**Dr. Frank Harris III Interview**

Learn strategies to address racial equity and anti-blackness in higher education.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast, it's a privilege to have Dr. Frank Harris III, professor of postsecondary education and co-director of the Community College Equity Assessment Lab at San Diego State University. Dr. Harris is best known for his expertise in racial equity and post-secondary education and has made important contributions to knowledge about college student development and the social construction of gender and race in college contexts. His work prioritizes populations that have been historically underrepresented and underserved in education. He's the co-editor/author of four books. His commentary has been featured in Diverse Issues in Higher Education. The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Chronicle of Higher Education, The Huffington Post, Inside Higher Ed and CNN. Before joining the faculty at San Diego State, Dr. Harris worked as a student affairs educator and college administrator in areas of student crisis support and advocacy, new student orientation programs, multicultural student affairs, academic advising and enrollment services. Thank you for participating in the Student Success podcast, Frank.

**Frank Harris** [00:01:08] Thank you. It is a pleasure to be here.

**AS** [00:01:11] So I like to start all the podcast to ask about if you happen to have a hobby or talents, something beyond your meaningful work that you wouldn't mind sharing.

**Frank Harris** [00:01:21] Yeah. So I don't, I'm not very talented beyond my work, which I know we'll kind of delve into during this conversation. But in terms of hobbies and how I like my free time, I like to exercise so more so also for my mental health and my physical health, believe it or not. So I've recently taken up boxing. I'm not fighting. Just getting that I mean, hitting mitt and bags. But I really enjoy that so that I get a good workout with that. And it's kind of something new that I've recently started to do. And then, you know, I have five kids. So my partner and I, we like to vacation. We like to do the normal stuff that families do. So take trips and do things with our kids as much as they'll allow us to do things with them. And yeah, so I would say outside of my work, my you know, my life is pretty, pretty normal, whatever that means. Right.

**AS** [00:02:21] Boxing. When did you start working on the boxing activity?

**Frank Harris** [00:02:25] About a month ago. So, you know, I think what happened with covid, if you're like me, you recognize that you're pre-covid workout routine doesn't really serve you as well. It's for a lot of different reasons. You know, I felt like I needed to do something, just kind of switch it up, you know, to be able to get more cardio in. And so I hate cardio, so I'm not one at all. I'm not going to go running. I'm not going to ride a treadmill for an hour or so. I need something else a little bit more active. So boxing seemed like a good thing to do. A good friend, a colleague of mine who we both know, Luke Wood, had been doing some boxing for about four months and he's got some amazing results. So I decided to kind of join in and into his boxing training routine. It's been very beneficial. I've enjoyed it.

**AS** [00:03:17] I really appreciate about boxing is that so much of it is about mental agility. The ability to coordinate your hands and your torso, and and your hip and being able to even hit the mitts with certain counts. It takes a lot of mental agility.

**Frank Harris** [00:03:37] You know, it's interesting you say that because I struggle, I find that, like, boxing is really challenged me like no other routine or workout, like like nothing else, to be honest with you. So, you know, I find myself I mean, obviously, I'm a beginner. I have it, you know, I haven't been doing it for a long time, but I really struggle and I struggle mentally. It really stretches me. So being able to remember the combinations and being able to know that one is a jab and three is the hook and putting it all together and doing it as your body continues to get more and more exhausted and more physically tired, you are the more mentally challenging it is. So I find that obviously I went there just thinking it was going to be good, a good physical exercise, but it's really taxed me. And that's really challenged me mentally to the point where I get frustrated sometimes and talking to the trainer and, you know, every now and then he'll say, OK, well, Frank, you know, you're not getting these combinations, so I want you to go over there by yourself and go get the bag for five minutes. It's like kind of being put in punishment in some ways has been good. I really I really like it

**AS** [00:04:52] You get good at it with time. So talking about stretching mentally, I think we're going to do that with today's podcast because you are a tremendous expert in equity. But we're going to drill down further to racial equity and even further, and stretch people's minds around anti-blackness, so if you can please unpack first what that is before we get into addressing it. So love to learn from you about this.

