

TipTalk: Summary Report

This report is based on the TipTalk project. The summary and findings are drawn from a total of 12 student interviews, each lasting between 60-90 minutes, conducted over three months with 8 systematically marginalized students from SFCC. The goal of these interviews was to understand their experiences, challenges, and recommendations for improving equity, inclusion, and support on campus for systematically marginalized students. The key findings highlight both areas of strength and significant opportunities for growth at SFCC, along with student recommendations for enhancing their experiences.

Areas of Strength

Students expressed a sense of community and inclusion, citing the welcoming staff and safe spaces like the Mosaic Center. Key figures, including Dahveed, Ken Commerce, Gloria, and MESA staff, were praised for their empathetic support. Positive interactions with admissions staff and professors helped students feel heard and respected, fostering a sense of belonging.

Challenges

Students at SFCC encounter a variety of financial, cultural, emotional, and systemic challenges. Financially, many face high tuition fees, unexpected costs such as textbooks, and limited employment opportunities, particularly for international students who are restricted by visa regulations. Working parents struggle to balance their educational expenses with family responsibilities, often without sufficient financial aid. Culturally, students from diverse racial and linguistic backgrounds feel underrepresented in the curriculum and faculty, with many experiencing a lack of inclusivity. LGBTQI+ students face challenges related to tokenism and feelings of isolation. Additionally, emotional and mental health struggles are common, and the lack of culturally competent counseling services further exacerbates these issues.

Communication barriers, particularly concerning access to essential resources and multilingual support, contribute to students feeling isolated and unsupported. These challenges point to a need for enhanced financial aid, cultural sensitivity, and mental health resources to better support the student body at SFCC.

Key Recommendations

Financial Support and Accessibility

Students suggested centralizing financial resources such as financial aid, scholarships, and other support options through a regularly updated online newsletter through Mosaic Center. This would make it easier for students, particularly international students and working parents, to manage their finances. Additionally, they recommended developing on-campus job opportunities tailored to meet the visa requirements of international students, providing them with viable work options while studying. Workshops specifically designed for working parents, covering topics like budgeting, childcare, and managing education costs, were also proposed to help alleviate financial stress.

Culturally Inclusive Curriculum: To better reflect the diverse backgrounds of the student population, students emphasized the need to broaden the curriculum by incorporating global perspectives and non-Western narratives. Hiring more faculty of color and including coursework that reflects the experiences of bi/multilingual students, international students, and other marginalized groups is crucial. They also suggested that faculty implement inclusive teaching practices, such as offering submission windows instead of strict deadlines and creating assessments that account for diverse learning approaches, and flexible testing windows or assignment substitutions for tests to accommodate working students.

Counseling and Mental Health and Emotional Support: Students highlighted the need for more culturally competent counselors who can understand and address the unique challenges faced by marginalized students, including LGBTQ+ students and ethnic minorities. They recommended establishing peer-led support groups for students dealing with isolation, such as neurodivergent and multilingual students, to help them connect with others who share similar experiences.

Community Engagement and Safe Spaces: Increasing the involvement of student groups in planning cultural events, such as Black History Month, would ensure these activities better reflect the needs and experiences of marginalized communities. Students also proposed the

creation of multilingual clubs and storytelling spaces where they can express their cultural and linguistic identities, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity across diverse groups.

Support for Non-Traditional Students: To support non-traditional students, including those who are working parents, the recommendation was made to provide on-campus childcare or partner with local providers to offer affordable childcare services. In addition, students suggested offering more flexible class schedules, alternative assignments, and hybrid learning options to accommodate the needs of those balancing work, family, and education.

Addressing Racial and Cultural Sensitivity: Students recommended implementing anti-bias training for staff and faculty to help them recognize and address harmful stereotypes and biases, ensuring all students are treated with respect and dignity. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of ensuring equal visibility and representation for all marginalized groups in campus events and orientation programs, going beyond just a focus on LGBTQ+ topics.

Improving Communication: Improved communication about available resources, such as financial aid, counseling services, and academic support, was another recommendation. Students suggested using email newsletters, campus posters, and adding relevant information in syllabi to ensure students are consistently informed of the resources available to them.

LGBTQ+ and Marginalized Group Support: Finally, students suggested creating spaces where LGBTQ+ students and students of color can feel genuinely included, rather than tokenized. This could be achieved by providing regular faculty training on supporting students with intersecting identities, ensuring their experiences and contributions are recognized and valued.

These recommendations provide a clear pathway for addressing the significant challenges faced by SFCC students, particularly those from marginalized and underrepresented communities. By implementing these suggestions, the institution can create a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable environment for all students.

