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Assessing the Degree of Systemic Equity among Personnel of a Community College: Foundations for a Professional Development Plan

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Abstract: This study measured the degree of systemic inequities and social justice among the personnel of a community college to inform the development of a professional development plan. Employing a descriptive-comparative research design with a census of all 36 permanent faculty and staff, the research utilized a researcher-made survey with a 5-point Likert scale. Data analysis, which included means, standard deviations, and the Mann-Whitney U test, found a significant departure from normality, justifying the use of a non-parametric test. Results revealed an overall neutral perception of systemic equity among the personnel (M=3.31, SD=1.03). The study found no statistically significant difference in perceptions between faculty and staff (U=80, p=0.184), indicating that both groups perceive similar levels of equity or justice. Specific items, such as access to professional development and social trust, were also rated as neutral. The findings suggest a potential lack of awareness or engagement with systemic inequities within the college. The conclusion highlights this neutrality not as a sign of a problem-free environment, but as a critical opportunity for proactive change. The study recommends implementing targeted professional development programs, enhancing transparency, and fostering dialogue to shift the institutional culture from a passive, neutral state to a more actively equitable one.

Keywords: Social Justice, Social Equity, Community College, faculty and staff, Systemic Inequities

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are complex social systems where interconnected factors shape student outcomes. Effective leadership and management are crucial for cultivating equitable learning and working environments. When systemic inequities persist, they can alter the institutional climate, leading to a decline in social trust and an uneven distribution of resources, such as professional development (Amemasor et al., 2025). This situation has profound implications, impeding faculty and staff's ability to support students and advance their careers. Specifically, low social trust hampers collaboration, while inequitable access to professional development leaves some educators less prepared to implement inclusive pedagogies. This disparity directly impacts student experiences and outcomes. Leadership plays a pivotal role in either mitigating or exacerbating these effects, with transparent practices fostering empowerment and hierarchical practices entrenching inequities.

The primary objective of this study is to measure the degree of systemic inequities or injustice among the personnel of a community college to form the foundations for a Professional Development Plan. Specifically, the research seeks to determine the: (1) degree of systemic inequities or injustice among faculty and staff in a

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Community College which include levels of social trust, collaborative culture, and perceived career enhancement opportunities among faculty and staff; (2) difference in systemic inequities perceived between faculty and staff; (3) prioritized professional development topics and preferred formats for addressing systemic inequities and supporting career enhancement.

Theoretical Framework. This study is anchored on three key theories. (1) Organizational Justice Theory (Greenberg, 1987) posits that employees' perceptions of fairness—distributive, procedural, and interactional—significantly influence their attitudes and behaviors. (2) Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961) complements this by emphasizing that investments in skills and experience, like professional development, increase an individual's value and potential for career advancement. Finally, (3) Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Leach, 1961) highlights the psychological contract between employees and the organization, where perceived imbalances due to inequities can diminish commitment and willingness to invest in one's career. This framework outlines how systemic inequality in resource allocation and processes can lower perceptions of organizational justice, thereby reducing motivation, engagement, and career opportunities. Conversely, a comprehensive and equitable professional development plan should boost human capital and self-efficacy, ultimately supporting career advancement for all employees. This framework serves to inform the college's professional development plan to create a more equitable and supportive environment.

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design. This study employs a descriptive-comparative research design with item analysis. This approach was selected to thoroughly portray the current conditions across several key areas pertinent to a Community College's faculty and staff.

Respondents. The target population for this study comprised all permanent faculty and staff members of a Community College. A census (total enumeration) approach was employed to ensure the inclusion of every individual within this population. Consequently, the study's participant pool consists of 36 individuals (N=36). The demographic distribution of these participants is: 20 faculty members, constituting 56% of the sample, and 16 staff members, accounting for 44% of the population.