**Frank Harris** [00:05:28] Yeah, great. Let's let's start with equity. So one of my mentors, mentors and someone who I just have tremendous respect for Dr. Estela Bensimon. So I have to say that everything that I learned about equity, I learned from her. She talks about equity. She talks about disproportionate impact, recognizing that somebody is not benefiting as much from this experience as someone or some group is not being well served by a system, by an institution, whatever it may be, as a starting point. And then from there, that brings you to equity mindedness. And I describe equity mindedness as the ways in which we as educators bring life and action to our equity work is how we really actualize and realize the goals of our equity work. And so we are equity minded is really about a mindset. It's really about how you approach your work. The responsibility you assume for addressing and eradicating disproportionally impact is thinking about the folks who you are serving differently, whether those be students or other educators. It's not enough to just understand and know what equity is, is not enough to just understand that we're trying to address the disproportionate impact. It's also about changing our mind because what we change our mindset, then the actions and the way that the things that we do, regardless of what we do, we do our work differently when we approach it from an equity minded perspective. And then when you talk about racial equity, racial equity has always been been a pressing issue for US educators. The events of the last 18 months have really helped us understand if we didn't already has made it more transparent as to why we have to be more focused on racial equity. And so we're looking at racial equity. We're looking at groups who are disproportionately impacted on the basis of their racial identity in most places as African-American, Southeast Asian, Pacific Islander, it's Native Americans. So it's group who have been historically marginalized, groups who've been the most adversely impacted by white colonization. And a lot of ways when we talk about racial equity, we really are deconstructing and examining a group's relationship, a relative position with white supremacy. And then when we talk about anti blackness, anti blackness, you know, I would say is certainly related to racial equity, but it's it's a deeper in some ways a more intense issue. I like the way that I describe anti blackness is having a very deep disdain for black culture, black people and being opposed to any type of black social political progress, anything that liberate and anything at that that improves the living conditions of black people, black communities. And when I and I use the word black intentionally because I'm talking about the entire diaspora, not saying African-Americans, because African-Americans is a very obviously a very significant subculture of the larger black community. But I'm talking about the entire African diaspora. That's what I would offer as a starting point in terms of how I try to make sense of those three very different but very related concepts. And it's about not only understanding it, but also how do we operationalize those things. This is where the real work is.

**AS** [00:09:13] We see so much of this disdain for equity, racial equity, and then the anti blackness. We see it in social media. We see it in the news. It's it's front and center. Because you work within the context of higher ed. How have you seen it at institutions of higher education?

**Frank Harris** [00:09:36] Anti blackness in particular?

**AS** [00:09:38] Sure. If you want to go down the line of the three or if you want to focus on the third. It's up to you.

**Frank Harris** [00:09:43] Well, let's let's start with equity first. It's important to understand it. Equity. And again, this is not this is not me. This is a Bensimon speaking and I'm of sort channeling her work through myself. Equity is not just an issue that we have in education. And higher education, right, inequity is a chronic issue, whether we're talking about post-secondary education, K-12 education, our health care system, our justice system, the workforce, every social system that impacts the lives of communities, the lives of disproportionately affected families and communities, that there's inequity that is ingrained within it. So it's not just an education issue to start. So we have to have this systemic perspective and recognizing and understand it and where we see it play out in. Let's talk about post-secondary education and community colleges there. Some very, very clear indicators, right? We look at time to completion. We can we can look and see that there are certain groups whose time to completion are much longer, much more extended, much more difficult and challenging than it is for other groups. And in many ways, this is the groups that we started the conversation with, which are racially, racially minority populations. It's our adult learners in many respects, although adult learners comprise the majority of students and community colleges. So we should we should recognize that. But then you look at some other populations. You look at former foster youth, you can look at, you know, students with disabilities and so forth. And so we see disparate outcomes when we disaggregate success data on almost every indicator of success, completion, core success, whatever it may be. Right. We see inequities, you know, very clearly manifested. But the data, the quantitative data only tell you one piece of the pie, right. It only tells you what one part of the situation is. So when we examine equity qualitatively, what we talk with people and we ask them about their experiences, that we ask them to tell us, what is your relationship with with other educators here? What are some ways the institution is serving you? Well, what are some ways in which this is not serving you well? Do you feel comfortable here? Do you feel like you belong here? Do you see positive representations of yourself in the curriculum that you're studying? Right. And there are certain groups, those same groups that we started with often articulate a very different experience than their white counterparts. Right. Or are there more privileged counterparts? You know, that's that's where we see it play out in education, higher education in particular. When we talk about racial equity, it's a lot of the same thing I just articulated. But what I'm going to, I also want to highlight that while our focus so far has been on the student experience, we could also look at the experiences that different educators have. Educators who are from racially minoritized backgrounds: faculty, classifed professionals, and executives. In some places they're having a very different experience, right. Who are experiencing racial battle fatigue. They experienced racial microaggressions, have their experience and their credentials questioned and challenged because of their racial identity, because they are representing an identity that hasn't been well represented within a particular context or institution. So that's another example of where we see not only inequity but racial inequity. And then when we talk about and we talk with our black colleagues and how with they experience, even when it comes to racial equity, how would they experience is very different and even more intensified. Right. So even in so here we have to understand most institutions, particularly in California, where you and I have the pleasure, of living and working. Most of our institutions are minority serving institutions. Right. In terms of who with the student population looks like, we don't see the same representation among faculty, among staff and certainly at the executive ranks. And even when we see colleges that have that have taken some some proactive steps to address that, even when folks are hired in position, they still experience a lot of challenges, a lot of challenges that our students experiences around belonging, around battle fatigue, all the same things. It really highlights the multi layered and the ways in which we talked about equity and how we're addressing it. It's a very complex phenomenon and it manifests and plays out in very different ways. Actually, some patterns are relatively consistent across different contexts and some issues. Even if those issues are the same, they look and feel different at one place and compare it to another place. And so. That's just the way that you know, what I've experienced in working with colleges and talking with colleagues and trying to really address these these issues and concerns around equity,

