



NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE  
STUDENT EQUITY PROJECT  
*STUDENT FOCUS GROUPS*

**CCEAL**

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

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## ABOUT CCEAL

### Mission

The Mission of CCEAL is to partner with community colleges to close equity gaps and improve outcomes for students who have been historically underserved in education. CCEAL is a national research and practice lab whose purpose is to advance three objectives:

1. To use assessment and inquiry to facilitate institutional capacity-building within community colleges
2. To conduct and disseminate empirical research on the experiences of historically underrepresented and underserved students in community colleges
3. To provide professional learning experiences that build educators' capacities to employ equity-minded and culturally-affirming practices in teaching and serving students.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Community College Equity Assessment Lab (CCEAL) at San Diego State University was contracted by Napa Valley College to engage in a comprehensive assessment of the experiences of African American students. The assessment entailed conducting focus groups with students who represent a range of backgrounds and identities. This project is a part of Napa Valley College's efforts to redress persistent inequities and outcome disparities in student success that disproportionately affect historically underrepresented and underserved students.

CCEAL administered the Community College Success Measure (CCSM) at Napa Valley College during the Spring 2018 term. It is also important to note that a total of 957 students completed the survey. However, the number of African American students who completed the CCSM fell below the required threshold of 50 respondents for data disaggregation. Thus, these focus groups were conducted to gain in depth insight into the needs, challenges, and experiences of African American students.

This report details findings that emerged from the qualitative assessment of the experiences of African American students at Napa Valley College. Three overarching questions guided the qualitative inquiry with students:

1. What are the lived experiences of African American students at Napa Valley College?
2. What are salient challenges that African American students experience at Napa Valley College?
3. What factors (e.g., people, programs, campus services, resources) situated within the campus context enable African American students to persist at Napa Valley College despite the challenges they face?
4. What are some intentional and equity-minded strategies that can be enacted by educators to improve outcomes and the quality of experiences of African American students at Napa Valley College?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework guiding this study is the socio-ecological outcomes (SEO) model (Harris III & Wood, 2016). As illustrated in Figure 1, the SEO model is comprised of seven constructs that account for key factors that contribute to the success of students of color (e.g., Black, Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian) and other underserved students in community colleges.

The first two constructs are described as inputs, consisting of background defining and societal factors that account for the experiences of students of color prior to entering the community college. Background defining and societal factors shape students of color's dispositions as learners and their expectations as they matriculate into community college. Defined as the socio-ecological domains, the noncognitive, academic, environmental, campus ethos, and structural domains illustrate the various factors that contribute to students of color's success and shape their salient experiences on campus. Moreover, according to the SEO model, student success in community college is broadly described as persistence,

achievement, degree attainment, transferring, goal accomplishments, and preparation for the labor market.

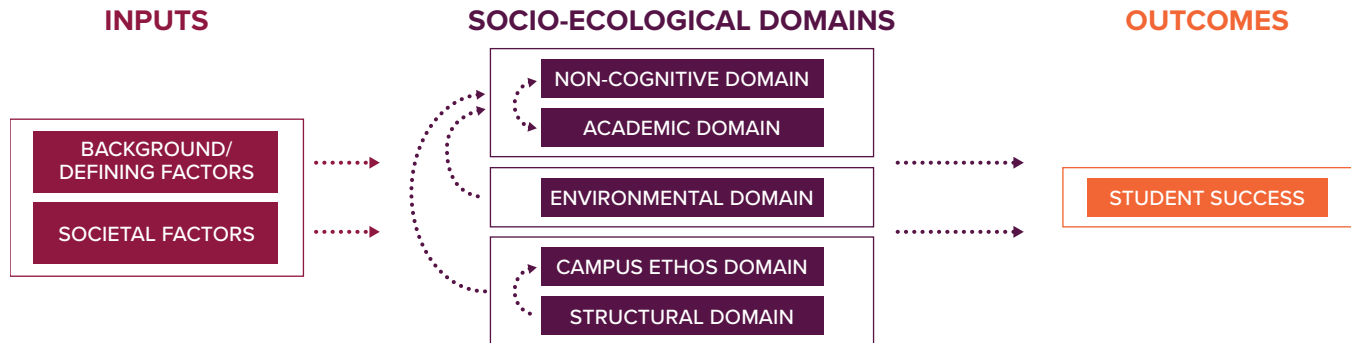
In addition to the aforementioned conceptual model, the research design for this project was also informed by several key equity-related initiatives that have been recently enacted in California and will have a substantial influence on the ways in which colleges address issues of disproportionate impact. Specifically, we constructed the focus group questions based on the goals of the California Community Colleges Guided Pathways project, AB 705

(Student Success Act of 2012), AB 19 (California College Promise), the Student Equity and Achievement Program (SEA), and the Chancellor’s Vision for Success.