Research Instrument. The study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire called the "Systemic Equity and Social Justice Questionnaire for a Community College" to collect data. This instrument contains 17 items on a 5-point Likert scale to gather respondents' perspectives on systemic inequities, social trust, professional development, and career enhancement. A pilot study confirmed the instrument's suitability, showing strong content validity (Item Content Validity Index > 0.78 and a Scale Content Validity Ratio of 0.95) and internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha of 0.711).

Data Collection and Analysis. Data collection began with obtaining ethical and administrative permissions from the College Administrator. After securing institutional approval and receiving explicit, voluntary consent from each participant, the questionnaire was administered to all faculty and staff members. This process ensured the collection of reliable and valid data relevant to the study's objectives. For Data Analysis, means and standard deviations were used in item analyses. Furthermore, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to determine normality, where the test showed a significant departure from normality ($W[3]= 0.74$, $p < .001$). Thus, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine significant differences in the degree of social equities between staff and faculty.

Ethical Considerations. The study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical guidelines, prioritizing the well-being and confidentiality of all participants. To protect privacy, all collected data was rigorously anonymized, and participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were fully informed of the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. The research posed no foreseeable risks, as it relied on a non-invasive, perception-based survey. The college's name was withheld to further ensure confidentiality. Ultimately, the research findings are intended to promote organizational justice by identifying areas for systemic improvement, thereby fostering a more equitable and supportive environment for faculty and staff.

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III. RESULTS

The results presented in this section, as summarized in Table 1 below, directly address the initial two research questions of this study. These findings illuminate the current state of systemic equity within the community college's personnel structure, highlighting both areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Table 1.
Degree of Systemic Equity or Justice among Faculty and Staff in a Community College

Survey Item No. & Content	M	SD	Interpretation
1 - Sense of Trust among Faculty and Staff	3.08	0.98	Neutral
2 - Equal Access to Professional Development	2.86	1.16	Neutral
3 - Addressing Students' Needs	3.28	1.17	Neutral
4 - Meeting Diverse Needs	3.47	1.01	High Equity/ Social Justice
5 - Works to Reduce Inequities	3.25	1.09	Neutral
6 - School Culture of Collaboration	3.31	0.99	Neutral
7 - Quality Education	3.31	0.88	Neutral
8 - Use of Data to Address Inequities	3.17	1.04	Neutral
9 - Awareness of Systemic Inequities	3.36	1.03	Neutral
10 - Improving Overall Student Achievement	3.97	0.93	High Equity/ Social Justice
11 - Professional Development to Foster Equity	3.19	1.10	Neutral
12 - Opportunities for Promotion	3.39	1.16	Neutral
13 - Salaries & Responsibilities	3.31	0.97	Neutral
14 - Mentorship of Admin to Rank-&-File	3.42	0.98	High Equity/ Social Justice
15 - Cultural Positivity	3.33	0.97	Neutral
Overall Degree of Systemic Equity	***3.31***	***1.03***	***Neutral***

Note. The numerical values of this scale are interpreted as follows: (1) mean score of 4.21 - 5.00 indicates Very High Equity/Social Justice; (2) 3.41 - 4.20 signifies High Equity/Social Justice; (3) 2.61 - 3.40 represents a Neutral stance or Perception; (4) 1.81 - 2.60 denotes Low Equity/Social Justice; and (5) 1.00 - 1.80 corresponds to Very Low Equity/Social Justice.

The following are found to have neutral stance in these areas relevant to systemic equities or social justice: Sense of Trust among Faculty and Staff (M=3.08, SD=0.98), Equal Access to Professional Development (M=2.86, SD= 1.16), Addressing Students' Needs (M=3.28, SD=1.17), Works to Reduce Inequities (M=3.25, SD=1.09), School Culture of Collaboration (M=3.31, SD= 0.99), Quality Education (M=3.31, SD=0.88), Use of Data to Address Inequities (M=3.17, SD=1.04), Awareness of Systemic Inequities (M=3.36, SD=1.03), Professional Development to foster Equity (M=3.19, SD=1.10) Opportunities for Promotion (M=3.39, SD=1.16), Salaries & Responsibilities (M=3.31, SD= 0.97), and Cultural Positivity (M=3.33, SD=0.97).