**AS** [00:15:12] I'm glad you touched on not only the students, but the college personnel, even the executives. I do a lot of coaching work with a lot of presidents. And it's been very interesting to me to see how a female president of color, how she's treated compared to other folks of different ethnicities. And I would say it's a gender thing, too. So, for example, there are some very strong executives who are of color who are extremely strong about things. And they they're going to fight. Right. And encourage others to fight. But they also have kind of a support group. To help them out so that in this fight, if you know, the reality is, you know, presidents get fired and it's not like they can quickly just go find another president job. And sometimes when we don't see about our female presidents is they could be single moms, they could be the only ones in there or in the executive cabinet who really, truly care about racial equality. And they're constantly getting beat up, but they keep on keep on trucking. But they have to play this chess game, this long term chess game and be very careful about what they say. And then I've also seen kind of the treatment, you don't look like a college president. These kinds of things are very interesting. And so that's one, something that I have observed, Frank. What I'm really interested in now from a student perspective, you said you spoken to students, the qualitative. What were some, maybe one or two examples of what they experienced specifically makes it an environment where they don't really feel a sense of belonging or community?

**Frank Harris** [00:17:09] Great question, Al. I echo a lot of what you just shared with regard to the experiences of women of color who are in executive positions. So we talking about vice president and presidents and chancellors. They have it especially especially difficult. And I don't want to make this a who has a worse type of, I don't want the conversation to necessarily be about that, but I have found it. Observe that black women especially have it really, really difficult in those roles. I have found that for the most part, they're allowed to be publicly demeaned and humiliated and stereotyped, you know, to be called aggressive. I mean, it's a lot of, a lot of the same old stereotypes of black women that have been around for a long time. You know, the competence, competence is challenged. You know, all this stuff. And I think the fact of the matter is a lot of people have a very difficult time taking direction and following the lead of a black woman, because in part, most people haven't had to. Right. So first and foremost, the long standing stereotypes, things that that have been around about black women for a long time. And so I do agree with you. It is it does underscore the intersection of race and gender. Right. And so you talk about. A marginalized racial identity and a marginalized gender identity that makes it especially especially difficult for black women who take on these roles and who who give these institutions a lot and don't usually get what they give in return. Right. But talk about loving the institution and giving institution your role, but not really being loved back. Right. And not being given the same thing. And so I hear you on that.

**Frank Harris** [00:19:17] In terms of what students often say, I'll try to use I'll try to paraphrase some of the things folks assume that because of my identity, that I'm not as smart as other students, I'm not as capable of other students. People fear me because I'm the tall black man. Right. People assume that I'm not smart because, you know, I speak with an accent. Right. Or English may not be my first language. I go and ask for support. Right. I've been out of school for a long time. I want to be here. But I find it really, really challenging to get the type of support that I need when I need it. You know, I go to financial aid and people treat me poorly. I'm leaving class at night and walk into my car and I'm profiled by campus police because I fit the description. So in many ways, a lot of what we see and what students experience is reflective of what they experience outside of the context of education. What happens within our institutions are often a microcosm of what's happening, what's going on in society. To that point, I have also noticed in most recent years people are a lot more transparent and direct with regard to saying racist things, questioning. Why is this person here? Right? Are they are they were they born in this country? Do they do they belong here? Right. A lot of the anti you know, anti Asian. The racial violence has been directed to our Asian-American friends and colleagues. Students have experienced a lot of those same things, a lot of anti-Semitic zoom bombing. So a lot of the things that we're seeing in society from our nation's leaders, in many respects, those same things are happening within our within our campuses and in our institutional context, both outside of the classroom and within the classroom. And it's having an effect on students mental health and wellbeing and even their decisions to decide to enroll or not like to say, well, why would I why would I put myself in this situation? Why would I give up time with my family? Why would I give up time at work to come and deal with this nonsense? Right. That's that's what students are articulating as being especially challenging right now.

**AS** [00:21:43] And you're right. I think that's reflected in the data, because what I see nationally is that actually student coourse success rates are actually not horrible. They're on average 70 at some campuses. They really tell, oh, we have over 80 percent success rate. Now when I said you're masking something here, though, what are your completion rates? Meaning for community colleges transfer within three years or you can do a six year or completing a program to earn a living wage. And that's when the numbers are really sobering. We're looking sometimes single digits if the success rates are relatively high, but then they're not completing. It talks a lot about their experience, which you highlighted. So when the when the pandemic hit, Frank, I was a mad man trying to create so many resources and just sending them out. And then I was also looking at, well, who's got something out there? And I knew and looked at this beautiful webinar. And you provided educators with a framework to employ equity minded and culturally affirming teaching learning practices in virtual communities. And you talked about being intrusive, relational, be culturally relevant and affirming the community focus, be race conscious. Since you've been doing a lot of work on anti blackness, are there any of framework you can share or steps?

