1	2	2	20
	<b>Weekly</b>	108	14	48	40	210
<b>Total</b>		<b>130</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>241</b>

*Note.*  $n = 241$ . Survey item: “Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never). Linear-by-linear association chi-square = 4.51 ( $p < .05$ ).

Lastly, “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” was compared among in-person, fully online synchronous, fully only asynchronous, and hybrid (combination of in person and online) course modalities (see Table 11). Engaging “weekly” with this culturally relevant practice was reported 83.1% among faculty who taught gateway courses in person compared to 82.4% among fully online synchronous, 94.1% among fully online asynchronous, and 93% among hybrid course offerings. A linear-by-linear association chi-squared value of 5.45 was found to be statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Although the frequencies reported were relatively high across the board, faculty who taught gateway courses in person and fully online synchronously engaged in “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” less frequently than faculty who taught fully online asynchronous and hybrid.

## Course Materials Among Gateway Course Faculty

In this section, we explore our research question: What culturally relevant content is most frequently used in course materials by faculty teaching gateway courses? To answer this question, we analyzed the means and standard deviations of the 261 survey respondents. We asked respondents, “When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use course materials (e.g., texts, videos, assignments, visuals) that: (a) positively reflect the identities of diverse learners, (b) reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners, (c) honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners, (d) are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners, (e) express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners, (f) provide collaborative learning opportunities for diverse learners, and (g) provide experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners.”

**Table 12.**  
*Top Course Materials Used by Faculty Among Participants Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	1	4	3.79	0.611
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.72	0.714
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.60	0.792
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.54	0.854

*Note.*  $n = 212$ . Survey item: “When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use course materials (e.g., texts, videos, assignments, visuals) that” (4 = *Weekly* to 1 = *Never*).

As presented in Table 12, the most used instructional practices are those that are “relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.79$ ), followed by “positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.72$ ), “expressing differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.60$ ), and “providing collaborative learning opportunities for diverse learners” ( $M = 3.54$ ). When asked to rate each culturally relevant content area with regard to course materials and the impact on student success (see Table 13), respondents assessed in the identical order as their use of instructional practices with “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.71$ ), followed by “positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.58$ ), “expressing differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.52$ ), and “providing collaborative learning opportunities for diverse learners” ( $M = 3.51$ ). This finding may indicate faculty use culturally relevant content within their course materials that they believe will have the most impact on student success.

**Table 13.***Rating of Impact For Student Success for Course Materials Among Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	1	4	3.71	0.592
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.58	0.695
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.52	0.694
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.51	0.764
Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.32	0.824
Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.31	0.821
Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship, field trip, community activity) that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners	1	4	2.87	0.933

Note.  $n = 211$ . Survey item: "From your perspective, when designing and teaching your course, how impactful is the use of course materials that" (4 = *Critical to student success* to 1 = *Does not contribute to student success*).

We analyzed which culturally relevant content was least used in course materials (see Table 14). Results indicated "providing experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners" ( $M = 2.13$ ) was the least used culturally relevant course material. There was also a notable and consistent divergence between experiential learning and "honor the contemporary contributions" ( $M = 3.29$ ) and "reflect the historical contributions" ( $M = 3.32$ ).

**Table 14.***Course Materials Least Used by Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship, field trip, community activity) that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners	1	4	2.13	1.146
Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.29	0.941
Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.32	0.952

Note.  $n = 212$ . Survey item: "When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use course materials that" (4 = *Weekly* to 1 = *Never*).

## Course Materials Among Math and English Gateway Course Faculty

In this section, we investigate the culturally relevant content used within course materials among gateway courses in mathematics (including statistics) and English. As presented in Table 15, the most used instructional practices among faculty who taught math courses were those that “provide collaborative learning opportunities” ( $M = 3.59$ ) followed by those that “are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.47$ ). The third most used instructional practices among faculty who taught math courses was “positively reflect the identities of diverse learners” ( $M = 3.21$ ), and the fourth was “expressing differing cultural viewpoints” ( $M = 2.94$ ).

Similar to instructional practices, this consistent finding demonstrates disaggregating mathematics from the other disciplines captured differences in frequency because collaborative learning was the top strategy in math but third when aggregated with other fields of study. As presented in Table 16, results indicated “providing experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners” ( $M = 1.82$ ) was the least used culturally relevant content in course materials followed by “reflect the historical contributions” ( $M = 2.35$ ) and “honor the contemporary contributions” ( $M = 2.44$ ) among faculty who taught gateway courses in math.

