Strategic Planning Equity Lens

Based on a suggestion by Dr. Charlotte Goodluck, the Project Support Team has created an Equity Lens through which we may review both the strategic planning process and its eventual outputs. In order to design our lens using the best and most current thinking on the subject, we have enlisted the help of a small group of experts from within the PSU community and other regional experts. This advisory group includes Ann Curry-Stevens, Ashley Horne, Carlos Crespo, Chas Lopez, Cornel Pewewardy, Steve Percy, Veronica Dujon, Yves Labissiere, Ann Marie Fallon, and Sonali Balajee.

In building a review process, this group—or some subset thereof—will serve as an Advisory Panel that will review the answers to our Equity Lens questions around race/ethnicity, and will suggest revisions or actions for improvement. An additional Advisory Panel will be formed to perform the same task to address additional marginalized communities including (but not limited to) persons with disabilities, women, transgender and gender non-conforming persons, and those in the LGBTQ community.

What follows is the set of equity questions that we propose be asked of the plan and the process. While we understand that simply answering these questions may be insufficient to address actual inequities, their challenging nature should shape thinking and planning in a positive direction, and will result in a plan that is more balanced than it would have been otherwise.

It will be important to track the equity outcomes of this plan—that is, to measure the actual impacts in terms of student, faculty and community outcomes, as well as smaller but still significant domains such as changes in behavior, attitude, capacity-building, resource allocation, and decision-making. Because the work of the Strategic Plan Development Team will be completed and the team will be dissolved, it will be important that the Topic Team on Equity, Opportunity, and Access recommend a mechanism by which these outcomes can be measured on an ongoing basis, so that the resulting data may be used for future iterations of PSU’s strategic plan.

This approach borrows heavily from the Multnomah County Equity and Empowerment Lens, and from the Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations by Ann Curry-Stevens, Marie-Elena Reyes & the Coalition of Communities of Color.
Foci of the Lenses
We have identified the importance of implementing a set of Equity Lens questions asked about race/ethnicity separately from the questions asked about other groups that may be affected, including non-dominant gender identities, LGBTQ status, and people with disabilities. While the same questions will be asked for each grouping, the separation of the answers will allow our two advisory panels to apply their specific expertise to the answers, allowing for a more thorough and thoughtful process:

› Race/ethnicity
› Women, transgender and gender non-conforming persons, those in the LGBTQ community, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized communities that the team identifies as significant

Guiding Principles
This Equity Lens supports attending to equity issues throughout the work of Strategic Planning. It will also infuse the processes selected for operationalizing our work sessions, and the substantive areas being focused on in each team’s work—including those elements not included in the work. We also recognize that equity is a larger societal construct (alongside inequity), and that prevailing disparities in issues such as education, income, employment, occupation and health have traditionally been reinforced by institutions of higher education.

In accordance with these challenges, we have designed a set of required questions that each formal working unit of Strategic Planning will need to answer.

We begin with a set of guiding principles that we ask each team to adhere to:

• PSU has a commitment to erase racial disparities in society, and advance social justice
• At PSU, equity is given the same emphasis as other university priorities
• PSU is committed to ensuring that its Strategic Plan reflects the interests of those most affected by our decisions: our students, their future employers, and the service users, customers and/or communities they will ultimately serve. We endeavor to support all students to reach their fullest potential and wellbeing.
• PSU is cautious of making decisions on behalf of marginalized communities and aims to directly include these communities and their advocates wherever practical. Decisions to not include these stakeholders need to be justified
• PSU aims to create a strategic plan, and the processes that lead up to it, that maximizes the benefits for communities of color and for other marginalized communities
**Equity Lens for the Project Support Team**

The purpose of the Equity Lens for the Project Support Team is to ensure that the process of strategic planning is deliberately inclusive and that process decisions are evaluated to identify where there are opportunities for greater empowerment, and also to identify when the process has failed to live up to the promise of equity. The Equity Lens for the Project Support Team questions will be answered by the Project Support Team—once at the mid-point of the process, and again near the end of the process. These questions will be asked twice: first considering race/ethnicity, then a second time for all other groups, including those with non-dominant gender identities (women, transgender and gender non-conforming people), LGBTQ status, and people with disabilities, plus additional marginalized communities the Team sees as important to address. The answers to these questions will be reviewed by each of the Advisory Panels, and suggestions for improvement or mitigation will be returned.