**Frank Harris** [00:23:20] Yeah, great. Great question. Now, so Luke and I were with you when the pandemic. When it became apparent that this wasn't going away after about 14 days and that the campus operations were going to be radically and rapidly shifting to a remote learning model, we knew and I'm sure you share this, we knew that a lot of educators, even if they were very effective, they didn't necessarily have the tools and resources to make that transition and to make that pivot. And so we felt like we had a responsibility as researchers and as educators ourselves to provide some guidance, to provide some direction, to provide tools for those five principles that you just so neatly and nicely laid out like those were transferable regardless of what it is that you do on a campus, whether you are a faculty member, whether you were counseling faculty, you are classified, professional, working in a financial aid or enrollment or in the student health center that if you keep those five things in mind. That you are going to you were going to be effective in being able to really support students during is through this difficult time? You know, I would say a lot of the feedback that we got at that time suggested that we were heading in the right direction with regard to those questions, that they really, they really do work. They really do serve us well. We did that webinar, I want to say that was around March or April. And then we know it happened in May, right at the end of May was the tragic murder of George Floyd, which I should say came on the heels of Ahmaud Arbery, that the video being released about a robbery when he was he was murdered not too long after we learned about Brianna Taylor's death as well. So, you know, we had these three very prominent and in many ways representative cases of black people being killed by law enforcement or in Ahmaud's case, former retired law enforcement folks who felt like they were in some some light operating as some law enforcement capacity. And we immediately saw how that impacted the entire country. Folks were emotional. Folks were angry. The black community felt especially vulnerable at this time. And then we had colleagues who didn't identify as black that were also hurting from it and felt the pain of and it felt like we got to do something at that time. Luke and I got with two other colleagues, Lasana Hotep and Dr. Regina Steinback Stroud, who is former president and former chancellor in the California community college system, who said, OK, let's really talk about anti blackness. Let's talk about kind of the historical roots of it, but really put it in the context and talk about the things that institutions needed to do. And so we came up with a 10 point plan that gave institutions some guidance on how they can respond to and how they can address anti blackness within their institutions. And I'm not I'm not going to go through all 10 of them, but some of the ones that were immediately relevant were first and foremost revisiting the history and legacy of racism at your institution. There are a lot of folks who work at institutions don't understand that the history of it and don't understand how black and indigenous people of color were denied access to those institutions at its origins, were denied opportunities to work at those institutions, how students experiences were still being impacted. In some cases you had buildings and you had endowed professorships and you had very identities. And the legacy of racism was rooted in a lot of the history and traditions that were still being celebrated at institutions. And so we thought that that was important to do. We suggested and advise institutions don't release these statements of solidarity without also talking about some concrete support that you're going to do and offer the community. Right, whether that was mental health support, whether it was revisiting curricula, whatever it is, you had to have some concrete actions because for a long time, colleges have always been very good at. But something happened. The response is, OK, let's quickly put out a statement that says, you know, we stand in solidarity with our black community and we stand in solidarity with our indigenous community, stand of solidarity with a community who has been targeted. And then after a while, the statement gets archived in the email and there's nothing concrete that comes out of it. And no one ever thinks about it or talks about it until the next day happens. So we really advise institutions to not just do that, offer concrete support, talk about what you're going to do, not just to respond to this issue, but also to really fundamentally change the culture in a climate of the institution. We talked about looking at student conduct data, for example, and disaggregating that data by race, ethnicity and seeing. Do you have certain groups of students that are disproportionately represented among those who are referred for student conduct, campus violations? And if so, what are the sources of those referrals? Right. Can we look at what are there some common threads or some common elements? A lot of campuses don't even collective it so they would have no idea. And if they do collect the data collected in a way that would allow it to be disaggregated by race or ethnicity. So that was an important practice. We talked about examining student services because we find when it comes to black students, three consistent patterns. So black students often tell us they feel unwelcomed, they feel under challenged. And so we talked about examining your student services practices and making sure that the way that they're delivered and the way that that folks in those areas communicate with black students reflects that they are welcome and that you are to both challenge and support them. So we just talked about these very concrete things that institutions can do in order to really try to get at the root of that anti-blackness. Now, the fact of the matter is here we are about 14 months since the the murder of George Floyd. And it was this some accountability and justice system in terms of the police officers who were involved. One was convicted, as you know, and then there are a few others that are going to be standing trial next month. But you have institutions made significant progress? My sense is no. Right, not really, a lot of institutions still have a lot of work to do to really demonstrate their commitment. To the statements that they released immediately after George was murdered,

**AS** [00:30:44] I know it hasn't been a very long time, years since the 10 points were developed. Do you happen to have any stories of any campuses, any college leaders that were able to take any of those and actually implement something to have any success stories? Or is it pretty sobering and we don't really have anything yet?

**Frank Harris** [00:31:07] Yeah, there's certainly some success stories here and there. You know, I'm not going to name institutions, but I know of an institution that decided that every student who's in their criminal justice program. That they're going to have to take a course on implicit bias and racism and policing. I mean, that's a substantive change, right? Because these are folks that are going to, you know, eventually graduate. And if they stay in a field in which they're studying, they're going to go into the justice sector. Maybe they're going to be attorneys, maybe some of them are going to be probation or parole officers, maybe some are going to be correctional officers. So provide us some early exposure to some of these concepts and helping them kind of understand how they come up and how they, you know, how they impact how justice is actually delivered. You know, I think that's a positive thing. You probably know this. I'm sure you work with a lot of institutions. We saw a rash of hiring. I think we saw institutions that were much more intentional about who they hired, thinking about, OK, you know, do we have black representation in some of these key areas? We've seen institutions that have done cluster hires where they said, OK, we're not going to just hire one faculty member at one area. We're going to think about can we bring in a critical mass of faculty who do work and who are committed to black student success, know black liberation. And we're going to bring a lot. Right. There are some some pockets of what I would call them, bright spots here and there. But, you know, I wouldn't say that, you know, maybe maybe it's probably more of a reflection of what I expected my expectations. And so I expected institutions to do more. That's what my perspective is on that.