Finally, our work is informed by Estela Bensimon’s notion of institutional responsibility for student success (Bensimon & Harris III, 2012). We contend that educators and institutions are ultimately responsible for identifying and eradicating outcome disparities and disproportionate impact. Institutional efforts to facilitate success among disproportionately impacted students

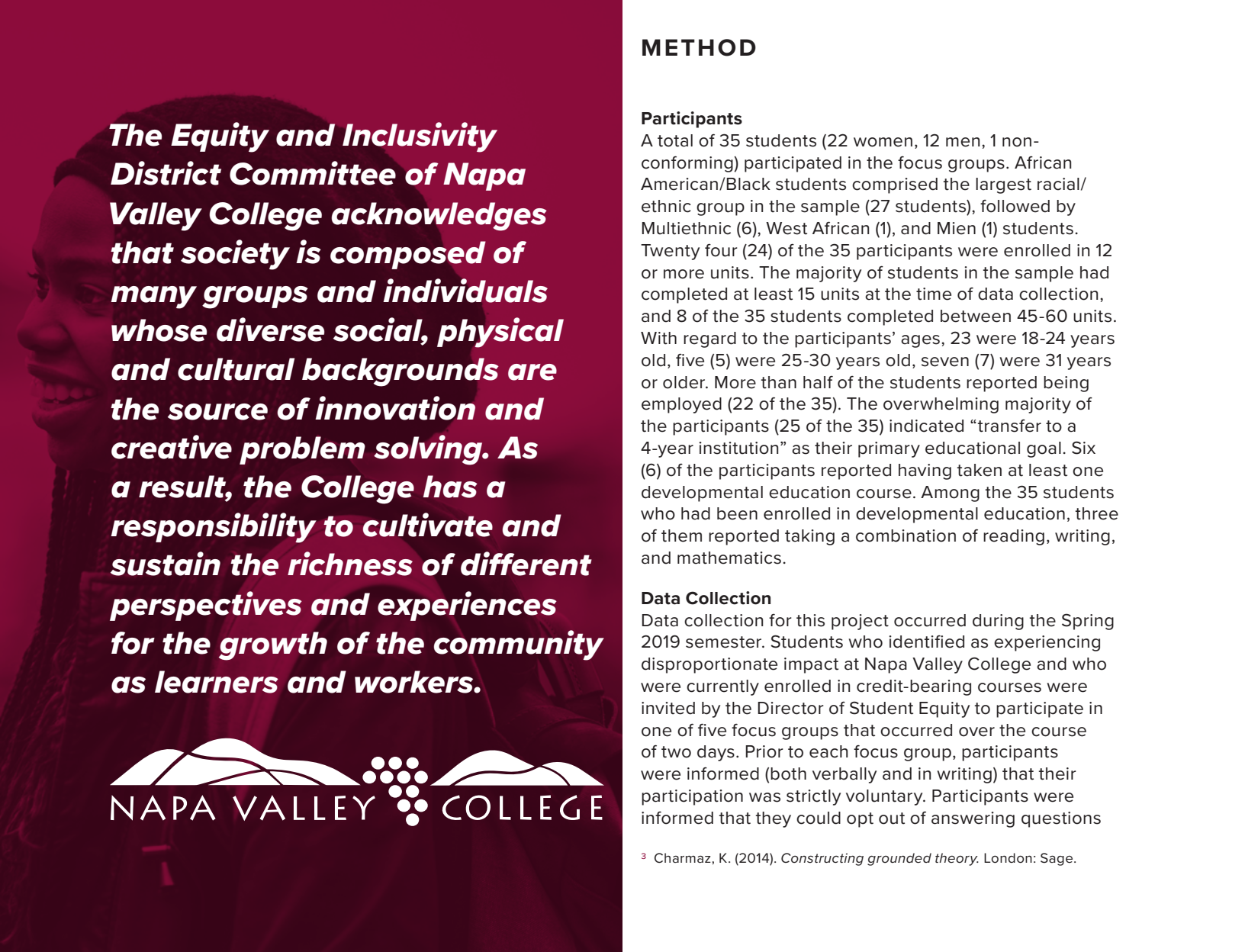
must be prioritized above and beyond perceived student deficits (e.g., academic preparation, external commitments, poverty). Stated simply, these efforts must be informed by the questions: “What are we doing (or not doing) as an institution that is creating and sustaining outcome disparities?” and “How can we change our policies, programs, and practices in ways that can best meet the needs of our disproportionately impacted students?” It is from this standpoint where equity-minded institutional practices emerge.