On the other hand, only the following three (3) areas related to systemic equity are found to have High Social Justice: Meeting Diverse Needs (M=3.47, SD=1.01), Improving Overall Student Achievement (M=3.97, SD=0.93), Mentorship of Admin to Rank-&-File (M=3.42, SD=0.98).

Table 1 above indicates that faculty and staff at the Community College hold an overall neutral perception regarding various equity-related themes (M=3.31, SD=1.03). This overall neutrality suggests that while equity issues are recognized, their consistent manifestation and impact are not universally perceived, and there isn't a strong, consistent consensus on the prevalence of equitable conditions or the effectiveness of institutional efforts currently in place (European Commission, 2022).

Table 2.
Difference in Systemic Equity/ Social Justice between Faculty and Staff

Variable	M	SD	Interpretation	U-Statistic	P-value
Personnel Classification				U=80	p=0.184
Faculty	3.24	0.30	Neutral		
Staff	3.25	0.34	Neutral		

Note. Mann-Whitney U test was used after normality testing, finding a skewed distribution. There is no significant difference among personnel classifications.

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Table 2 presents the results of a Mann-Whitney U test comparing the "Systemic Equity/Social Justice" perceptions between faculty and staff. Faculty members reported a mean score of 3.24 (SD = 0.30), while staff members had a slightly higher mean of 3.25 (SD = 0.34). Both groups' mean scores were interpreted as neutral. The Mann-Whitney U test (Salkind, 2024) yielded a U-statistic of 80 and a p-value of 0.184, indicating no statistically significant difference in perceived systemic equity or social justice between the two groups. This finding aligns with broader research suggesting that while institutions may prioritize equity, faculty and staff perceptions of these efforts can be complex and often similar across roles within the same institution (Hofman, L. et al, 2024).

Table 3.
Specific Professional Development Topics to Address Systemic Inequities in the Community College

Professional Development Topics	**Faculty**	**Staff**
Inclusive Education and ICT Integration		X
Customer Satisfaction Trainings, Comm & Time Mgmt		X
Professionalism in the Workplace/Office Etiquette/Work Ethics	X	X
Conflict Resolution & Social Emotional Learning		X
Global Classroom and Inclusive Pedagogies	X	X
Leadership and Emotional Intelligence Training		X
Advocacy Skills, Allyship, Action Planning & Evaluation		X
Equity in Digital Access and Technology Use		X
Restorative Justice in Education & Equity-Centered Curriculum Design	X	
Culturally Responsive Communication & Collaboration	X	
Professionalism, Transparency & Accountability		X
Reflective Practices and Continuous Learning	X	
Stress and Anger Mgmt/Microaggression in the Workplace	X	X
Fellowship/Humility/Servant Leadership	X	X
Code of Conduct & Ethical Standards for Public Employees	X	
Addressing workplace, assessment, and discrimination / the Safe Space Act	X	
GAD Programs and Community Stewardship	X	
Customer Relationship Training		X

Note. Topics were developed through Thematic Analysis.

Table 3 lists specific professional development topics aimed at addressing systemic inequities in a community college setting. The table is structured into three columns: "Professional Development Topics," "Faculty," and "Staff." The topics, which were developed through thematic analysis, are listed in the first column. The columns for "Faculty" and "Staff" are marked with an "X" to indicate which group is suggested to participate in each specific training.