**AS** [00:33:09] My work, my my outcomes, what I'm always looking at when I'm working with institutions is I'm always looking at the prize, which is equity. I'm an implementer, it's very important to think about the means. And that's why I'm big on kindness. I find it's very effective, especially when you have you red lighters when it comes to equity, racial equity and especially anti blackness. And then you have your yellow lighters. And I try my best to bring those yellow lighters to green. One thing that I found helpful, and I stole this from one of the campuses that I coach actually down in your area. And I'll give her credit because she's the one who told me this, Dr. Lisa Brewster. She described how you know, how we when we enter a building and the door automatically opens for you. Or if you're carrying something heavy and there's an option upstairs which could be challenging for some people or there's a ramp so you can take the ramp. So basically we have all benefited because we decided to take care of our disabled brothers and sisters. And I tried to give a similar message. And even when we take care of black students, when we and sometimes I have to use the group that they everybody seems to care about, I'm one of them, veterans, that if you take care of veterans, everybody will benefit. They kind of get that. If I say veterans lives matter, they don't say, oh, no, all lives matter. It's very interesting dynamic there. But at any rate, I find that sometimes that's helpful. Also helping them just through the work. Let's be part of a team. We're going to go through an inquiry and action process to improve our craft. And in that process, we're going to happen to disaggregate data and see what it tells us. Do you have other approaches, Frank, that you would mind sharing to help more of those yellow ligheters and even the red lighters to move more into the green that you wouldn't mind sharing?

**Frank Harris** [00:35:20] I would say what I do and how I approach it now is in many ways align with the approach that you just articulated. And so I agree, you can't start with the red lighters and you can't design whatever it is you're doing, professional development, whether you're coming up with new institutional policies or practices, you can have the red lighters in mind when you do that. Right, because if you do, then you never come up with something that can be as meaningful and as impactful as if you focus on the yellow lighters. Right. The folks that have in some ways the shortest distance to go when it comes to knowledge and understanding and embracing that what you might describe, the other leaders are much closer to the green than the real leaders are. So I don't typically start with the red lighters is the theory behind the way I approach it is if I can get enough critical mass, if I can get enough of those yellow lighters to become green lighters and we get critical mass, they're. Then they can create an institutional context where it's uncomfortable and unpopular to be a yellow lighterr, right? I mean, to pardon me to be a red lighter. And so that's the theory behind it, I believe. And I think you agree with me here. I also believe in you have to you have to meet folks where they are. And we have some colleagues who would disagree with this approach. And so it may mean that, yeah, you have to start with a population like this. Maybe you're working with a campus and they have huge issues around racial equity, but they have some commitment and some connection to say, you know, students with disabilities or former foster youth. Sometimes you got to kind of start there from there and you try to move them more to a focus on racial equity. Now, I will say this. There are some colleagues that would criticize me, especially, right, as someone who's a part of a racially minorities community to say, hey, why why are you taking this approach? Why you're trying to make folks more comfortable? The problem is folks are too comfortable. So you need to go right in and you need to address where they're uncomfortable. Know, I mean, I think maybe there's some merit in that. It's just not the way that I've approached it. And I haven't necessarily been successful in it. But I you know, I've been thinking about that a lot more like in my as my approach, making it too comfortable. Should I be challenged, folks, and pushing folks a little bit more at the outset and recognize that when that happens, you're going to turn some folks off and you're going to lose some folks, but you're also going to get some folks who are like, wow, it's going to be much more impactful. And so there's that every place is different where we've had a lot of success, to be honest with you, is when we can connect equity and racial equity to other things that the institution values. So, you know, you're going to agree with me on this. The concept of equity planning in California's community colleges, as an example, has been around since the early 90s. However, it wasn't a funded initiative. And I know it's much more than an initaitive to our equity champions who are listening. I know equity is more than just sitting there with me, but it was it's something that was funded until 2014. And once you start to attach funding to something like equity, then it becomes more of an institutional priority, right? Because you get funding, you got resources, you can you can create cultural centers. You can hire build your workforce. Right. There's all these things you can do that you can't do in the absence of funding, then we can kind of talk about. OK, to your point. Well, if we're going to be looking at equity, we can't look at equity without disaggregating our data. Right. There's no way you can do that. So I know your focus right now is on, say, students with disabilities. But we also need to desegregate this data by race and ethnicity and see are there some disparities, are some things that we don't know about or are some things that we that we're seeing? Or even if we do know, racial minorities, students are disproportionately impacted? We may not know the intensity of the disproportionate impact. We may not know where it is. We may not know. Right. And so you use that. And because there's an equity plan and because there's some funding and some accountability that's attached to. Folks are much more open, even folks who may have been initially resistant, a much more open to it, and then the last thing I'll say is where I think we have a longer way to go. Where I think is important is we've got to start holding folks accountable. for closing equity gaps so you can be a president, you could be a college president where this college or university president, you know, historically you could have horrible success rates for racial minority students or any population and not necessarily be held accountable for that as an institutional leader. So we got to make sure closing equity gaps and things like that, that that's a part of how folks are evaluating folks job descriptions. It's that it becomes a criterion for evaluating performance. Right. And I think when we can start to do that right, we can have this become a part of how we review institutional effectiveness like no one would ever be able to continue to be, you know, if they weren't doing a good job of balancing their budgets or if they were having all these lawsuits or things like that. Right. And so I think equity and student success has to be taken as seriously as some of those things as well.