**Figure 1. Socio-ecological outcomes (SEO) model.**



<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the SEO model, see: Harris III, F., & Wood, J. L. (2016). Applying the socio-ecological outcomes model to the student experiences of men of color. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2016(174), 35-46. doi:10.1002/cc.20201

<sup>2</sup> Bensimon, E.M., & Harris III, F. (2012). The mediational means of enacting equity-mindedness among community college practitioners. In E.M. Bensimon & L.E. Malcom (Eds.), *Confronting Equity Issues on Campus: Implementing the Equity Scorecard in Theory and in Practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.



***The Equity and Inclusivity District Committee of Napa Valley College acknowledges that society is composed of many groups and individuals whose diverse social, physical and cultural backgrounds are the source of innovation and creative problem solving. As a result, the College has a responsibility to cultivate and sustain the richness of different perspectives and experiences for the growth of the community as learners and workers.***



## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 35 students (22 women, 12 men, 1 non-conforming) participated in the focus groups. African American/Black students comprised the largest racial/ethnic group in the sample (27 students), followed by Multiethnic (6), West African (1), and Mien (1) students. Twenty four (24) of the 35 participants were enrolled in 12 or more units. The majority of students in the sample had completed at least 15 units at the time of data collection, and 8 of the 35 students completed between 45-60 units. With regard to the participants' ages, 23 were 18-24 years old, five (5) were 25-30 years old, seven (7) were 31 years or older. More than half of the students reported being employed (22 of the 35). The overwhelming majority of the participants (25 of the 35) indicated "transfer to a 4-year institution" as their primary educational goal. Six (6) of the participants reported having taken at least one developmental education course. Among the 35 students who had been enrolled in developmental education, three of them reported taking a combination of reading, writing, and mathematics.

### Data Collection

Data collection for this project occurred during the Spring 2019 semester. Students who identified as experiencing disproportionate impact at Napa Valley College and who were currently enrolled in credit-bearing courses were invited by the Director of Student Equity to participate in one of five focus groups that occurred over the course of two days. Prior to each focus group, participants were informed (both verbally and in writing) that their participation was strictly voluntary. Participants were informed that they could opt out of answering questions

<sup>3</sup> Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: Sage.

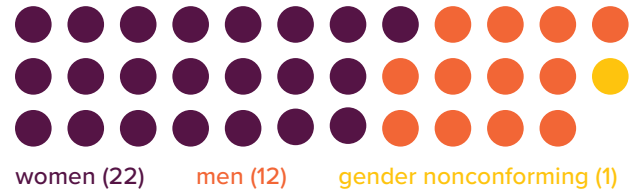
they did not feel comfortable answering and could discontinue their involvement in the project at any time without consequences. None of the participants who began the project discontinued their participation.

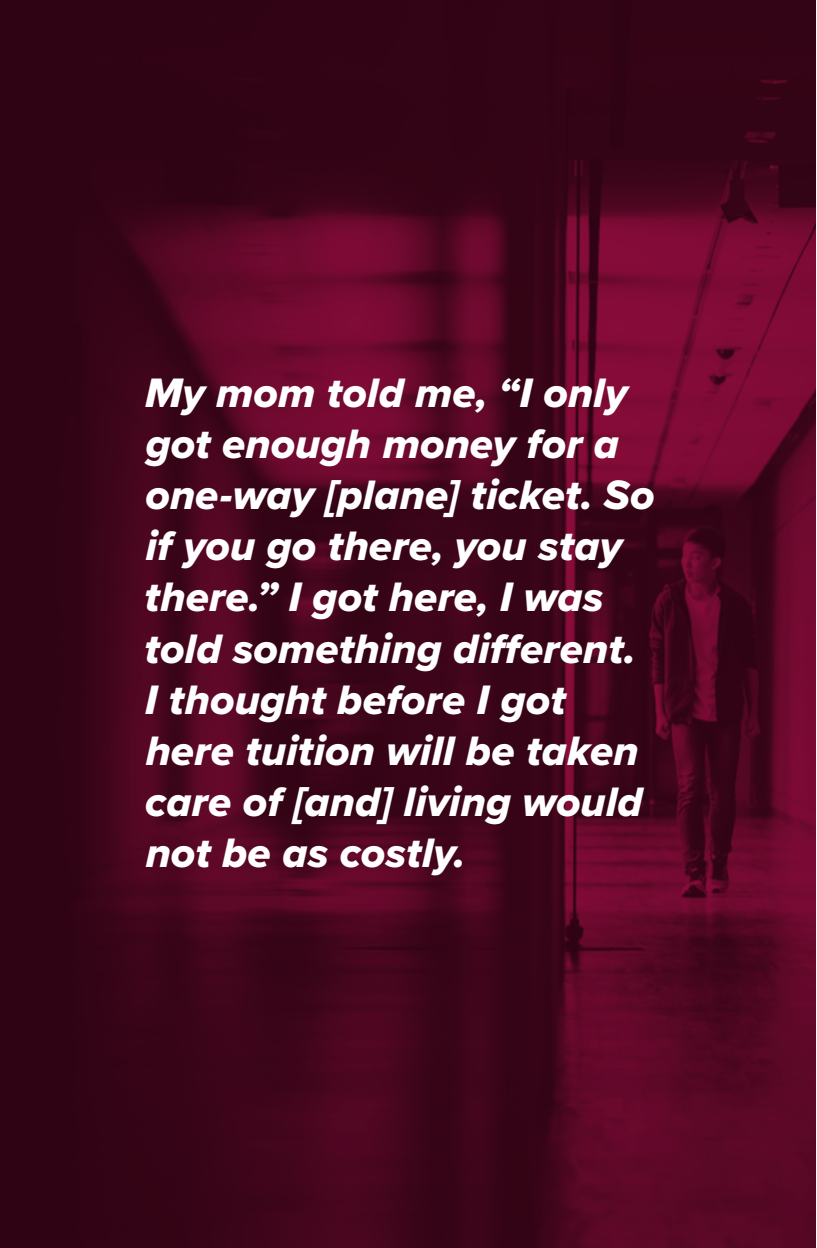
All of the participants agreed to have their conversations audio-recorded and were assured that the insights they provided would be treated confidentially by our project team. All of the audio recordings were transcribed for data analysis. Immediately following each focus group, the facilitators co-constructed research memos to capture the salient aspects and interpersonal dynamics of the conversations that took place. We relied on both the transcripts and research memos to construct this report.