**People**
- How have we adequately ensured that our operational processes are inclusive, and that the elements of the process have not created barriers to meaningful participation?
- Which stakeholder groups would we like to have included but were unable to facilitate?

**Place**
- On the basis of PSU’s social, physical and cultural location, how does this process compensate for access limitations of various stakeholder groups?
- How have we modified our process to support access by marginalized community stakeholders?

**Process**
- How are our processes supporting the empowerment of communities historically most affected by inequities?
- How are processes ensuring that participants’ emotional and physical safety needs are addressed?
- How are processes supporting participants’ need to be productive and feel valued?
- How are our process building ongoing community capacity for involvement with PSU (beyond the strategic planning process) by those communities historically most affected by inequities?
- How are we using this opportunity to contribute to the leadership development of those from marginalized communities?
- What types of biases have influenced the work of the groups and how have these been identified and addressed?
- What improvements to team processes can you support for naming and identifying unaddressed bias?
- What have we learned about effective empowerment practice that we recommend being continued by PSU in other program and initiative development processes?
- What recommendations do we suggest for the future work of PSU?
Equity Lens for the Topic Teams & SPDT

The purpose of the Equity Lens for the Topic Teams & SPDT is to ensure that each specific element of the plan (such as vision and mission) and each initiative proposed intentionally creates a future for PSU that advances equity for historically marginalized groups. The Equity Lens also aims to ensure that no elements of the plan have outcomes that make it more difficult for marginalized communities to attain equity.

The Equity Lens for the Topic Teams & SPDT questions will be answered by the working groups who formulate each part of the plan. In some cases, this will be the entire SPDT, in other cases it may be a small working group. Each of the Topic Teams will also be asked to answer these lens questions. Like the Process questions, these questions will be asked twice: first considering race/ethnicity, then a second time for all other groups, including gender identity, LGBTQ, and people with disabilities. The answers to these questions will be reviewed by the respective Advisory Panels, and suggestions for improvement or mitigation will be returned.

People
- Who is affected—positively, negatively, or not at all—by the elements of this part of the strategic plan and what are the specific advantages and/or barriers to each group?
- How have we considered environmental justice in this (initiative/plan element)—that is, how will these initiatives support the rights of all people to live in a healthy environment?

Process
- How does this (initiative/plan element) foster the development of processes that address barriers to inclusion and contribute to the development of community capacity?

Power
The Equity, Opportunity and Access team needs to consider which demographic groups have the greatest need for greater inclusion and which steps PSU as a whole should take to mitigate these needs. Each Topic Team will also be asked to answer these questions, tied to each initiative proposed:
- How will this (initiative/plan element) support the empowerment of people from historically marginalized communities?
- What are the specific ways that this (initiative/plan element) is expected to reduce disparities and advance social justice?

Implementation/Documentation
1. Decisions made during the planning process will be by a general consensus model, with opportunities for dissenting opinions to also become part of the plan.
2. Efforts are expected to equalize participation of those at the table.
3. Efforts are expected to ensure voices of stakeholders not at the table are gathered and that these perspectives have influence in the process.
4. Two Equity Advisory Panels (as described at the beginning of this document) will assist the Project Support Team in vetting the Equity Lens process, and in ensuring that it is adequately applied to both the process and the resulting plan.

5. The answers to all Equity Lens questions will be included as part of the strategic plan documentation. The Advisory Panels will review portions of the plan as they are completed, and will provide guidance as to whether the Equity Lens has been adequately applied. In some cases, this may necessitate outreach to an affected community to ensure that the community’s concerns are addressed.

6. When the answers to the questions highlight an inequity that may result from the implementation of that portion of the plan, the team working on that portion will be asked to provide mitigation measures, which will also be included in the plan documentation.