Financial Equity

- International Students (Majedi): Faces high tuition fees, unexpected costs, employment restrictions, and harmful stereotypes assuming financial stability.
- Working Parents (Bernice): Experiences limited financial aid while balancing education and family responsibilities. Suggests workshops and centralized support for student-parents.
- Work and Studies (Kiana): Struggles with balancing tuition, work, and costly textbooks, leading to both academic and mental health challenges.
- Decentralized Resources (Carolyn): Finds it difficult to access decentralized resources like food banks and transportation vouchers due to poor communication.
- Communication and Visibility of Financial Aid (Naya, Jane, Kiana): Report that financial aid information is hard to access and suggest enhancing communication through newsletters, emails, and improved visibility.
- Employment Barriers (Majedi): International students face restrictive job opportunities and a complicated, lengthy application process.

Mental Health Impact of Financial Stress:

- Kiana and Majedi: Financial pressures contribute to emotional strain, isolation, and academic difficulties, with a perceived lack of empathy from faculty.

Key Recommendations

1. Financial Support:
 - Majedi, Kiana, Bernice: Develop more financial aid opportunities and job options for international students, along with flexible coursework to accommodate working students and parents.
2. Improve Communication and Centralize Resources:
 - Naya, Jane, Carolyn: Enhance the visibility of financial aid resources and centralize access to essential services like food banks and transportation support.
3. Employment for International Students:

- Majedi: Create campus jobs that comply with visa restrictions, offering more work opportunities for international students.
4. Flexibility
- Kiana, Majedi: Provide flexible testing systems and stronger emotional support services to help students manage the financial pressures impacting their mental health.
5. Address Financial Stereotypes:
- Majedi: Challenge stereotypes about international students' financial capabilities and ensure they receive equitable access to financial aid.

Students, particularly international students and working parents, students with disabilities, among others face high tuition, unexpected costs, limited job opportunities, and inadequate communication about financial resources. Addressing these through targeted financial aid, improved communication, flexible academic options, and challenging stereotypes will alleviate stress and promote equity.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Inequitable Practices Observed by Students

1. Niceness as Racism:
 - Jane and Bernice: "Niceness" from professors often feels patronizing, singling out students based on identity, which exacerbates feelings of alienation.
2. Fear of Being Racist:
 - Zohra: Fear of being labeled racist stifles dialogue about race and inclusion, creating discomfort in interactions.
3. Anxiety Over Racism:
 - Jane and Bernice: Anxiety around racism discussions causes avoidance or overcorrection, further isolating marginalized students.
4. Stereotype Threat:
 - Bernice: Felt pressure to overperform due to stereotypes about students of color, highlighting educators' lack of understanding of these challenges.
5. Tokenism:

- Katrina (Non-binary student of color): Struggled with being cast in theater roles to fulfill diversity quotas, questioning if her talent was recognized.

6. Gender-Based Assumptions in STEM:

- Jane: Experienced assumptions in STEM classes that she needed more help because of her gender, undermining her confidence.

7. Empathy Deficit:

- Bernice and Zohra: Noted a lack of empathy among educators for the challenges faced by marginalized students, suggesting spaces like the Mosaic Center could offer empathy training for faculty.

8. Surveillance vs. Support:

- Jane, Naya, and Wajedi: Excessive check-ins by professors based on identity felt more like surveillance than genuine support, especially for multilingual students.

9. Names as Cultural Identity:

- Kiana: Highlighted the cultural significance of her name and how dismissing its proper pronunciation feels like a disregard for her identity.

10. Dismissiveness Toward Multilingual Students:

- Majedi: Professors often assume a lack of ability in multilingual students instead of recognizing their diverse problem-solving approaches.

11. Erasure of Indigenous Identities:

- Katrina: Indigenous students are often viewed as historical figures, not active members of society, perpetuating outdated narratives.

12. Shifting Responsibility:

- Zohra: Professors often blame students for their struggles without acknowledging systemic barriers, which invalidates their efforts.

The interviewed students at SFCC highlighted numerous challenges related to diversity, inclusion, and equity in their educational experience. From subtle forms of racism masked by "niceness" to the anxiety and discomfort that stifle conversations about race, marginalized students frequently feel isolated and unsupported. Stereotype threats, tokenism, and assumptions about gender or language proficiency further contribute to their alienation. These issues are

compounded by a lack of empathy from educators, especially in addressing the systemic barriers faced by students of color, multilingual students, and other marginalized groups.

