



# College of Education & Human Services

## COEHS Interrogating Teaching and Learning Structures in Pursuit of Equity and Social Justice

### Policies, Procedures and Guidelines Subgroup Report

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#### Introduction

The Interrogating Teaching and Learning Subgroup 1 focused its efforts on examining potential inequities related to potential inherent bias of college policies that could disadvantage specific populations of students, with a particular emphasis on race, gender and age as characteristics likely to be impacted either by the nature of the policy itself, mechanisms of implementation, or student awareness of policies that may impact them.

The committee developed hypotheses, gathered and analyzed available data, explored policy documents, and conducted focus groups with students in courses from all four departments at the undergraduate and graduate level.

In particular, we investigated the following areas:

1. Petition Data
2. Policy Related Documents
  - a. Program Area Handbooks
  - b. Admissions Standards and Policies
  - c. Grade Disputes, OIE statements, etc.
  - d. Website
3. Student Knowledge of Policies and Procedures

#### Results

##### *1. Petition Data*

Petition data was gathered for all submitted college and university petitions for undergraduate and master's students in the college. Data on 712 petition decisions from 2017-2020 were gathered through reports generated by the college Central Database and included reason for

petition, student demographic information, and outcome of the petition decision. Types of petitions included extensions, special placement requests, late add/withdrawal, waivers/substitutions, readmission, and course prerequisite exemptions.

Descriptive statistics were run for the whole group and disaggregated by race. Rough analysis indicated that there were differential outcomes by race in terms of approved petitions (see Appendix 1 -- Petition analysis). For the three years, the approval rate for petitions by black students ranged from 76%-79% whereas the approval rate for white students ranged from 84%-88%.

However, as a percentage of submitted petitions, the approval rates were similar. Black students submitted 24% of all petitions and approvals reflected 23% of all approvals. Petition data was not analyzed by type of petition, which may have been an intervening variable. There were also a significant number of petitions submitted by students with no race identified. The committee also noted that there were differences in the numbers of petitions submitted by program, which suggested different program processes to provide information about or to review petitions.

In reviewing these findings and limitations, the committee found it difficult to determine whether disparities were the result of differential treatment.

#### *Recommendations:*

To protect against the potential for bias, the committee recommends the following measures:

1. Create a petition review procedure that decreases bias – (e.g. blind review, multiple reviewers or program-level review).
2. Ensure that programs have clear policies/procedures in place for advising students and reviewing petitions (See recommendations below under “Policy Related Documents”)
3. Identify a diverse group of faculty and staff to review petition data each year (potentially Undergraduate and Graduate Affairs Committee) in the spring when the curriculum work is light to guard against bias

#### *II. Policy Related Documents*

Documents related to policies where individuals or groups make consequential decisions that impact student ability to progress or succeed in an academic program were identified and collected, through web searches or contact with university offices. The following types of data were gathered:

- Program handbooks
- Admission standards and policies
- Procedures for intervention with struggling students
- Policies posted on university web pages

From their review of these documents, the committee found:

- Some programs have handbooks and some do not
- Handbooks take a wide range of forms and include different kinds of information, making it difficult to gather information about parallel issues across the existing handbooks
- Admission standards and policies vary throughout the college
- Intervention policies vary widely and include different “chains of command” for addressing issues
- It is not always easy to find relevant policies on the web, and it is easy to find old, inaccurate information
- Information on the web is not easily accessible for visually impaired students

*Recommendations:*

1. Program areas/student support offices review intervention processes and ensure clarity and equity (see Appendix 1 -- Recommended Intervention Guidelines)
2. Develop a handbook template for program areas and provide support for creating digital, accessible, easily navigated handbooks that can quickly be adapted as curriculum and other changes take place.
3. Ensure that programs have a process for disseminating policy-related documents and advising using these documents
4. Collect and analyze admissions data before and after requiring the GRE (due to COVID)
5. Routine review of websites
  - a. Create a process for reporting finding old or inaccurate web pages
  - b. Advertise the “For Students” page (see below) through courses, social media, etc. (make it better than the google search) – someone should “own” the page
  - c. Link web sites to the catalog (undergraduate and graduate) because it is accurate and reflects official college policy

III. *Student Knowledge of Policies and Procedures*

Focus groups were conducted in eight courses across all programs and both graduate and undergraduate levels. A common set of questions were developed to learn about students’ knowledge of advising resources and relevant policies, especially when facing challenges in their programs, and to solicit examples of potentially inequitable situations. Focus group interviews were conducted by 1-2 committee members. Notes were reviewed and discussed by the whole committee to identify common themes.