As incentives for participating in the focus groups, the Office of Equity provided each student a \$20 gift card redeemable at the campus bookstore. In addition, participants were offered meals and snacks before, during, and after the focus groups.

### Data Analysis

The audio recording for each focus group was transcribed for data analysis. Each transcript was uploaded into Dedoose—a qualitative data analysis software program that enables multiple researchers to work collaboratively on analyzing a data set. Data were coded deductively in three phases (initial, focused, and axial) as prescribed by Charmaz (2014). Although we took a deductive approach to analyzing the data, we paid close attention to concepts and insights that emerged inductively as well.



A student is walking away from the camera down a hallway. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The student is wearing a dark jacket and dark pants. The hallway has a tiled floor and a drop ceiling with recessed lights.

***My mom told me, “I only got enough money for a one-way [plane] ticket. So if you go there, you stay there.” I got here, I was told something different. I thought before I got here tuition will be taken care of [and] living would not be as costly.***

## FINDINGS

The following themes emerged as salient across the 5 focus groups.

Pathways and Experiences That Led Students to Community College  
**“Why I Chose Napa Valley College”**

Relationships and Interactions with Faculty  
**“Some Won’t Even Acknowledge You”**

Key Sources of Campus Support  
**“It Feels Like Family”**

Culturally-Affirming Teaching and Learning Practices  
**“I’m Really Rooting for You”**

The Student-Athlete Experience  
**“There’s Six of Us in a Two-Bedroom Apartment”**

In this section of the report, we discuss each thematic category and support each theme with representative quotes and reflections from the participants. Following the discussion of overarching findings, we propose recommendations and advice for how Napa Valley College faculty, staff, and campus leaders can employ equity-minded practices to close equity gaps and facilitate success for African American students.



Pathways and Experiences That Led  
Students to Community College  
“Why I Chose Napa Valley College”

As is often the case with community college students, the focus group participants were compelled to enroll at Napa Valley College by a range of both personal and institutional factors. Having somewhat easy access to the campus was one of the most widely cited reasons that emerged during these discussions, as was the comprehensive academic programs and services that are available at the college. With regard to the latter, one student talked about how having access to reliable childcare at the College was a motivating factor during her decision-making process:

*What got me here was basically the childcare. I graduated high school in 2011 and then I went straight to [a CSU campus] and I stayed there for two years and then I got pregnant and the commute was not going to be ideal for me. The traffic was horrendous. So I signed up for [classes at] Solano College but that didn't work out. So I had to dropout mid semester and then somebody informed me like, well you should try Napa. So I called up there and they're like, "oh yeah, our childcare is enrolling right now actually we have space." So that's what got me started here really.*

Interestingly, a critical mass of the participants noted that they considered Solano College when deciding to enroll in community college. Some had gone so far as to take classes there. Yet, without prompting, they shared that they chose Napa Valley because it “had a better reputation,” “was a better environment,” or “it had more to offer,” than

Solano College. The reflection below that was offered by one of the participants is representative of what most had to say with regard to this phenomenon:

*I think for me moving up here it was which [college] is going to offer me what I want. So like what is best? Which one is best? I feel like Napa has better programs and I feel like there's more access here. So certain things versus if you go to Solano you probably still have the access but the environment is different.*

In discussing the paths that led them to Napa Valley College, the participants also talked about having some knowledge and insight about the College because they had partners, children, and other family members who had attended and were successful. Others shared being familiar with the campus because they worked in the local community and saw the campus during their daily commute to and from work. For instance, one of the students shared: “I used to pass by here taking my daughter to work and I was ready to return to school . . . one day. I was like, ‘I think I'm [going to] go there.’” Above all, it is important to note that all of the participants were enrolled at the college with the hope and expectation of improving their lives, careers, and family situations.