The students' proposed solutions emphasize the need for improved representation through hiring bilingual faculty, fostering genuine inclusion, and creating safe spaces for storytelling and dialogue. They also call for support tailored to non-traditional students, empathy training for faculty, and enhanced cultural sensitivity across the board. Addressing these systemic barriers and fostering unity across racial, cultural, and linguistic communities will create a more inclusive and supportive environment where all students can thrive, both academically and personally. The path forward lies in embracing diversity, promoting equity, and ensuring that all voices are heard and respected.

Broader Issues Related to Equity and Inclusion

One significant equity concern highlighted by Bernice is the lack of bilingual instructors. She advocated for hiring more bilingual professors to better support students who speak multiple languages, ensuring they have access to inclusive learning environments that reflect their linguistic needs. Naya echoed the challenges related to assumptions about English proficiency, as she faced obstacles due to the misconception that she was fluent in English, ultimately hindering her educational experience. In the theater department, Katrina experienced tokenism and felt her identity as a person of color overshadowed her talent. She expressed the need for more faculty of color to ensure that students are recognized for their contributions beyond identity labels. Additionally, Katrina, as a queer, Native Hawaiian, and Hispanic student, described the complexities of belonging, particularly in environments where she felt erased in both Latinx spaces and academic settings. While she found some comfort in the campus drama community, she often felt hypervisible as one of the few visibly queer students of color, highlighting the tension between safety and exposure.

Recommendations for Inclusivity

To address these challenges, several solutions were proposed. First, improving representation through recruiting bilingual faculty and diverse counselors would provide more relatable support

for marginalized students. Empathy and cultural sensitivity training for faculty could also help bridge the gap in understanding diverse student experiences. Addressing tokenism involves fostering genuine inclusion that goes beyond surface-level diversity efforts and centers marginalized voices. Creating safe, inclusive spaces for storytelling and student involvement in cultural events would provide a platform for marginalized students to express themselves. Promoting equity across groups with balanced visibility would also ensure that no community feels overlooked.

For non-traditional students, offering childcare support, mentoring, and resources would alleviate some of the burdens they face while balancing school and significant personal responsibilities. Finally, enhancing cultural sensitivity through workshops tailored to the needs of immigrant, Black, Latinx, and multilingual students would foster deeper cross-cultural understanding and inclusion.

Broader Challenges: Representation and cultural barriers continue to challenge students like Katrina and Majedi. The dominance of Western narratives in theater left Katrina feeling excluded, while Majedi, an international student, noted that the curriculum's focus on Western perspectives made him feel isolated from domestic students. Naya, too, felt excluded due to her identity as an adopted child and struggled with navigating multilingualism. Jane underscored how the Black community's voice remains underrepresented, especially in cultural events like Black History Month. The emotional and mental health struggles of students further highlight the need for equity interventions. Carolyn, who is neurodivergent, expressed feelings of isolation, while Kiana faced mental health challenges from juggling work, financial stress, and academics. Majedi also shared his loneliness and disconnection as an international student, and Zohra discussed the emotional toll of discrimination, advocating for greater spiritual and cultural support.

Communication Barriers and Accessibility: Students like Carolyn experienced difficulty accessing campus services due to inefficient communication, suggesting text notifications could improve this process. Naya pointed to language barriers, as assumptions about her English

proficiency impeded her learning, while Zohra noted the lack of multilingual support for both students and their families, further restricting access to essential resources.

Spiritual Equity and U.S.-Based Stereotypes: Zohra called for greater respect and recognition of spirituality and unity across communities of color, despite experiencing discrimination. Additionally, both Zohra and Majedi raised concerns about U.S.-centric stereotypes, noting that educational systems and societal assumptions—such as those around international students' financial stability—compound the challenges they face.

Counseling Services and Inclusivity at SFCC

1. Promotion of Counseling Services:

- Jane: Counseling services are under-promoted, particularly to students of color. Jane suggested using outreach methods like flyers, posters, A-frames, emails, and professors mentioning counseling services in class and syllabi.

2. Difficult Transitions Between Counselors:

- Carolyn: Experienced challenges transitioning between counselors, feeling unsupported without a proper introduction. She recommended overlapping sessions between the old and new counselors to ensure continuity. Carolyn also found emotional refuge at the Mosaic Center after difficult therapy sessions.

3. Need for Culturally Responsive Counseling:

- Kiana, Bernice, and Carolyn: All felt disconnected from counselors who didn't understand their experiences with cultural and systemic marginalization. Kiana, a two-spirited Micronesian woman, emphasized the need for more diverse and culturally sensitive counselors. Bernice, who faced systemic barriers as a working parent, and Carolyn, a neurodivergent student, also called for counselors who better understand the unique challenges of marginalized students.

4. Lack of Support During Personal Hardships:

- Bernice: Shared how she faced suspension after losing her brother and struggling with personal issues, highlighting the lack of emotional support during life-altering events.

