MAKING THE CASE FOR EQUITY

Engaging State Boards and Leadership in Equity Work

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OVERVIEW

WHAT WE'LL DISCUSS

Current Conversations
Why Boards Matter?
Boards as Partners
Strategies to Communicate
Application Activity
Reflection/Q&A
Key Takeaways
Action Items
"Not only is there a public good to what we do, there’s an immense private benefit. If you have a college degree, or at least some college, you’re going to have higher lifetime earnings, higher annual earnings; you’re going to be more likely to be employed, less likely to be laid off; you’re going to be healthier, less likely to be on social welfare; you’re less likely to get in trouble with the law; you’re more likely to vote and more likely to be philanthropic in your community."

CHANCELLOR DUBOIS, UNC CHARLOTTE
WHAT IS EQUITY?
"...a concern for educational outcomes that are cognizant of and responsive to how socio-cultural forces (i.e. structural ‘isms’) impede or propel student success and institutional accountability."

What do State-Level Governing Boards have to do with Equity?
HOW CAN STATE-LEVEL GOVERNING BOARDS ACTING AS LEVERS IN INITIATING AND ACHIEVING POLICY CHANGE, ULTIMATELY ACHIEVE A MORE EQUITABLE HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETPLACE?
Boards as Levers

- Strategic Board Composition
- Interlocks as Pathways
- Culturally Sustaining Governance
Equity as Fiduciary Duty
"The pursuit of equity is a mindset, framework, and lens that guides your approach to the work with which you have already been tasked."

Rall, Commodore, & Morgan
EQUITY AS FIDUCIARY DUTY

Duty of Care
Act in good faith and with skill to protect institutional assets
Monitor the institution's activities

Duty of Loyalty
Equitable practices and decision-making as a priority to their work and central to the work of the board
Prioritizing what will be equitable and good for students as opposed to self-interest

Duty of Obedience
Hold institutions accountable to commitments to diversity and student success
Adhere to mission and laws
CULTURALLY SUSTAINING GOVERNANCE
Rall, Morgan, & Commodore, 2020

- The board establishes a subcommittee with deeper working relationships with the institutional research office, diversity affairs, and human resources to ensure that all data presented to the board has been vetted for possible inequities in either outcomes or experiences.

- The board is able to consistently articulate how equity informs their decision-making and are seen as partners and advocates for equity in broader conversations about institutional mission and success.

- The board creates a statement defining equity and identifying time-bound goals in light of the institutional mission and local realities. The statement also commits the board to specific accountability mechanisms.

- The board receives regular training around issues of equity and the experiences of minoritized stakeholders. Furthermore, the onboarding process for new trustees is reimagined to focus on the pursuit of equity.
STATE LEVEL GOVERNING BOARDS

SLGBs operate in a policy and governance context that exposes them to myriad discourses, some of which directly deal with postsecondary education (e.g., increasing postsecondary attainment) and others that can be read as potentially more indirect (e.g., state economic impact).

Morgan et al., 2021
State-Level Governing Boards as Intermediaries

General System Context

- Environmental
- Political
- Socioeconomic
- Legal

Issue Windows

Macro Challenges, Opportunities, & Crises

Principals

- Broader Public
- State Elected Officials (e.g., Governors and State Legislators)

Intermediary

- "Drivers of Collaboration"
- Responsive to Leadership Directives & Political Priorities
- Disseminates Ideas about Consequential Incentives
- Identifies Collaborative Opportunities
- Tempers and Transforms Policy Uncertainty
- SLGB Strategic Plans

Issue Opportunists: State-Level Governing Boards

Agents

- Public Postsecondary Institutions

Morgan et al., 2021

Commodore Consulting, LLC
Boards can function like electrical sockets, meaning they have access to power and can facilitate the flow of resources, energizing a DEI initiative to fulfill its goals of creating cultural transformation to support all institutional stakeholders. The transference of power and resources from a Board coupled with insights, expertise, and day-to-day management from other DEI leaders operates as a form of organizational partnering that can facilitate the realization of desired outcomes and institutional transformation.

Morgan et al., 2022
A Matrix of Governing Board's Partnering for DEI

**Board's DEI Capacity**

- **High**
  - **Symbolic Governing Board:** A Board with high DEI capacity but without internal & external partnerships due to late or unclear partnership window timing. The Board's DEI involvement is likely to be symbolic and lack sustained partnerships with DEI stakeholders.

- **Low**
  - **Ideal Partnering:** A Board with high DEI capacity and early in the partnership window creates optimal conditions for the Board to employ tenets of CSG and have robust internal and external partnerships. The Board is likely to initiate or energize DEI efforts that lead to a pervasive and sustainable institutional commitment to ongoing and evolving DEI work.

  - **Performatively Governing Board:** A Board with low or unclear DEI capacity and late or unclear partnership window timing. The Board's DEI involvement is likely to be internally performative and lack partnerships.

  - **Follower Governing Board:** A Board with low or unclear DEI capacity but early in the partnership window. The Board's DEI involvement likely to follow the lead of other stakeholders who initiate the episodic DEI partnership; sustained Board engagement with stakeholders is likely to be inconsequential due to the Board's lack of DEI expertise and capacity.

**Timing of Partnership Window**

- **Early**
- **Late**

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Morgan et al., 2022
HOW TO MAKE THE EQUITY ARGUMENT?
Why does equity matter?
STRATEGIES TO COMMUNICATE WITH BOARDS

Four Approaches

- Value-Add
- Interest Convergence
- Public Interest
- Economic
Application: Make Your Case
CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. What are the Key Issues?
2. What Key Decisions are Most Imperative?
3. How can these Decisions be Made in an Equity-Centered Approach?
4. What Anti-Equity-Centered Decision-Making Arguments could be Made?
5. Craft your Argument to the Board? Which Approach would you Take? Why?
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Define Equity
- Boards are Levers and Intermediaries
- Know Your Board's Motivation to Determine Approach
- Find Allies and Co-Conspirators
- Bring in Support and Development
Q&A/CONTACT
FOR QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND MORE INFO

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