7. To the degree that results may fall short, minority reports will serve as a complaint process to highlight where the plan or the process has not lived up to the ideal, and may make recommendations for future processes or initiatives.

**Definitions**

**Communities of color:** Communities of color are identity-based communities that hold a primary racial identity that describes shared racial characteristics among community members. The term aims to define a characteristic of the community that its members share (such as being African American) that supports self-definition by community members, and that typically denotes a shared history and current/historic experiences of racism. An older term for communities of color is that of “minority communities” which is increasingly inaccurate given that people of color are majority identities on a global level. That term has also been rejected for its potential to infer any inferior characteristics. The community may or may not also be a geographic community. Given that race is a socially-defined construct, the definitions of these communities are dynamic and evolve across time. At present, in Multnomah County, the Coalition of Communities of Color defines communities of color to include Native Americans, Latinos, Asian and Pacific Islanders, African Americans, Africans, Middle Eastern, and Slavic communities.

**Community wellbeing:** Is defined as the conditions that support self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity. It often has a larger set of domains that include physical, social, environmental, economic and psychological elements, with the specifics recommended to be set by the community itself.

**Community capacity:** Is “the combined influence of a community’s commitment, resources, and skills that can be deployed to build on community strengths and address community problems and opportunities.”

**Disability** is a social construct, often defined by the presence of impairment, as well as limitations (perceived or otherwise) associated with the impairment. Disabilities may originate from a combination of a person’s impairments, an inaccessible environment, and discrimination or prejudice. The lived experience of a person with a disability also
varies by context/setting, type of impairment, and other intersectional identities like age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, access to material resources, and so on. The range of diversity among people with disabilities has challenging implications for operationalizing equity in higher education settings, such as PSU. Limiting discourse pertaining to people with disabilities to that of accommodations and/or physical accessibility without examining issues of power and privilege is problematic.

**Diversity** is a term used to describe the many national, racial, ethnic groups and sovereign tribal Nations in the United States that have brought their cultures, languages and belief systems to North America. It is a term that has grown to include the representation of all those who hold both dominant and minoritized identities, and it aims to prioritize attention to the importance of diversification across society, including employment, research, policy making, political representation, and institutional governance composition. Its goal is both a means and an end – diversifying who is at the table making decisions (such as hiring committees) is more likely to end up with more inclusive results. Diversity is also an important outcome of initiatives to, for example, diversify the student and faculty body.

**Equity:** “Equity is when everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential. We have a shared fate— as individuals within a community and communities within society. All communities need the ability to shape their own present and future. Equity is both the means to healthy communities and an end that benefits us all.”

**Empowerment:** Is both a process and an outcome that builds the power of individuals, groups and/or communities to influence the outcomes they desire. It is typically applied to the context of marginalized communities increasing their ability to improve their wellbeing by reducing forms of oppression that cause and sustain their marginalization.

**Environmental Justice:** Is “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies... It will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”

**Gender non-conforming persons:** Those whose behavior and appearance are not aligned with society’s expectations for one’s gender.

**Healthy Environment:** Refers to the more physical dimension (i.e. location in space) that promotes individual and community wellbeing. It incorporates physical, social, environmental, economic, and psychological dimensions.

**LGBTQ:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. Please know that queer is a term used by those in the community to self-define; it is not acceptable for those not in the community to use the term.

**Marginalized communities:** A community (defined in this instance as an identity-based community) that is marginalized by systems, practices, behaviors and discourses of
domination that preserve the current social order. These communities include persons of color, low income persons, women, transgender and gender non-conforming people, LGBTQ persons, people with disabilities, non-Christian persons, and the elderly. Additional such communities may be added to this list.

**Micro-Aggressions:** A concept coined by Dr. Derald Wing Sue, it refers to the daily insults (rudeness, insensitivity, or demeaning comments), assaults (put downs, avoidant behaviors, or discrimination) and invalidations (excluding, negating, or nullifying the experiences) expressed towards those holding marginalized identities. Exist by impact instead of intention of the offender.

**Queer:** An encompassing term used to refer to a community of people with underrepresented sexual orientations/identities. This word has a troubled past as it was used as an epithet, but it has been reclaimed by certain members of the community as an empowering, political term. Queer is used in place of LGBT because any acronym will not fully represent the spectrum of sexual orientations/identities.