**AS** [00:41:23] Yeah, a few things, Frank. I get the same thing from my colleagues about my approach. They even use the word. They use it. They say you've got to be more militant. You've got to, you got to go in there and tell them how it is. And I say, well, I have an outcome I want to achieve and that doesn't work. It's not my style. And I've seen actually the impact of that. And it and it actually turns yellow lighters into red lighters. So I get where they're coming from and it comes from a place, a place of hurt. And they really want to feel strongly that no apologies, this is the way it is. But again, I go to it's a means to an end and there's a timing. You know, there is a point where you can be more aggressive about it throughout the process of taking a campus through this change is just sometimes it isn't a good idea to that the first meeting. And, you know, Frank, what's so difficult about campuses? When they're trying to implement any priorities, I'll give you one example, I'll give you two. One is the typical campus, people fail to realize, they only have two or three months in a year to actually get some priority work done. Because faculty have to be involved right, there are key to this, and so they're often gone in the summer. So you miss that. September. What do you hear, Frank? It's too busy. Start of the semester. October is OK. November and December. Are you crazy? That's the holidays. We're lucky to squeeze in maybe a meeting or two. January gone again. February. No, because we're just starting this semester. March is all right depending on the campus. April. No, we got spring break and May. No way. Right. So we often forget now what I tell campuses, especially campus leaders. I say, well, don't be the typical campus. Find ways to keep that momentum going. The second piece that I find really interesting, I find this dynamic happening all the time is let's say, Frank, you and I go to a meeting, some committee meeting, and someone let's say a faculty member says something and just throws the wrench into momentum around equity. And then the meeting is done and people keep going. Well, faculty don't agree with this. And it was one person one. But everybody uses the word faculty as if that one person represents everybody and at the same thing happens with administrators. And that's how I find some of these anti equity antiracist people. They're actually very shrewd. They know how to use the committee structure. They know they know how to use participatory governance. They know it only takes two or three months and a year to actually get priority. And so they use that to to their advantage. And so in terms of accountability, I'm kind of I often go back and forth with that one, Frank, because let's say back to that female president I was talking about. Right. She's fighting hard. But she has to be careful how to fight. Otherwise, she might have a board that's let's just say on not very equity minded. That's another issue altogether. Right. And so years go by and they don't move the needle. But then should we hold her accountable? Right. So that accountability piece. I don't know, Frank. So anyway, those are my thoughts. I don't know if you have any comments on my reaction.

**Frank Harris** [00:44:56] Yeah, yeah, I mean, just, you know, really spot on point and so accountability can mean a lot of different things, right. To me in this context, accountability could be we should have so that we have board meetings every month. Right. We're talking about community colleges in California, in particular, board meetings every month. So I think it's important for the board to be asking, hey, where are we with regard to student equity, where we were regard to meeting the goals of our equity play. Tell us what is going on, what institutional actions are happening, what new committees are being formed, what work is being done? What successes have we had? Right. I mean, I can say it's not always about, hey, you know, if you don't meet these these very arbitrary goals, you're out of here. But it's asking the question is being engaged. It's having to be a part of, OK, did you balance your budget? Did you do this right? OK, it's requiring folks to speak on it and to report on it. Right is one. And that's something. It doesn't happen a lot of places. I would even say it doesn't happen in most places. So even if the example that you to that president who may be struggling to get by, you still have to navigate that. Right. So you can't go into the void. Mean to say, hey, well, you know, we're making no progress, you know, because I got a faculty executive committee in the Senate that's holding things up. Right. You know, so you can't say that. But I think it would be important to let the board know, hey, this is this is what we need to move things forward. Sometimes accountability is about changing policy, changing institutional policies and changing institutional structures that make it difficult to do so. You talk about the faculty contract. Faculty have to be engaged in this work, right? At some point, you can only go so far without that. And so are there some things that we can do with regard to faculty contracts and faculty assignments that facilitate faculty engagement in this rather than just a sense of. Yes. So when I see accountability, in some ways it could be like, hey, you know what? We've been at this for three, four or five years. And you know where I mean, it could be asking the tough questions, but it can also be standing gauged in what is going on. You know, as a leader, as an if you're an executive, if you're a vice president, you know, when you're having your one on ones with your deans having on the agenda, hey, OK, talk to me about equity. What's going on? What are we doing right. If you're the president or chancellor asking the folks who report to do the same thing. So I think that's where I find that sometimes maybe less so more recently, but certainly in past times, you know, it only came up when the equity plan was to go away. Right. And there was some it wasn't a part of the day to day conversations that folks are having either formal conversations or informal conversations. And I think it has to be more part more ingrained in institutional culture for us to really be able to move things in a way that we need to move.