## FINDINGS

### Relationships and Interactions with Faculty “Some Won't Even Acknowledge You”

The participants' relationships and interactions with faculty members also emerged from the focus groups as a salient theme. In general, these encounters were overwhelmingly negative and riddled with racial microaggressions and stereotypes of African Americans. Consequently, the participants did not feel welcomed and lacked a sense of belonging at the College. Among the most notable challenges students reported experiencing when they reached out to professors for academic support were being reprimanded for not knowing or remembering content they should have learned in high school. This perspective seemed to be most prominent amongst faculty who taught math and science courses, as noted in the quote below shared by a participant studying nursing:

*And so I had huge problems with science teachers here. I took chem 110 and most of the students had an issue with him because he was intelligent, but he just didn't know how to teach. I was the one [student] that was approaching him and I was doing it in a respectful manner. I try to set a meeting with him. He would never email me back. I got to the point where I had to talk to him before class started and he said, “well, you should've learned this in high school. You shouldn't even be in my class.”*

Perhaps even more egregious than the issue noted above were the students' experiences with racial microaggressions from faculty. Several participants shared instances in which the professor openly used the “N-Word” while disclaiming that it was necessary to do so within the context of what they were teaching. For example:

*The professor gave a disclaimer, “hey, the N-Word is going to be [used] in this [class]. Does anybody feel uncomfortable with that?” I raised my hand like, “I'm sorry, I'm the only African American person in here. Like I don't know, these people, I don't know if they have ill will towards African American people. Not to say that they would harm me, but by giving them that power to say it wasn't okay with me.”*

Similarly, another participant shared:

*There was a character [in a book], the character's name was N\*\*\*\*r Jim and she [the professor] kept saying it. And I was like, “Are you kidding me?” That wasn't even like an educational moment. [It] wasn't subtle at all’*

Moreover, several of the women in the focus groups shared instances of faculty members making culturally insensitive remarks about their hair and bodies.

Another recurrent issue during the participants' discussions of interactions with faculty was feeling invisible or not being acknowledged by faculty during class. "Some [faculty] won't even look at you when you're in their class. They won't even acknowledge you," noted one of the students. Others talked about regularly being "shut down" or interrupted during class discussions while other students were allowed to speak as long as they'd like as another example of feeling invisible or unwanted. Many of the participants were often one of the few (if not the only) African American students in most of their classes. This alone made the classroom context a challenging space for them. Thus, being microaggressed, especially publicly, made their experiences in the classroom unbearable at times.

Finally, it is important to note that the participants also shared interactions with faculty that were positive and affirming, which helped to counteract some of the negative experiences they had with other faculty members. The students appreciated faculty who were "helpful," "caring," and "passionate" about their subject matter. A humanities faculty member who was identified by the participants as an African American woman came up often during these discussions. As evident in the quote below, the participants also valued the few opportunities they had to take classes from an African American professor:

*Last semester I had two Black professors. Those were my two favorite classes, not only just because of the material but because of the professors and so there is like a welcoming, inviting space for them and they were kinda, you know, looking to connect with the students and past just the curriculum. So I felt comfortable with that. And then I have a biology teacher, she's a young teacher and I connect with her too. I go to her after class or whatever, you know, she gives me tips on studying and getting through and all that.*

Faculty members who were able to make the content of their courses culturally relevant the participants also acknowledged and appreciated. This issue will be discussed later in this report.

## FINDINGS

### Key Sources of Campus Support “It Feels Like Family”

Through the focus group we learned that most of the support services students relied on regularly were provided by UMOJA, EOPS, TRIO Program, and financial aid. Interestingly, when asked about other campus supports (i.e. math lab, tutoring center and writing center), the students conveyed that they did not utilize these services on a regular basis. Similarly, students shared that there was a lack of access to information and expressed having a hard time learning about resources that were available to them. When we asked about the food basket, they reported that it was a good resource but it was not readily accessible and that oftentimes the hours conflicted with class times.

Several participants mentioned that they felt supported by staff in the UMOJA and EOPS programs because of the ways in which they were able to establish an actual relationship with staff in these programs. One student said that UMOJA “feels like a family.” Continuing to express the importance of connectedness, she explained, “You get to know lots of new people” through the program.