**Student Veteran and Servicemember:** A person who attends a college or university who has served or currently serves in the United States Armed Forces.

**Transgender:** (often shortened to trans) – An umbrella term for a range of gender identities and expressions that challenge society’s view of gender as necessarily fixed, unmoving, and following from one’s assigned sex at birth. Trans is used to refer to people whose gender identity or expression does not align with the rigid gender binary (man/woman).

**Woman:** A gender identification term. Anyone who identifies as a woman is a woman.
Insights on Challenges Faced by Minoritized Communities

Challenges facing LGBTQ Students

Although queer and trans students are addressed together below, it is important to remember that these are separate communities that have different experiences, needs, and challenges on campus:

- **Understanding** – Many members of the PSU community, including students, staff, faculty, and administrators, do not have a broad, nuanced understanding or awareness of queer or trans communities. As such, queer and trans students are often faced with peers, professors, and staff across the university who do not have an understanding of the daily realities of their lives.

- **Representation** – Queer and trans students often do not see themselves represented in many aspects of the university. Queer students are rarely seeing queer faculty, administrators, and staff, and trans students are even less represented across all levels of the university. Queer people are often not mentioned in curricula across the institution, and trans people face essentialized notions of gender in curricula that align with conversations about what women say, do, and are, and what men say, do, and are, which do not offer space for people who do not fit into the gender binary.

- **Microaggressions** – Queer and trans students face small, implicit bias in classrooms and across campus through statements that invalidate their existence. Most references to relationships are focusing on heterosexual pairings, and all people are assumed straight unless explicitly stated otherwise. Trans students are often misgendered and their pronouns are not used. Both communities are subject to the incorrect assumptions perpetuated by media, religion, and other institutions.

- **Climate** – Queer and trans students often experience an unfriendly climate on campus due to the implicit and explicit bias they face from peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. This experience of a negative climate can affect academic performance, involvement on campus, and persistence to graduation. Some queer and trans students may feel unsafe on campus if they have experienced harassment on campus or in the vicinity. This lack of safety can significantly impact a student’s ability to succeed at PSU.

- **Intersections** – Queer and trans students represent many other intersecting social identities, including race, class, religion, etc. Queer and trans students who represent multiple marginalized identities (i.e., queer and trans students of color) present unique challenges that should be recognized and attended to by the university.

- **Competent Services** – Queer and trans students need access to services and service-providers on campus who have an understanding of the unique ways that these student populations interact with their services. Financial Aid, Housing and Residence Life, Student Health and Counseling, among others, all need to have a firm understanding of the unique ways that queer and trans students will access their services.

- **Facilities** – Trans students, in particular, face challenge on campus due to a lack of facilities that they feel most comfortable accessing. Due to a variety of factors, trans students might not feel comfortable accessing gendered spaces (i.e., restrooms, locker rooms, etc.). When trans students do not have access at all nor easy access to gender-neutral facilities, they may limit their time on campus or
not access certain courses because they do not have comfortable, safe facilities to use.

*It is important to note that there is no universal queer or trans student experience at PSU. Some students face all of these challenges and some students face none of these challenges. It is important to not see these student populations as solely victims but, instead, as vital, contributing members of the vibrant, diverse PSU community.

Although PSU does not currently collect queer and trans demographic information from students, there is a larger population of queer and trans students on campus due to resources and support services offered to these students and because PSU is located in Portland, which is considered one of the country’s most queer- and trans-friendly cities.

Challenges facing Women Students
Women are represented across all social identities and groups, including race, class, religion, queer and trans* communities, etc. A woman’s experience navigating Portland State University cannot be reduced to gender identity alone, but must be understood within the context of intersecting spaces of privilege and oppression. As such, this document cannot adequately address all intersectional identity barriers and challenges, but aims to address some core issues for women at PSU. The following list helps identify the types of barriers facing women students at PSU.