She emphasized the need for counseling services to provide more tailored support rather than enforcing penalties.

5. Diversity in Counseling:

- Kiana, Bernice, and Carolyn: All expressed the need for more racial and cultural representation in counseling services. They felt that the current counselors lacked understanding of their social, cultural, and economic challenges, reinforcing the call for greater diversity among the counseling staff.

6. Systemic Barriers and Marginalization:

- Bernice: Discussed how systemic racism and stereotypes affected her and her son, further illustrating the need for counselors trained to recognize and address these biases.

7. Support for Student Parents:

- Bernice: As a working parent, she emphasized the need for more resources and workshops designed for student parents, ensuring they have the necessary emotional and practical support to balance academics and family responsibilities.

The Mosaic Center plays a crucial role in providing emotional refuge and support for students, particularly those from marginalized communities. Carolyn recommended the creation of peer support groups, especially for neurodivergent students who may feel isolated. Naya suggested hosting multilingual clubs and storytelling events to help students express their cultural and linguistic identities, fostering a greater sense of belonging. Kiana emphasized the importance of identity-affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority students, advocating for events that allow marginalized students to share their experiences and build peer networks. Majedi proposed regular emotional check-ins and structured peer-mentorship programs, particularly for international students, to address feelings of loneliness and isolation.

To expand its role, the Mosaic Center could further develop peer support groups, organize multilingual and storytelling events, and host identity-affirming spaces for marginalized students. Additionally, offering peer mentorship programs, regular check-ins, and access to academic and financial resources would better support students. Featuring a diverse range of books on alternative approaches to therapy and healing would also enhance the center's impact, helping create a more inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

Representation in the Curriculum

Western-Centric Curriculum and the Need for Diverse Representation

Participants emphasized the importance of diversifying faculty and curriculum by hiring more faculty of color and incorporating non-Western narratives. The goal is not just representation but also the understanding, respect, and affirmation of the knowledge and spirit of other cultures.

- Naya: Disappointed by the superficial coverage of adoption in her psychology course, Naya noted the lack of depth in exploring the diverse experiences of adopted children across race, language, and culture. She also mentioned that multilingualism, central to her identity, is rarely discussed. In her ASL course, her struggles weren't understood until she explained that English wasn't her first language.
- Kiana: Called for greater racial and neurodivergent representation in the curriculum. She found the Western interpretations in her English class constraining and felt excluded by psychology courses focused only on dominant narratives of trauma. Additionally, her mathematics course failed to accommodate diverse problem-solving approaches, emphasizing the need for inclusivity in teaching methods.
- Majedi: As an international student, Majedi expressed disappointment that the curriculum was centered on Western and European traditions, leaving little room for global perspectives. He noted that many domestic students lacked knowledge about other countries, including his own, and called for a broader, more inclusive curriculum.
- Katrina: Frustrated by the lack of Indigenous representation in her theater courses, Katrina advocated for including modern works by Indigenous playwrights in the core curriculum. She appreciated receiving books by Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island playwrights from a professor but was disappointed that these works weren't part of the required readings. She also criticized how Native American works were reduced to technical discussions rather than their cultural significance.

The participants collectively highlighted the need to move beyond a Western-centric curriculum to one that embraces global, Indigenous, and neurodivergent perspectives. Whether it's the lack of depth in discussing adoption, multilingualism, non-Western problem-solving approaches, or

Indigenous cultural works, the current curriculum often fails to reflect the diversity of student experiences. To foster a truly inclusive environment, it is essential to integrate diverse narratives, global perspectives, and underrepresented voices in course materials and teaching practices. This would not only promote representation but also create a deeper understanding and appreciation for the richness of various cultures and identities within the academic space.

Teaching, Pedagogy, and Classroom Communication

Professor-Student Relations and Pedagogical Choices

1. Carolyn's Appreciation for Accommodating Professors:
 - Carolyn, a neurodivergent student, appreciated how her business professor, Ken Commers, noticed her discomfort and proactively provided accommodations. This proactive approach made her feel understood and supported without needing to ask for help.
2. Majedi's Call for Empathy and Support:
 - Majedi emphasized the importance of emotional support, recalling how simple encouragement like "You can do it" from professors made a big difference. He advocated for regular well-being check-ins, especially for international students, and noted how unresponsive professors made him feel overlooked, while interactive teaching environments helped him feel included.
3. Katrina's Experience with Tokenism:
 - Katrina, a non-binary student of color, felt conflicted about her theater experiences, often questioning whether her roles were assigned based on talent or diversity quotas. She wanted her contributions to be genuinely recognized beyond her identity.
4. Naya's Struggle with Multilingualism:
 - Naya struggled in her ASL class until she explained her multilingual background, which helped her receive appropriate support. Her experience highlights the importance of professors understanding students' linguistic backgrounds early on.
5. Kiana's Call for Flexibility:

- Kiana appreciated professors who were flexible with deadlines and assignments, recognizing the challenges of balancing school with financial and mental health issues. She advocated for hybrid classes and alternative assignments to accommodate students with diverse responsibilities.

