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Latinx and the Community College: Promoting Pathways to Postsecondary Degrees

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A Real Tragedy

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We often assume—

(We know what that means, no?)

When we continue to name

oppressive experiences faced

by Latinx community college students,

we are shut down as these “are things of the past.”

After all, Latinx are the largest growing “minority,”

we have studies dating back 10-20-30-40 years.

We assume

We “know” the challenges.

We “know” the barriers.

Yet, as an activist-scholar-administrator in this field,

shit is still real.

Too damn real not to name it.

Asi que...

When we shame our students

for not knowing,

not naming,

nor having the terminology

to name

what they aspire to do

at the community college—

it assumes

it assumes

it assumes we do a really good job or

that we do our job

of explaining the purpose of a three-tier college system—

that’s a real tragedy.

Because some folks working in the “system”

are so removed

disconnected

they’ve forgotten

or pretend they don’t know or

they don’t know,

nor care,

don’t care to know,

don't know to care
 realities experienced in our communities,
 nor about the historical underpinnings;
 white supremacist underpinnings
 that built educational institutions in this country—
 that's a real tragedy.

Instead,
 they lash to say how dare we speak?

 Don't speak—not us—
 How dare we speak?
 How dare we speak
 about graduate school
 or medical school
 or law school
 or anything to challenge and change the status quo.

How dare we speak
 to community college students
 about these things;
 these students aren't going ...
 aren't going...

 to make it that far, right?—
 that's a real tragedy.

Yet we know,
 we see
 we hear
 we feel—

We know the truth.
 We know our strength.
 We know their strength.
 We know their resilience.

When 1 of 4 Chicanas/os Ph.D. scholars
 produced in 1990-2000 for the entire country,
 started at the community colleges!¹

We know our strength,
 we know the power they be!

¹ Rivas, Martha A., Jeanette Pérez, Crystal A. Alvarez, and Daniel G. Solórzano. (2007). An Examination of Latina/o Transfer Students in California's Postsecondary Institutions. CSRC Latino Policy and Issues Brief No. 16. Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.

Rivas, M.A. (2012). Soulfully Resistant Transferistas: Understanding the Chicana Transfer Experience from Community College and into the Doctorate. Doctoral Dissertation. University of California, Los Angeles.

When you have to convince folks
our students are resilient,
determined,
beautiful,
and committed
to their education,
their families,
themselves.
We have to convince folks
-Hard-
because their lenses are fogged
tapados
with deficit ideologies
continuing to brainwash folks
to believe
and exacerbate the opposite—
that's a real tragedy.

When we refuse to call it
white supremacy
or racism,
or classism,
or misogyny,
or ageism,
because well, we may not
have the language to name it
-or-
because we are too.damn.comfortable
too.damn.comfortable
with our six-figure paychecks—
that's a real tragedy.

When our students' parents
may not know what college is about;
instead of stepping in to engage them,
we stand quick to point fingers and blame them—
that's a real tragedy.

Because 60-years in the process
we finally realize we've been
marginalizing,
shackling,

oppressing and
 neglecting
 too many,
 too many,
 too many;
 an overwhelming many
 of our students
 in not transferring,
 in not accessing the right courses,
 in complicating the process,
 or misplacing them in mismatch courses,
 relegating and corralling them
 in remedial courses—
 that's a real tragedy.

The new response
 (or magic wand) is
 a “holistic approach” to place students
 through MMAP²,
 Yet, it doesn't take into account
 real accounts—
 real things,
 warranted things,
 systemic things,
 like the fact
 MMAP will not replicate the few
 nor hire critical pedagogues,
 MMAP will not replicate the few
 nor hire conscious counselors,
 MMAP will not replicate the few
 nor hire radically capable administrators,
 Because MMAP does not eradicate
 deficit ideologies,
 racism,
 classism,
 homophobia,
 xenophobia,
 or all the ignorance
 that continue

² Multiple Measures of Assessment and Placement (MMAP).
<http://rpgroup.org/All-Projects/ctl/ArticleView/mid/1686/articleId/118/Multiple-Measures-Assessment-Project-MMAP>

continue
continue
to “cool out”
marginalize
dehumanize
silence
oppress
our students
and their aspirations—
that’s a real tragedy.

See now,
Now!
now it’s time for
student equity.
We talk about it.
We plan for it.
We meet to talk and plan.
We plan to talk and meet.
But folks bluff to understand
Equity.
Why would we need a special
special initiative?
(*everyone listen up*)
...because there’s tons of funding there
so
listen up!
Plan to meet.
Meet to plan.
But nowhere is there assurance
Folks know what equity means—
that’s a real tragedy.

When we speak of equity
we conjure
we evoke
we recall
we remember
the legacies of struggle,
legacies of exclusion,
legacies of sacrifices,
generations-after-generations-after-generations
before have endured.

That is pedagogy of memory.
 That is pedagogy of hope.
 You see—
 Equity does not equate diversity.
 We do not pause to plan
 to celebrate who is in the room.
 We have to pause
 to see
 to fight
 to voice
 to name
 to acknowledge
 who is fighting
 to be in the room.
 Legacies of exclusion.
 Legacies of a three-tiered system.
 Legacies of continued marginalization.
 Legacies of corralling Students of Color
 in the perceived bottom sector of higher education.
 That's a real tragedy.

But the real tragedy is in knowing
 folks will read this in disagreement.
 Because then, they too are part of this tragedy
Y si les queda el saco, ya saben!
 The beauty in this is
 knowing our students resist!
 They have,
 they will.
 We must, together.
 There are critical folks that have been there this entire time...
 voicing,
 pushing,
 encouraging,
 challenging—
 not often heard
 often silenced
 ignored,
 oppressed,
 released,
 killed in their attempt to defend our students.
 That's a real tragedy.

But just as they've collared

and relegated
to oppress—
We will fight back.
We will challenge—
we will create systemic changes!
Rooted in community,
nurtured within our own legacies,
centered on advocacy y resiliency
along with our students,
because of our students
because of our communities
because of the generations-after-generations
of teaching and inculcating resilience
we are ready.
We've been ready!
To name-confront-challenge
all the f'ing—isms
ahorita
porque no hay de otra!
Simply
because
We cannot afford to accept another tragedy.

This is our **strategy**.