The table depicts a clear distinction in the proposed training needs for faculty and staff, reflecting the varying roles each group plays in the institution. Faculty members are targeted for topics more directly related to the educational and instructional environment, such as "Inclusive Education and ICT Integration," "Global Classroom and Inclusive Pedagogies," and "Restorative Justice in Education & Equity Centered Curriculum Design," which are critical for addressing pedagogical and curricular inequities (Culpepper et al., 2021). In contrast, staff members are recommended for a broader range of topics, including "Customer Satisfaction Training," "Conflict Resolution & Social Emotional Learning," and "Advocacy Skills, Allyship, Action Planning & Evaluation." This focus on a positive campus climate and support functions is essential for staff in creating an equitable environment for all students (Cheung et al., 2020). Both groups are suggested for some shared topics, such as "Professionalism in Workplace Etiquette/Work Ethics" and "Fellowship/Humility/Servant Leadership," though there are very few instances of overlap. The table delineates the different types of professional development deemed necessary for each group to address systemic inequities.

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Table 4.
Format for Professional Development for Faculty and Staff in a Community College

Workshop Format	f (out of 36)	% (N=36)
Workshops	29	80.6
Online Courses	15	41.7
Mentoring/Coaching	23	63.9
Collaborative Learning Communities	23	63.9

Note. N=36; formats taken through Thematic Analysis.

Table 4 presents the professional development format preferences of faculty and staff, where a significant majority (81%) favored Workshops. This finding aligns with research that emphasizes the effectiveness of interactive formats promoting active learning and peer collaboration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2024; Global Partnership for Education, 2024).

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Degree of Systemic Equity or Justice among Faculty and Staff in a Community College. The findings in Table 1, which report a neutral perception of systemic equity and justice among both faculty and staff, are a crucial starting point for understanding the institutional climate. The mean scores falling within the "Neutral" range suggest that neither group holds a positive nor a negative view. This finding is significant because it indicates a potential lack of awareness or engagement with the topic (Macdonald & Birdi, 2019) of systemic inequities within the community college. Instead of a polarizing issue, it appears not to be at the forefront of the daily professional experience for most employees. This collective neutrality may also point to a shared institutional culture where discussions about equity and justice (Lin, 2020) are not yet fully integrated into the organizational discourse.

These findings can be viewed in the context of existing literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Many studies highlight a gap between institutional intentions and actual outcomes where policies aimed at fostering equity are often not perceived as effective by employees (Bui et al., 2023; Conner & Norman, 2022). The neutral scores in this study may be a reflection of such a gap. It's also possible that the term "systemic equity and justice" itself is not fully understood or is interpreted differently by various individuals, leading to a reserved, neutral response. For some, a "neutral" response may be a safe or non-committal answer, while for others, it may genuinely reflect a belief (Campbell, 2021) that the institution is neither particularly equitable nor inequitable. This highlights the need for clearer communication and a more robust institutional dialogue about what these concepts mean in a community college setting.

Difference in Systemic Equity/ Social Justice between Faculty and Staff. The statistical analysis, as presented in Table 2, reveals that there is no significant difference in the perception of "Systemic Equity/Social Justice" between faculty and staff. This finding suggests that both faculty and staff hold a similar, neutral viewpoint regarding systemic equity and social justice within the organization. The similar perceptions across both groups may indicate a shared institutional culture or a consistent experience of the organization's policies and practices related to equity, regardless of their specific classification as faculty or staff.

The shared neutral perception between faculty and staff is a particularly noteworthy finding. It contradicts the assumption that these two groups, due to their different roles and responsibilities, might have significantly different experiences with systemic equity. The lack of a statistically significant difference (as noted in Table 2 of the study) suggests that the institutional climate regarding equity is experienced consistently across all personnel classifications. This consistency could be attributed to institution-wide policies and practices that apply equally to all employees, or a shared organizational culture that shapes perspectives uniformly (Chalmers et al., 2025). This finding implies that interventions and professional development initiatives aimed at improving equity would need to be designed for the entire institution, rather than being tailored specifically for either faculty or staff (Hofman, 2024). A holistic, institution-wide approach is likely to be more effective in shifting the collective perception from neutral to actively positive.