• **Academic Access:**
  Currently women make up 52% of enrollment at PSU⁶, yet are grossly underrepresented in fields of study such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. There is implicit gender bias in co-educational classrooms that begins in grade school and continues through college. Women are not encouraged to take up space, are expected to conform to gendered stereotypes, and are not acknowledged and rewarded for the same behavior that earns boys and men accolades. This can impact class participation on a daily level, and participation in a field of study. For example, a woman student became pregnant and was encouraged to change her field of study to Child and Family Studies.

• **Sexual Assault, Dating/Domestic Violence, and Stalking:**
  As outlined in federal Title IX and Clery legislations, students deserve safe access to their education. Sexual assault, dating/domestic violence and stalking impeded that access. While students of all genders experience these kinds of violence, women are significantly affected. As demonstrated in our national conversation on campus sexual assault, there is a perceived climate of silence on issues of violence against women on campus. Students express feeling unsure how to get help, a lack of confidence that reporting will address their needs, and campuses have limited resources dedicated to primary prevention of violence. Sexual assault, dating/domestic violence and stalking pose significant health, safety and academic issues on campus. One in five women is sexually assaulted while in college, often during their 1st or 2nd year, and 75% of the time the perpetrator is an acquaintance, boyfriend or otherwise socially involved in the student’s life⁷. The impacts of this kind of violence are wide-ranging: health effects, loss of community, the need to leave/change housing, financial effects, trauma, and the decisions to transfer schools or discontinue education.
altogether. While PSU offers substantive reporting and support services aimed at addressing the impact of these issues, violence can still create significant barriers to a woman's academic success.

- **Barriers Facing Nontraditional Students:**
  Women make up a significant population of non-traditional aged students returning to PSU. They face additional barriers in juggling work and, often, the gendered expectation of being a primary caretaker of their children. The cost of childcare can be prohibitive and there are limited institutionalized resources to diminish the challenge of balancing children, work, and education for this population.

**Challenges facing Student Veteran and Servicemember Students**

*Common barriers to consider include the following:*

- **Transition:** Transitioning from military to civilian life is perhaps the most difficult task for veterans. The greatest challenge to veterans is readjustment, which may include coping with PTSD symptoms, depression, physical injury, lack of structure in civilian life, and difficulties with personal relationships and social functioning.

- **Interruption:** Servicemembers face many problems while they are attending classes. Many attend monthly drill weekends, or receive activation orders for deployments that can last anywhere from a few days to a year or longer. Relatively unpredictable departures, complicated by extended deployment periods, can interrupt a student's academic career. This can put them behind in their coursework, and even frustrate professors – some of whom do not understand or honor the student's military service obligations. Veterans face interruptions as well. For instance, if someone is receiving care at the VA hospital, and they have an appointment scheduled that conflicts with a class, they are likely to skip class because it can take months to reschedule another appointment.

- **Financial hardship:** Benefits like the GI Bill pay the Veteran a monthly housing stipend. Many rely on this so they can attend classes full-time and maximize their benefits and finish their degrees within four years. If a veteran drops to half time, they receive half of the stipend. Many Veterans are non-traditional students with families to support, so time and income must be delicately balanced. On many occasions, veterans do not receive their education benefits for a month after the term begins, leaving them in a serious financial hardship. These are often the biggest stressors for Veterans who also face physical or mental health disabilities.

- **Stigma/Identity:** War veterans are commonly stereotyped as mentally unstable and violent. This creates a stigma that many veterans find difficult to face, especially those who have been diagnosed with or experienced post-traumatic stress. A sense of powerlessness leads to a lack of self-worth, to self-blame, to indifference towards and alienation from the environment. This may be why the majority choose not to openly identify as veterans or servicemembers to other students, faculty and staff.

- **Disability:** Due to incredible advancements in body armor, more veterans come home after fighting a war. The Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns are the largest military conflicts since the Vietnam War. Millions of veterans have served in war and have returned to use their GI Bills, many of them with disabilities that they may or may not know about. Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD are the most common diagnoses, and are the most likely to go untreated. For example, hypervigilance, trouble concentrating in class or reading homework can be signs and symptoms of a Mental Health issue. These symptoms may take months or years to present
themselves, but are generally noticed sooner in the classroom. Many student veterans have not received an evaluation or care for these afflictions, due to negative experiences with the VA or other reasons.