**AS** [00:48:24] Yes, Frank. And I think there should be accountability for board members. Unfortunately, their accountability comes with elections and not enough people vote. And so I'll be candid. You get some of a particular political persuasion that and they actually block the equity work. They're the kinds of people where you say Black Lives Matter and they respond with no, all lives matter. They're often the ones who block actually this this work. And but we don't have really an accountability pressure point for them other than their election. I want to get back to the closing equity gaps, because this is another thing that I told my colleagues is that closing the equity gaps is not enough. Because if we have, let's say, a 17 percent completion rate, and that's the highest group, the highest performing, let's say black students are 10 points below that, and then everybody's brought up to 17. That's horrible. I mean, we should celebrate that we close them. But I think a lot of people forget that we still have so much work to do that closing equity gaps. Absolutely. But the work of change, culture change, to bring these numbers up significantly more. It's just hard work. It's really, really difficult work. As you know, there's this Guided Pathways framework that colleges have been trying to implement. I've been helping them to apply an equity lens to that, and the same thing I mentioned earlier about the two or three months in a year, how people use committees to block. I see. I see that all of that. We're going to go into fifth year in California, guided pathway's. And I can probably, there's probably a handful that actually are doing something, implementing, whereas others are kind of stuck in that planning mode. Since there are ten points. Frank, would you mind sharing maybe one or two more from that ten point?

**Frank Harris** [00:50:20] Absolutely happy to do it. But can I can I comment on what you just what you just talked about?

**AS** [00:50:26] Absolutely.

[00:50:27] I agree. Board members should be held accountable for equity and for student success. I agree. It does go back to who was elected to the boards. And this is a challenge with K-12 too. Yes, not higher in our post-secondary aid challenge is the folks who are most likely to be elected, by and large, are not really educators, are not even folks who really care all that much about education, at least about public education. So you have folks who are being elected that don't really understand educational policy, that don't understand curriculum. They don't understand like some pretty fundamental things about what makes an institution go and what does an institution need. And so when that person or when you have a critical mass of people on a board that's not committed or not engaged with, then you get a lot of what we've gotten, you know, are the folks who are blocking important institutional actions for political parties because they want to you know, they want to make sure that they that when they run for city council or when they run for mayor, whatever, the next step is that they don't lose votes in that regard. Right. And you know why they're doing that? They're harming students or harming families and they're harming communities. And I don't you know, I'm not that's not hyperbole. They are actually doing things to hurt the people who need to support the most. Right. And that's disgraceful that they would do that. So I think part of what we have to do and I don't know, maybe maybe we need to be more intentional to talk to what our colleges about, you know, making sure that you are in communication with your community, with the folks who are making decisions about who gets to serve on the board, give them some guidance around what does the college need. And, you know, what is a good candidate to serve on the board, right. What it what are certain past experiences, a certain competence? What are some things you should expect? Because right now it's kind of I don't know how it happens. Is whoever I mean, I really don't know right now. It's kind of all over the place. But you get a lot of folks who are serving on these boards who don't know or don't care enough about education. So that that's important.

**AS** [00:52:43] And Frank, really quick look at CRT conversation that's happening nationally. For example, school boards are banning something that's not even taught,

**Frank Harris** [00:52:53] Not even taught in K-12 schools. I would imagine that most folks who are on this critical race theory have never, ever read a book or an article like they have no idea what critical race theory is. It's just so popular. They say, hey, you know what? You know, the folks at CPAC said that we should do this and that it help us get more votes. So let's just do it. And they have no idea what they're calling for. They have no idea what they're banning. But it makes for great political rhetoric and it does a good job of riling up folks who are anti, Race anti-immigrant, anti a.. Progressive, in my opinion. You know, so. So it works really well. It does. It's doing exactly what, you know, it's supposed to do. I suppose, you know, that's probably the most prominent example. But there are other examples that are even the even a little bit closer to home with regard to what our community college colleagues are facing and dealing with and trying to move things forward for sure. You also asked about some of the other some of the other points. But some other things that we talked about is making sure that becoming an anti-racist institution is not just something that you say, but something that you're committed to doing. And so what that means is that, you know, you have to look at what are the institutional policies and practices. You almost need to do like a real audit. And figure out what are the institutional policies and practices policies, as you know, are things that are that are that are codified, that have been sanctioned either by a governing body or a stakeholder group through votes and so forth, and policies that things are not necessarily written, but practices that happen that are a part of institutional culture where all the things that we're doing that's allowing anti-blackness to exist and persist. So then you've got you know, you've got to take a real you've got to look at your curriculum. You have to look at your H.R. policies. You have to look at grievance policies. You have to look you have to be willing to engage in a deep and critical examination of everything that makes your college a college. And you ask one question, right. Does this policy advance anti-blackness or does it disrupt? And there's no there's no middle ground, right? Either. Ibram Kendi says there's no neutral policy right there, no race neutral policies. They're either racist or they're not racist. And that's how we have to look at it and examine it. Another one that comes to mind also is making sure that you make addressing anti-racism antiblack is a strategic priority. So if this is a real issue, should a priority, it needs to be articulated in your strategic plan. And if it's in your strategic plan, you need to have measurable goals that help to document progress and you need to have resources are allocated towards doing it. So that might mean you need to invest some money towards an employee resource group for your black employees, or you need to create a black cultural center. And that's going to require some investment. Right. So these are and there's more for sure. But those are, again, a couple other ones that I would I would add to the list for sure.

