



HIGHER ED ALLIANCES EXPAND RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT



The rising COVID infection rates and the presidential election have dominated past couple months of news, and the urgency of the racial justice protests of the 2020 spring and summer may, for some, seem lost in the tumult of 2020. Already, [polls suggest](#) that public support for the demonstrators—and the Black Lives Matters movement that inspired them—has waned in the wake of Trump administration efforts to [cast](#) mostly peaceful events as looting sprees carried out by “criminals,” “vandals,” and “thugs.”

Yet the issues that united demonstrators still demand immediate attention. Unarmed people of color [continue to be killed](#) by police. And the coronavirus is still disproportionately damaging communities of color, which have outsized death and infection rates and which disproportionately rely on remote learning in areas with large digital divides.

Fortunately, the momentum from this past summer’s lofty promises is being sustained by some resourceful efforts. One example is the Race and Equity Center at the University of Southern California, led by NEPC Fellow [Shaun Harper](#), which is involved in two far-reaching equity initiatives in higher education.

Founded this year, [The California Community College Equity Leadership Alliance](#) offers professional development on racial equity to administrators, faculty and staff at more than half of that state’s 115 community colleges. Members also participate in Center-developed campus climate surveys of students, faculty and staff. The goal of the initiative is to train and facilitate conversations throughout campus—involving everyone from presidents to plumbers—rather than leaving racial equity work to one department or individual.

“This is presidential leadership,” Harper [told](#) the news outlet *Inside Higher Ed* in June. “I’ve never seen presidents come together like this around race,” he said. “This is an inspiring,

instructive example for the rest of the nation.”

The Race and Equity Center is also involved in a second higher education initiative, the Liberal Arts Colleges Racial Equity Leadership Alliance. Founded in November, the partnership consists of more than 50 liberal arts colleges, including DePauw University, Macalester, Oberlin, Occidental and the Pomona colleges. The Center will provide professional development around racial equity, offer access to a portal of resources, administer climate surveys that allow members to benchmark themselves against one another, and make strategic recommendations to individual schools. Topics to be addressed include diversifying faculties, addressing racial violence on campus, and confronting implicit bias. The Alliance aims to provide consistent, ongoing, and rigorous resources related to racial equity rather than relying on a more piecemeal approach that has often failed in the past.

Of course, the road to the inequitable status quo is littered with well-meaning initiatives that fell by the wayside without enacting meaningful change. But this time, members say, there’s an expectation of real results.

“This is very, very different from past initiatives,” Kent Devereaux, president of Maryland’s Goucher College, an Alliance member, [told the news outlet *Education Dive*](#). “I think there is a moment of reckoning in America . . . Now is the time for us to have honest change.”

NEPC Resources on Higher Education

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