Challenges facing Low Income Students
Low income students face particular hardship on campus because of the costs of being here. The barriers they face can include:

- **Textbook prices**: the high cost of textbooks can be prohibitive to purchasing them, particularly when instructors use newest editions without alternative options.
- **Textbook availability in the library**: Placing required texts on reserve in the library is an uneven practice. Yet it is sometimes the only way low income students can read required materials.
- **Hunger**: A new research study from the School of Social Work identified that 43% of the school’s students were “food insecure” (at 211 of 496 students), and this was worse for bachelor-level students, Latino students, and distance-learning students (in the master’s program). Hungry students do not learn well, and face a wide array of stressors.
- **Reliance on loans and grants**: The timing of financial aid is important to retaining housing and feeding oneself and/or one’s family. Faculty often do not pay attention to this in grading of student papers or in the stress such students carry in reaching minimum grade levels to continue grants or financial aid.

Challenges facing First Generation College Students
Many students on campus are the first among their family to attend college. It can be a bewildering place when one lacks the acculturation and resources to both understand the demands and to feel like one belongs. Here are some of the concrete challenges that first generation college students are likely to face:

- **Basic information**: Certain conventions such as the importance of fixed deadlines for everything from application to payments to registration for courses can be misunderstood.
- **Allies**: In an environment where students are eager to impress instructors, there tends to be an absence of allies for first generation college students who are willing to speak out about assumptions that are made by instructors or administrators.
- **Specializations**: Such students often do not know what it means to declare a major or the consequences of selecting specializations. These choices have a particularly harsh impact on going on to graduate degrees.
- **Vulnerable to credit pitches**: Students are often promised easy credit while at university and can stack up high debt loads while here. The fact that there is a shrinking supply of living wage jobs with decent promotion opportunities, available to new graduates, is relatively limited information.
- **Middle and upper class bias**: Working class students often feel out of place amongst students who have money to spend freely on food, clothing, phones and
- **Imperatives for contributing back to one’s family**: Given the high level of sacrifice that families make for the first children in their family to attend university, their future plans are typically laden with thoughts about how to give back to their families.
- **Role models**: Given the absence of role models in one’s own family, access to high levels of advising and formal academic mentoring program, including employment placement opportunities is important.
• **Dropout levels:** First generation college students have high dropout rates. Paying attention to their cultural and financial needs is important across the university, and noticing middle class biases that get established in classroom and departmental practices – and then remedying them – is key to retention. Individual supports and active engagement with students who might be inclined to “disappear” because they experience isolation and exclusion is important.

**Challenges facing Students of Color**

Students of color face an array of challenges in college, some of which overlap with the other identity-related barriers listed in the above sections. In addition, here are some prominent challenges:

- **Invisibility in the curriculum:** Students of color arrive in college with their histories having been overlooked in the school education. In college, the curriculum and authors studied tend to be even more white (unless one takes a particular course or program that centers such experiences).

- **Role models:** Educators and administrators of color are scarce. This confirms for students of color that they do not belong, and increases the likelihood they will leave before gaining their degrees.

- **Assumptions and Stereotypes:** There are few forms of oppression that make instructors nervous about handling directly in the classroom as racism. Students thus face unaddressed micro-aggressions in large quantities and without instructor supports.

- **No retention supports in specific programs:** With the exception of Social Work, there are no retention specialists in departments at PSU.

- **Language and accents:** Students who have accents and weaker English skills both self-censor their participation and are overridden by students who are more confident in English. Practices that require equal participation and leadership among students might be helpful and at other times might embarrass students with accents.

- **Low expectations:** Instructors who think they are doing students of color a favor not infrequently lower their performance expectations. This is harmful to the futures of such students and their psyche as they think they have gained mastery but have not. Retaining high standards across the curriculum is essential.

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4 Portland City Council’s definition of equity, adopted in 2011.
6 Published at nces.ed.gov/globallocator. Data references enrollment from Fall of 2013.
8 Ibid