**Table 15.**  
*Top Course Materials Used by Math (Including Statistics) Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.59	0.957
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	1	4	3.47	1.022
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.21	1.175
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	2.94	1.153

Note.  $n = 34$ . Survey item: “From your perspective, when designing and teaching my course, how impactful are the course materials (e.g., texts, videos, assignments, visuals) that” (4 = *Critical to student success* to 1 = *Does not contribute to student success*).



**Table 16.***Least Used Course Materials by Math (Including Statistics) Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship, field trip, community activity) that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners	1	4	1.82	1.167
Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners	1	4	2.35	1.203
Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners	1	4	2.44	1.211

Note.  $n = 34$ . Survey item: "When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use course materials (e.g., texts, videos, assignments, visuals) that" (4 = *Weekly* to 1 = *Never*).

Finally, we look at course materials among faculty who taught English. As observed in Table 17, the most used instructional practices among faculty who taught English courses were those that are "relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners" ( $M = 3.95$ ) followed by those that "positively reflect the identities of diverse learners" ( $M = 3.89$ ), "express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners" ( $M = 3.81$ ), and "provide collaborative learning opportunities" ( $M = 3.68$ ). As presented in Table 18, results indicated "providing experiential learning opportunities that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners" ( $M = 2.04$ ) was the least used culturally relevant content infused in the course materials followed by "reflect the historical contributions" ( $M = 3.45$ ) and "honor the contemporary contributions" ( $M = 3.55$ ) among faculty who taught gateway English courses.

**Table 17.***Top Course Materials Used by English Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Are relevant to the lives and experiences of diverse learners	2	4	3.95	0.265
Positively reflect the identities of diverse learners	1	4	3.89	0.440
Express differing cultural viewpoints that center the voices of diverse learners	1	4	3.81	0.502
Provide collaborative learning opportunities (e.g., think/pair/share, small groups, jigsaw) for diverse learners	1	4	3.68	0.643

Note.  $n = 84$ . Survey item: "From your perspective, when designing and teaching my course, how impactful are the course materials (e.g., texts, videos, assignments, visuals) that" (4 = *Critical to student success* to 1 = *Does not contribute to student success*).

**Table 18.***Least Used Course Materials by English Faculty Who Taught Gateway Courses*

	Min	Max	M	SD
Provide experiential learning opportunities (e.g., internship, field trip, community activity) that engage issues facing communities of diverse learners	1	4	2.04	1.103
Reflect the historical contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.45	0.751
Honor the contemporary contributions of diverse learners	1	4	3.55	0.782

Note.  $n = 84$ . Survey item: "When designing and teaching my course, I purposefully use course materials (e.g., texts, videos, assignments, visuals) that" (4 = Weekly to 1 = Never).



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# Summary and Implications

This project has gleaned some insights into the use of culturally relevant instructional practices and course materials in postsecondary gateway courses. Based on data from this report, we have evidence that faculty choose practices and materials they believe have the most positive impact on student success. However, we found faculty face some challenges as well. The primary reason why faculty do not utilize the culturally relevant instructional practices that are “never” used is lack of capacity/time. We need to better understand how this barrier can be addressed, especially among part-time faculty who tend to teach a large proportion of gateway courses.

A second barrier we uncovered is that faculty believe they do not have access to experts and resources. Postsecondary institutions can address this challenge, perhaps by first identifying faculty at the institution who have knowledge and expertise that can be shared in a faculty coaching model. Further, institutions must identify expertise in a broad range of disciplines, including math, statistics, English, science and technology, and the social sciences because there are instructional practices that may be discipline specific.

Future research studies may provide deeper insight and context for how faculty incorporate culturally relevant instructional practices and materials into gateway courses. Individual interviews with faculty, reviewing course syllabi, and observations of instruction would be valuable and could provide rich data on the implementation of culturally relevant practices. Similarly, we need a better understanding of how faculty use digital learning tools and course materials (e.g., e-text, courseware, open educational resources) to infuse culturally relevant content. It would be very helpful to investigate the question “How (if at all) can digital tools be used to facilitate culturally relevant content?” Hopefully, exemplary examples of assignments and instructional materials for all seven culturally relevant practices could be catalogued and developed as resources for those leading similar courses.

An interesting finding was that faculty who taught fully online asynchronous and hybrid courses more frequently infused culturally relevant content than faculty who taught in-person and online synchronous courses. A deeper investigation of faculty experiences may provide key insights into the barriers that modalities present in infusing culturally relevant instructional practices. It is very important to understand what professional development is needed to build the capacity of faculty to infuse culturally relevant content into the curriculum, especially for those who teach part time.