Equitable Teaching Practices

1. Carolyn's Need for Clear Accommodations:
 - Carolyn experienced difficulty navigating decentralized disability services. She praised professors who took the initiative to offer accommodations and emphasized the need for clearer communication across the institution.
2. Kiana's Call for Diverse Teaching Methods:
 - Kiana advocated for teaching methods that embrace trial and error, as well as incorporating non-Western approaches to problem-solving and healing. She felt that these methods would better support neurodivergent students and those from diverse backgrounds.
3. Majedi's Recommendations for Culturally Responsive Teaching:
 - Majedi urged professors to check for understanding and create interactive, engaging classroom environments. He also recommended acknowledging multilingual perspectives in subjects like science and math to better support international students.

Classroom Communication

1. Naya's Desire for Better Resource Communication:
 - Naya, as a multilingual student, was unaware of the resources available to help her. She suggested better communication about resources like tutoring and recommended collaborative sessions or study buddy systems to build community among online students.
2. Carolyn's Call for Improved Service Communication:
 - Carolyn described poor communication across services, making it difficult for her to access support. She suggested better follow-up mechanisms, such as text reminders for appointments, and improved management of student services.

3. Zohra's Recommendation for Balanced Inclusivity:
 - Zohra suggested SFCC provide clearer communication about inclusivity, ensuring that issues related to race and ethnicity are represented equally with LGBTQ+ topics in orientation and other modules.

Students expressed the need for more inclusive professor-student interactions and pedagogical practices. Proactive accommodations, empathy, and understanding of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are key to fostering a supportive environment. Calls for culturally responsive teaching, better communication of resources, and increased flexibility in classroom practices highlight the importance of addressing the varied needs of students, especially those from marginalized groups. By improving communication and adopting inclusive teaching methods, SFCC can create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all.

Social Events and Community Engagement

1. Involving Student Clubs as Consultants:
 - Jane emphasized that student clubs, such as the Black Student Union, should act as consultants in planning campus events, especially those celebrating diversity like Black History Month. This would ensure events resonate with marginalized communities and foster a sense of ownership among students.
2. The Role of Student Club Advisors:
 - Several students highlighted the importance of accessible advisors in student clubs. Jane noted that advisors not only guide academic challenges but also provide personal support, helping students feel connected both academically and socially.
3. Fostering Relationships Between Domestic and International Students:
 - Majedi suggested initiatives like conversation partner programs to foster cultural exchanges between domestic and international students. He emphasized that understanding different cultural backgrounds would promote inclusivity and respect, bridging the gap between these groups.
4. Social Events to Enhance Student Connections:

- Jane pointed out that social events like a laser tag gathering helped her connect with her first friends at SFCC. She recommended more inclusive and interactive social events to help students from diverse backgrounds bond and reduce feelings of isolation.
5. Culturally Enriching Events for African-American History:
 - Zohra advocated for hosting events that celebrate African-American history, such as theater performances, to engage students in cultural expression and promote cross-cultural dialogue.
 6. Mentorship and Social Events for International Students:
 - Majedi emphasized the importance of social events to help international students feel included. He suggested mentorship programs and campus-wide gatherings to build emotional support and expand social networks.
 7. Online Learning and Social Interaction:
 - Naya recommended organizing online collaborative sessions and study buddy systems to help students, especially those feeling isolated in online learning environments, connect with their peers.
 8. Post-Event Networking Opportunities:
 - Jane shared how attending a social event helped her integrate into the SFCC community, highlighting the value of post-event networking. Majedi suggested extending the impact of events through mentorship programs and deeper discussions to foster meaningful connections between students.

SFCC can improve social events and community engagement by involving student clubs like the Black Student Union in planning culturally relevant events, ensuring inclusivity and representation. Accessible club advisors can further support students both academically and personally, fostering a sense of connection. Initiatives like conversation partner programs can strengthen relationships between domestic and international students, promoting cultural exchange. More interactive and inclusive social events, along with post-event networking opportunities, can help students build connections, reduce isolation, and establish mentorships. Organizing culturally enriching events will promote cross-cultural understanding and contribute to a stronger, more engaged campus community.