**AS** [00:56:29] I'm glad I asked. I really appreciate you mentioning those other two. We ask our students as we educate them, hey, we want you to think critically. We want you to have grit. We want you to blah, blah, blah. But then sometimes we don't model that right. So we need to model that. We need to think critically about our practices, our policies, our procedures, the way we teach, the way, the way we serve students, the kind of experience that we give them and and look at ourselves in the mirror and and then work toward action because I see too many data talks, data, this data that and then just no action, just another tactic to look at data, question it. And this is where they get bogged down and no action. As we wrap up, I want to go back to the boxing because I think that the work that people at colleges do to really do the things that you were mentioning is is like training for a boxing match or actually being in a boxing match. People don't, if they've seen it as a violent sport, it is. But it's also it's an art the way that they train to be tremendously physically fit, but just mentally fit and to have a strategy to be smart, to know about timing, balance. These are the kinds of things that all of our equity colleagues need to just continue to fight. Right. Continue to. So we encourage I think we'll encourage everybody to take some boxing. Right, Frank?

**Frank Harris** [00:58:03] Yeah. You know, yeah. Definitely take boxing either for the reasons that I'm doing it, you know, for any other reasons. I really like the metaphor. I really like the metaphor because we're boxing. You have to do two things to be a good boxer. So you have to be able to be assertive and be offensive, right, and sort of your approach, but you also have to while you're doing that, you also have to have good defense. You know, you have to be reactive. So you have to kind of be able to do both simultaneously. You got to kind of see a punch coming before it hits you. You've got to counterpunch. I mean, there's all these things, all these these elements, both physical and mental elements that all have to come together. And I feel like in a lot of ways, you know, that's what we're asking our education, our educators to do with regard to closing equity and achievement gaps. There's some things that we have to do to be proactive in how we do it. Right. We get, we got to be on the offense. Boxing, if you don't like the boxing metaphor, I think dancing works the same way as being in sync with your partner. We have to think about how do we get all the key stakeholders and sync, how do we get everybody dancing together? Right. If we're going back to boxing, how do we make sure all of our everything that we're doing, that it's aligned and that is moving together is moving in the right direction? And we can we can be good punchers, but we can also be good counterpunches and so forth. And obviously, the opponent that we're fighting is inequity, is systemic racism. Systemic oppression is all the stuff that has long plagued plagued us as an educational community that, despite our best efforts, have really, really made progress difficult in closing the equity gap. Also, I would say that boxing is a sport that has been around for hundreds of years. You know, when you're learning the box, you're kind of, you know, for the most part the things you're learning are not new. Right? These are things that have been around for a long time, tried and tested strategies. But every now and then you get a boxer and you get a Muhammad Ali or you get somebody that revolutionizes the sport real meaningful way. And with that person does is just kind of comes in and takes something that has already been established and takes it to the next level. And so I feel like we have that's a lot of what we have to do is really think of ourselves as that's coming in, that we all come in with training. We all come in with degrees and graduate degrees, that we've all been taught how to be educators. But what we really have to do is take what we've learned and figure out how do we revolutionize it, how do we adapt it, how do we make it work for today's context and today's student population, recognizing that today, what we're dealing with and who we're serving today, the conditions we're dealing with and who we're serving today are very different from what they were and who they were decades ago. But a lot of our theories and a lot of things that we've learned over the years in terms of what it means to be an effective educator is based on conditions and populations that that don't reflect are today's challenges. And so we really have to to revolutionize what we do. We have to radically reimagine what we do. And we have to really be willing to not just come in and maintain the status quo. We have to challenge the status quo. I think that's what it's going to take. And it's not going to just be one person. Right. It has to be a collection of folks that are committed to doing it

**AS** [01:02:01] While I'm on the coach in the corner trying to train, trying to help people, help them have the tools to know when when do I go on defense offense, when do I need to do both simultaneously. So I can't thank you enough because I know that's what you do. Thank you for participating in the Student Success podcast.

**Frank Harris** [01:02:22] Thank you. This is a wonderful conversation. I always have, and I appreciate you. I appreciate your leadership. I appreciate all that you do to support colleges. I know you and I, we're we're both on the same team and there's others who are also on the same team. And so we just have to continue to continue to to stay committed to the work.

**AS** [01:02:49] Fly like a butterfly and sting like a bee, man.

**Frank Harris** [01:02:51] Oh, yes!