Lastly, this study explored culturally relevant instructional practices from the point of view of faculty, although it would be beneficial to explore students’ perceptions. It would be important to explore how students respond to culturally relevant instructional practices and materials. Often there is a disconnect or a misalignment between the perceptions/preferences of students and faculty. Further, exploring the impact culturally relevant instructional practices may have on students’ sense of belonging would be value added and worthwhile.

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# About the Authors



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**Frank Harris, III, EdD**

Dr. Frank Harris is a professor for postsecondary education and director of the Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University. He is best known for his expertise in racial [in]equity in postsecondary education and has made important contributions to knowledge about college student development and the social construction of gender and race in college contexts. His work prioritizes populations that have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education, and he has obtained competitive grants and extramural funding for his research. Harris's scholarship has been published in leading journals for higher education and student affairs research and practice, and his commentary has been sought by high-profile media outlets, including *CNN*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. He also has delivered thousands of academic and professional presentations throughout his career. During the Obama Administration, Harris was invited to The White House to share his knowledge and expertise on the status of boys and men of color in education. He also serves on the Every Learner Everywhere Equity Advisory Board and on the Partnership for College Completion Board. Dr. Harris earned a bachelor's degree in communication studies at Loyola Marymount University, a master's degree in speech communication at California State University, Northridge, and a doctorate in higher education from the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California.



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**Christopher B. Newman, PhD**

Dr. Christopher Newman is an associate professor of higher education at California State University Fullerton. His research focuses primarily on equity and undergraduate student experiences in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. He also studies college readiness and pathways into postsecondary education for students of color. Additionally, he investigates multicultural education and equity in global contexts. Dr. Newman has presented over 40 papers and symposia at well-regarded national and international conferences. He is author or coeditor of four books and has authored or coauthored 25 articles and book chapters. Dr. Newman earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a master's degree and PhD in higher education and organizational change from the University of California, Los Angeles.





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### J. Luke Wood, PhD

Dr. J. Luke Wood is the 9th president of Sacramento State University. Dr. Wood's research focuses on racial equity in education with a specific emphasis on early childhood education and community colleges. In particular, his research examines contributors to positive outcomes for boys and men of color. Dr. Wood has delivered over 2,000 scholarly professional and conference presentations. His research has been featured by *NBC*, *The New York Times*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Huffington Post*, *Fortune Magazine*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Miami Herald*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *C-SPAN*, and *National Press Club*. Dr. Wood has authored over 180 publications, including 80 peer-reviewed journal articles and 16 books. Dr. Wood is a former recipient of the Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Fellowship, from which he served as research fellow at the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research at Stanford University. Wood received his PhD in educational leadership and policy studies with an emphasis in higher education and his master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in early childhood education from Arizona State University. He also holds a master's degree in higher education leadership with a concentration in student affairs and a bachelor's degree in Black history and politics from California State University, Sacramento.



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### Sim Barhoum, EdD

Dr. Sim Barhoum is a professor of English at San Diego Mesa College. Dr. Barhoum has taught a wide range of higher education courses from pre-transfer and basic skills to transfer and graduate level in a variety of teaching formats, from traditional courses to hybrid and online education. He teaches, trains, and runs the education of over 150 tutors in a variety of San Diego Mesa College's outlets, including Disabled Student Services, Veteran's Center, and local San Diego high schools. Dr. Barhoum's research focuses on developmental pathways, barriers to underserved students, and best practices for helping students succeed inside and outside the classroom. Dr. Barhoum earned a doctoral degree in educational leadership with a specialization in community college/postsecondary education from San Diego State University.



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### Marissa Vasquez, EdD

Dr. Marissa Vasquez is an associate professor of postsecondary educational leadership and associate director of the Community College Equity Assessment Lab at San Diego State University. Her research seeks to better understand the experiences, factors, and conditions that facilitate success among underserved college students, particularly community college and transfer students. Her research agenda includes three strands: (a) understanding the pre/post transitional experiences of community college transfer students, (b) using antideficit perspectives to examine the experiences of Latina/o/x college students, and (c) exploring the role of community colleges in fostering welcoming and inclusive campus environments for disproportionately impacted students. Dra. Vasquez earned an associate degree in transfer studies from Southwestern College, a bachelor's degree in English from the University of California, Berkeley, a master's degree in counseling from the University of San Diego, and an EdD in postsecondary educational leadership from San Diego State University.



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