*Limitations:*

- Not much racial diversity in the groups
- Focus group may not have been the best for students to share their thoughts
- Not a research study, just for our information

*Themes that Emerged:*

1. Significance of particular people (faculty and advisors) whom students gravitate towards, trust, and seek for assistance

2. Students in smaller or cohort-based programs seem to be more easily connected with specific advisors. Undergraduate students who changed advisors multiple times (first year advising, ESSC, faculty advisors) felt more disconnected from advisors
3. Students who started during COVID, felt less connected to one another and to faculty
4. Graduate and undergraduate students differed in the types/sources of support they sought (graduate students relied on faculty whereas undergraduate students relied on internet and college advising office)
5. Students rely on one another for information. Students who were part of informal groups had more support between one another
  - o Some students were left out of these groups and don't have the support from other students
6. Many students mentioned using the website and found the resources useful (campusnet and degree audit). Generally, students were able to find what they needed.
7. Students did not know about our processes (grade dispute, petitions, catalog rights, department chair, etc.). Some were unaware of advising resources (faculty advisor, ESSC) and whom they should seek for advising.

*Lingering Questions:*

- Is there a difference for student support or connection in classes that are remote, web-based, synchronous, asynchronous, or in-person?
- How do advising and support differ in programs that have higher percentages of part-time faculty

*Recommendations:*

1. Communicate to faculty (course instructors) and advisors how important their role is to the students
2. Recognize importance of responding to students in a timely fashion
3. Create general statement(s) about advising and incorporate in the syllabus and recommend incorporating advising in the entry level courses – to teach the students about the advisors that are available
  - a. Add ESSC contact information to the contact information section of the syllabus
  - b. Add Department Chair on the syllabus
4. Provide multiple options for students to be connected to someone – faculty, advisors and/or other students
  - a. If advisors use Starfish for undergraduate, all of the advisors can see what the student has been told
  - b. Create formal structures for students to support one another
  - c. Make judicious use of electronic connectivity (e.g. Zoom, brief “check-in” appointments)
5. Seek better ways to communicate better with students
6. Make the college hierarchy visible to students (faculty, department chair, dean). Make visible the difference between faculty and ESSC advisors.
7. Modify website
  - a. Make sure information is up to date on the website

- b. Create a “For Students” portion of our website listing links to policies and procedures

## Conclusions

Overall, there were important differences in the type of support that students sought or received. These differences seemed to impact students’ ability to navigate the college and university systems to their benefit.

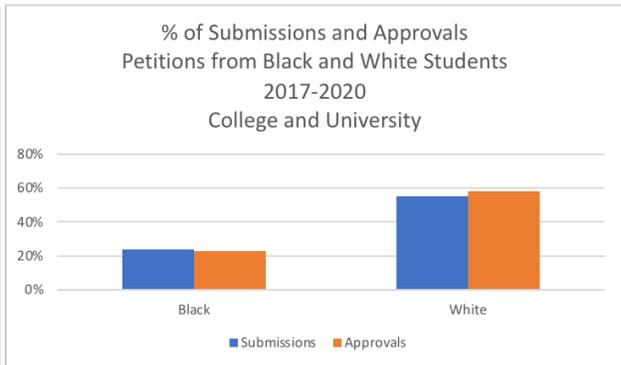
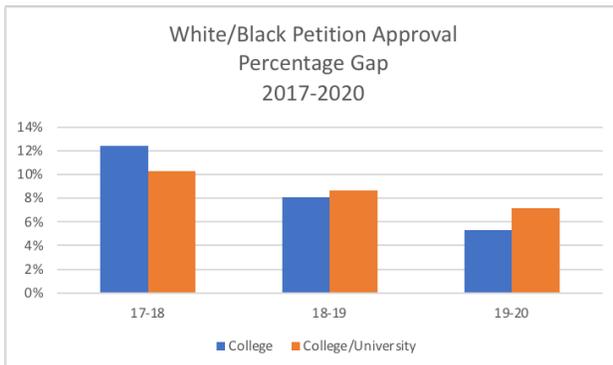
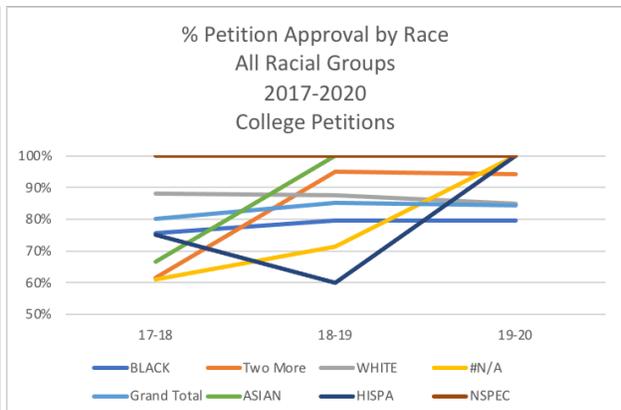
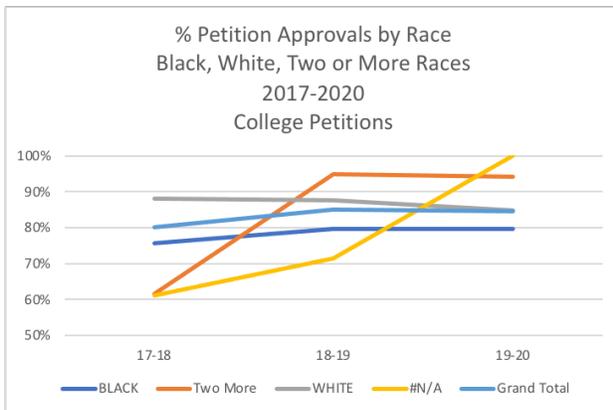
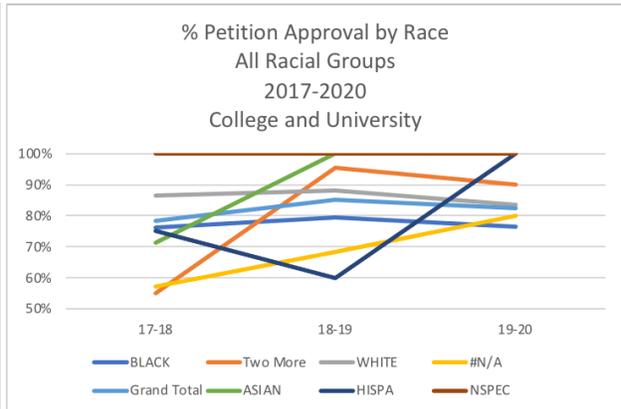
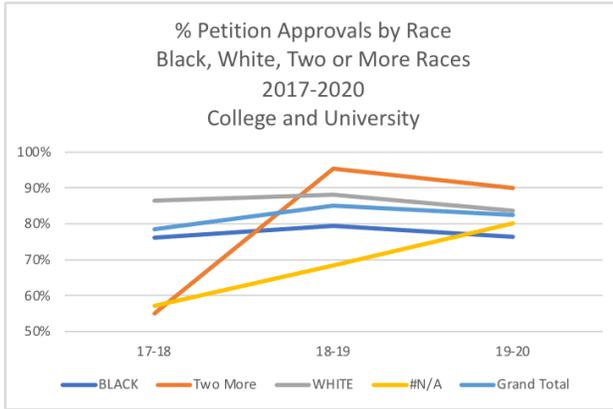
Some of the salient variables impacting these differences included:

- Undergraduate v. graduate differences in advising and student contact
- Differences in student strategies and ability to locate accurate online content
- Availability and development of a single trusted advisor to assist in navigating the program
- Program differences in involvement with advising and student support
- Differences in the availability and accessibility of online information

To ensure greater equity in the application of college policies and procedures, the committee’s recommendations focus on improving **communications** and **advising** overall, to prevent potential problems, to manage emergent problems, and to ensure that all students receive equitable treatment in addressing issues.

## Appendix 1: Petition Analysis

The following graphs summarize the findings of the petition analysis completed for petitions from 2017-2020.



## **Appendix 2: Recommended Intervention Guidelines**

The following components were identified in an analysis of college and university documents outlining procedures for intervention with struggling students. The committee recommends the following items to be included in any college or program-specific document related to an intervention process:

1. Process for Assessment
  1. Point in time -- are there specific times during a semester or academic year, or is it on a continuous basis?
  2. Raters -- who identifies the issue?
2. Criteria
  1. Academic
  2. Dispositional
  3. Professional/clinical skill
3. Process for resolution
  1. Time frame
  2. People involved
    1. College
    2. Student/advocate
  3. Documentation
  4. Recording of decision
  5. Transparency
4. Potential outcomes
  1. Action plan
  2. Removal from experience
  3. Repeat course
  4. Flag on file
5. Recourse for appeal
  1. Chair
  2. Dean
  3. Office of Institutional Equity
  4. University ombudsperson

### **Appendix 3: Focus Group Questions**

- 1.) Where do you go for information about your program or college policies that impact your program completion?**
- 2.) Who or what sources do you find particularly helpful?**
- 3.) Next are questions related to circumstances that might arise during your time at CSU in the COEHS:**
  - **Scheduling**
  - **Internship**
  - **Grades and Grade Disputes**
  - **Curricular Program Planning and Degree Requirements**
  - **Emergencies**
  - a. It is week 11 of the semester and you need drop a course you are currently enrolled in and the option is no longer available in CampusNet. What should you do?
  - b. An instructor advised you to reach out to your faculty advisor regarding your program plan. You have never been introduced to your faculty advisor. How would you find your assigned faculty advisor and their contact information?
  - c. A staff member advised you to get a copy of your program of study or program checklist online. How would you find it on the CSU website?
  - d. Have you ever disputed a grade or felt that you received a grade lower than you deserved?
    - i. You have received a grade of F in your class and do not believe you deserve it. Can you do something about it and if so, what you do?
  - e. You have a medical situation and have to take two weeks off in the middle of semester. What do you do?
  - f. You are approaching the end of your program and need to complete an internship. Where would you go to find information about this process?
- 4.) Have you heard of any experiences in the college where someone felt uncertain about the process or felt they were treated inequitably?**