Other students shared that the UMOJA environment was an inviting place where they felt welcomed--more so than they did in other parts of the campus. One student said: “Everybody I met over at UMOJA is just genuine. They really want to see you win and that’s why I feel like it keeps us in that positive, uplifting environment.” Other ways that UMOJA staff really got to know students were by being

proactive about connecting with them, often sharing personal contact information and acting more like a family member than a professional connection. One student explained how a UMOJA staff member went out of her way to connect with her:

*She tries to establish some sort of relationship with students. That’s helpful because I’m not really going to open up to somebody I don’t know, or somebody who isn’t welcoming. When I first met her she reminded me of my auntie who I can come talk to and that’s why I kept going to her. I was able to talk to her about my personal stuff and what I was going through.*

The idea of a real relationship, or “family” as many students’ referenced, was a common theme surrounding campus support and what worked for students. They felt most supported through personal relationships where they were seen as a whole person and not having their academic lives segmented from their personal and emotional lives. Another common theme that ties into faculty and staff establishing relationships with students was the time and availability of campus support personnel. One student explained the value of time, saying “[Counselor] in EOPS is just amazing. I love her so much. I’ll be in her office forever. My appointment is only supposed to be 30 minutes and it never is.”

Another student echoed a similar sentiment, reporting that they sought out specific campus counselors because they would be willing to take extra time to really understand their issues:

*She would always meet with me because I would say, “no, I only want to see her. I don’t want to see anybody else because she takes her time.” She spends time with you to go over your Ed plan.*

Aside from developing meaningful relationships with staff over time and with consistency, students also mentioned the value that they felt in sharing similar backgrounds with faculty and staff. Students in the focus group explained that the similarities they shared with support personnel helped them feel connected and more willing to seek help. One student shared: “That’s how I got connected...she told me she was from the city in a similar neighborhood to the one I grew up in.” Another student expressed her feelings about a faculty member with whom she established rapport because they both identified as biracial:

*It helped me even more because she also comes from a mixed background and we’re both mixed with African American and something else so I identified to her a lot because she understood the majority of the problems that I had.*

While campus support plays a major role in the success of students through relationships, time spending and having a shared background, we found that there were other, culturally-affirming, strategies that faculty employed in the classroom that also contributed to student success.

***Last semester I had two Black professors. Those were my two favorite classes, not only just because of the material but because of the professors and so there is like a welcoming, inviting space for them and they were kinda, you know, looking to connect with the students and past just the curriculum. So I felt comfortable with that. And then I have a biology teacher, she’s a young teacher and I connect with her too. I go to her after class or whatever, you know, she gives me tips on studying and getting through and all that.***

## FINDINGS

### Culturally-Affirming Teaching and Learning Practices “I’m Really Rooting for You”

Another theme that we inquired about were teaching and learning practices utilized by classroom faculty that students felt added value and contributed to their success. Several teaching practices that were aligned with the concepts of equity-mindedness and institutional responsibility emerged during these discussions. Some of these include ideas about authentic care, infusing diversity and inclusion in the classroom, and the passion and enthusiasm instructor’s demonstrated for the content they were teaching.

One recurrent practice with regard to authentic care was the importance of faculty establishing personal connections with students that extended beyond the actual content of the course. In this respect students appreciated when faculty were intentional in creating a “welcoming and inviting space” where they could “get to know each other” and establish connections with both students and faculty beyond the content of the course. It was not always necessary for students to share the same background or race/ethnicity with the instructor, but students often mentioned this characteristic as a way of identifying with their instructors and establishing a personal connection.

A multiracial student shared that one of her professors was also multiracial and, as a result, understood the challenges and lived experiences of being multiracial. She explained: *“[The professor] just understands. She knows us. She knows how it is. You don’t have to explain anything. There was no stereotyping at all. It was get in there and be us.”*

A second form of authentic care that students appreciated was when professors conveyed messages of validation and support, for example: personal notes, comments and feedback on assignments that conveyed care, saying things like “I’m rooting for you” and sending emails or text messages that expressed to students that they were growing and maturing as learners. One student shared: *“I had some great professors [that have] been motivating, willing to write me letters, [sharing] the progress [I was] making.”*

The participants noted that some professors were very proactive and, at times, intrusive, in providing support. For instance, one of the participants explained that the support from her professors went well beyond the classroom saying “they would actually call me to see if I was okay and not from a school phone. I have their cell phone number; they will call and make sure I’m okay.” Another student shared that they were struggling in their class with some unforeseen medical issues and had a similarly positive experience when they went to meet with the professor.