Specific Professional Development Topics to Address Systemic Inequities in the Community College. The list of professional development topics in Table 3 provides a comprehensive strategy to address systemic inequities at the Community College. These topics are categorized into direct interventions and foundational skill-building. (1) Direct Interventions. Direct interventions address specific disparities. For example, topics like "Inclusive Education and ICT Integration" and "Equity in Digital Access" for staff directly tackle inequities in technology use, aligning with national mandates for digital inclusivity. Similarly, trainings on "Stress and Anger

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Mgmt/Micro Aggression in the Workplace," "Culturally Responsive Communication," and the "Safe Spaces Act" are designed to dismantle biases and discrimination, reflecting a commitment to legal and ethical standards. This includes compliance with mandates like the Safe Spaces Act and the Magna Carta of Women, which promote a secure and equitable environment. (2) Foundational Skills. The proposed topics also cultivate foundational skills essential for a thriving workplace. Trainings on "Professionalism, Transparency & Accountability," "Leadership and Emotional Intelligence," and "Code of Conduct" aim to foster a culture of integrity and fairness. Additionally, topics like "Conflict Resolution" and "Reflective Practices" contribute to a respectful atmosphere, while shared topics such as "Professionalism in Workplace Etiquette" and "Servant Leadership" reinforce a shared institutional commitment to a positive work environment. This holistic approach is intended to combat systemic inequities directly while building a supportive organizational culture where all faculty and staff can advance their careers.

Format of Professional Development for Faculty and Staff. Faculty and staff at the community college overwhelmingly prefer active and engaging professional development formats that foster direct human interaction and applied learning. The most popular programs, according to the data, are workshops, mentoring/coaching, and collaborative learning communities, all of which received significant endorsement. This suggests a high value is placed on peer connection, personalized support, and shared problem-solving, which are known to promote sustained professional growth and skill development. While a smaller percentage of respondents found online courses to be a helpful option, acknowledging their flexibility and accessibility, the clear preference for formats that allow for practical experience and guided support indicates that the college's professional development initiatives should prioritize these hands-on and collaborative approaches to best serve its personnel.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In the context of systemic inequities and social justice, neutrality is NOT a sign of a problem-free environment; it is a sign of passivity. Thus, this is an opportunity for proactive change. Instead, it indicates a need to look more closely to uncover the complex, subtle, and intersecting forms of oppression that may be present. Thus, a complex picture of social justice and equity emerges at a community college characterized by a pervasive sense of neutrality and variability in individual experiences, which indicates a potential lack of awareness or engagement with the topic of systemic inequities within the community college. This lack of disagreement or agreement is a sign of a culture where discussions about fairness and justice are not yet fully open among the people in the organization. In this case, the lack of open conflict is not the same as fairness, and it shows that the institution should always be evaluated more often.

Recommendations

The neutral perception, rather than being a sign of a problem-free environment, should be viewed as an opportunity for proactive change. The lack of strong negative perceptions means the institution is not facing widespread opposition, which can make implementing new initiatives easier. The goal should be to move the collective perception from neutrality to a clear and demonstrable sense of positive equity. This can be achieved by implementing targeted, meaningful professional development programs that go beyond generic training. Ultimately, the neutral findings in this study serve as a call to action to move from a passive, neutral state to an active, positive, and equitable institutional culture. To move beyond this state of widespread neutrality and address the identified concerns, the community college should focus on a multi-pronged approach:

1.Conduct a comprehensive review of existing PD programs to ensure equitable access and enhanced effectiveness. PD should be practical, engaging, and directly aimed at equipping staff with skills for fostering an inclusive environment.

2.Initiate structured dialogues and workshops to enhance institutional consciousness around systemic inequities. Using existing data to illuminate specific areas of concern can help move from neutrality to informed action.

3.Develop and communicate a clear institutional equity road-map with measurable goals. By highlighting successful initiatives and establishing accountability mechanisms, the college can demonstrate consistent, visible, and effective action, reinforcing its commitment to equity for all members of the community.

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consent and candid responses were essential for the collection of reliable data.. Finally, the findings of this study are intended to promote organizational justice and foster a more equitable and supportive environment for all personnel.

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