

Student Reflections on Online Student Representation

Our team of three undergraduate students attending different institutions applied our diverse and intersectional higher education experiences through a lens of racial equity to analyze equitable student representation on 5 Advising Success Network partner organization websites. We assessed websites using the Equity-Minded Inquiry Series Web Scan, created by USC Rossier School of Education to evaluate portrayal of and commitment to equitable language, images, and student-centered initiatives. With our findings, we have developed recommendations for these organizations and the broader field to implement that will convey the mission toward equity and student success.

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Website Tool

We began our project by shaping the definition of equity and student success through various articles and analyses of research done by professionals within these fields. We then applied our understanding of these topics to our usage of the Equity-Minded Inquiry Series Web Scan. The web scan asked reflective questions regarding equity and student success that are meant to be answered while reviewing the websites, which allowed us to locate patterns of potential deficit or inequitable language and/or images.

The tool itself has four steps that we followed:

1. Find web pages to be scanned.
2. Scan web pages for Equity-Minded practices.
3. Reflect on web-scan findings and processes.
4. Present findings to organizations.

The tool is extremely helpful because of the specificity of what is considered inequitable and unwelcoming communication, such as questions regarding the representation of racially minoritized students. One inadequacy that the tool has is the failure to specify how deeply we should go into the website (i.e. stay on the given web page or click links to others). There were moments of uncertainty on whether to analyze the entirety of the website, or just the given page.

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Themes

While reviewing the websites, we documented recurring lapses in equitable communication. The two most common themes that we found were 1) a general ambivalence in defining equity and 2) websites portraying a student experience that was geared toward white students of a higher socio-economic status. This message was generally communicated through;

- A lack of photos representing racially minoritized students, if any at all
- Little reference to initiatives that improve diverse student experiences
 - » Normalizing a white student experience by assuming a one-size fits all approach to student engagement
 - » Websites are catered toward institution faculty/employees rather than students
- Little to no resources for more information or contact information for student inquiries
 - » I.e.: FAQ, institution contact information



Ideal Recommendations

The following are recommendations for the ideal website of any academic organization that serves students directly or indirectly:

- **Invest in an updated and easy-to-navigate web design**
- **Include images of racially diverse student bodies**
- **Clear the website of academic jargon**
- **Including information on student-centered initiatives**
- **Directly state the organization's stance on equity within mission/goals**
- **Create a section for students to inquire more; i.e. FAQ, or contact information**