*She already went and took the initiative to talk to a counselor and let them know what was going on with me and basically got me a medical withdrawal from her class so that it’ll just erase the whole class off my record. No “W,” no nothing on my transcript. She did this on her own and then came to me.*

Finally with regard to authentic care, students conveyed the importance of faculty being available to meet with them one-on-one during office hours to explain difficult content. As one student noted,

“I always make use of office hours because I think it helps me understand [the content] more because I’m a slow learner.” Along the same lines, participants noted that receiving timely responses to email requests for assistance was essential to their learning and success in a course. This is especially true for online courses or for courses like math and other subjects that had challenging content. One student explained *“[Instructors] really open up more when you go to office hours, instead of in front of the whole class, they focused on you.”*

Another student commented on the availability of an instructor outside of official office hours saying:

*If I’m doing homework online where I can email her and ask her questions, she responds. You can basically talk to her and if you need a time that she doesn’t have an office hour, she’ll make time for you to see her.*

While having faculty members making themselves accessible is a critical source of support for students, perhaps what is more important is that faculty are approachable, validating, and positive in their interactions with students.

Aside from demonstrating authentic care in the ways noted above, students also explained that they felt their learning was improved when their faculty members intentionally created a class ethos that prioritized equity, diversity, and

inclusion. Providing opportunities for students to engage social issues (e.g., institutional racism) within the context of the course, applying real life examples in teaching key course concepts, and bringing culture into the classroom were salient examples that emerged during the focus groups. Regarding the latter, one student noted: “I see that our teachers are trying to make it diverse like their slideshows or their visual aids like that they’re using. They are trying to be a bit more inclusive.” Another participant shared an instance in which an interpersonal communication instructor engaged the class in a discussion about Colin Kaepernick. Finally, one of the students discussed a cultural activity, “cultural cuisines,” an instructor utilized that he appreciated because it created a sense of community in the classroom:

*[Cultural cuisines are] when everybody in class has to bring something from their culture and talk about it. That’s a complete icebreaker for people to get to know somebody that doesn’t share the same cultural background as themselves... She makes it a point and it’s not uncomfortable either, it’s very warm and welcoming it makes her class more engaging and interactive.*

Finally, with regard to effective teaching and learning practices, the participants shared that it was important for faculty to convey passion and enthusiasm in their teaching. When faculty were excited to teach, students felt they were more engaged and excited to learn. For example, one participant noted: “It’s a more refreshing environment because [if] the teachers want to teach and they’re engaged and they’re happy to be here, and I feel like that alone is like a big part of [my success].”

## FINDINGS

### The Student-Athlete Experience “There's Six of Us in a Two-Bedroom Apartment”

As a part of our efforts to examine the experiences of African American students at Napa Valley College, one of the focus groups we conducted was reserved exclusively for African American student-athletes. Five African American men who were student-athletes at Napa Valley College participated in this group. The student-athletes' experiences were shaped by three core issues that were salient during our discussion: 1) unmet promises, 2) housing and transportation challenges, and 3) institutional support.

Our initial discussion with the student-athletes centered on how and why they chose to study and compete in their sport at Napa Valley College. Almost immediately, it was evident that these students had been promised resources and opportunities by coaches to lure them to Napa Valley, notably, on-campus housing and financial aid (including scholarships). However, much to the student-athletes' dismay, these resources and opportunities never materialized. Below are some of the reflections the student-athletes shared during the focus group that related the financial support they were promised and never received:

*Me and [another student-athlete], wrote a letter to the school saying we don't have the financial funds to cover our fees and everything and they waived like \$3,000 off the top. But we still had to take out \$5,500 loan. And because of us being out-of-state [students], they said the loan is not going to cover all of the fees.*

*My mom told me, “I only got enough money for a one-way [plane] ticket. So if you go there, you stay there.” I got here, I was told something different. I thought before I got here tuition will be taken care of [and] living would not be as costly.*

*So, my parents got a high income, so of course I didn't want to come because I knew I wasn't going to get financial aid and even when I checked with the school they were telling me “no” [financial aid] and stuff like that. But then the coach was saying, “nah nah, just do it. Don't worry about the FAFSA or the financial aid. Trust me, we do this all of the time”.*

Challenges with housing and transportation was another issue that negatively impacted student-athletes experiences at Napa Valley College. As was the case with financial support, the student-athletes expected help with meeting their housing and transportation needs. But they never received it.

*[Coach] was presenting it to me like we will live in Napa and then it was also like oh, they're planning [to offer] on campus housing or something like that. I haven't heard any plans about that since August so I don't even know what that's about. And [now] we're rooming with like four people.*

*Like we're really like six of us in a two bedroom apartment and we took over from some other teammates that was leaving last year. We all ride with [student-athlete] to school and at one point it was all 6 of us in his car, and it's an hour long traffic to get [here].*



*[Coaches] are trying to add another player to the apartment. But I don't really want to take them. I'm not trying to be driving six people in the car again. You know, we're driving in Napa, we got six Black people in one car. That's a red flag.*

Finally, we asked the student-athletes to discuss key sources of campus support that were critical to their personal well-being and academic success at Napa Valley. This conversation focused almost exclusively on the support they received from the Umoja Program, specifically the counselor who is assigned to work with Umoja students. The student-athletes shared that this was their go-to person for any type of support they needed be it, academic, personal, or financial. Interestingly, they juxtaposed this support with the woefully underwhelming support they received from the athletic program. For example, one student-athlete had this to say regarding his preference for going to the Umoja program for assistance in figuring out his class schedule:

*[UMOJA Counselor] will put you in classes where you can graduate. I wouldn't go to my coaches to get out of here. Coach would just throw you in classes so you can be eligible for the season.*

Similarly, in distinguishing the support he received from the counselor that was assigned to work with student-athletes from the support he received from the UMOJA counselor, one student-athlete remarked,

*"The counselor that I had was the athletic counselor and honestly, he wasn't really any help. He was barely there. I would try to come talk to him and I would find out that he wasn't in that day."*

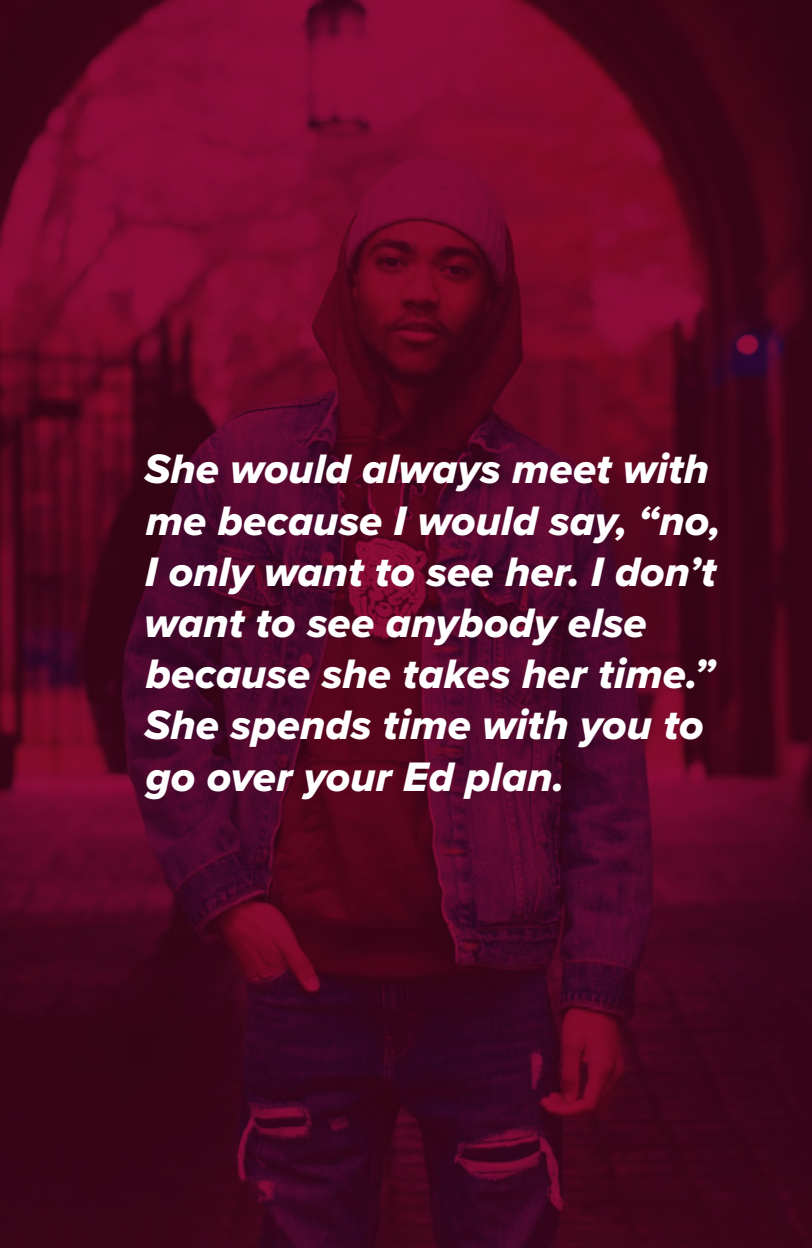
Again, the quality of students-athletes' counseling experience seemed to hinge on having easy access to a counselor who took the time that was necessary to address pressing concerns. This perspective was widely shared by the student-athletes--all of whom credited the UMOJA counselor for providing the support that they needed. What they seemed to appreciate most about this particular counselor was that, unlike others, she both understood and appreciated their lived experiences as student-athletes. One of the participants shared:

*"She knows the athletic program. She's seen it all. She knows how we live. She helps out all the athletes."*

Another had this to say about the UMOJA Counselor:

*She really cares about you. If she thinks you need an hour or two hours with her, you can take the whole two hours out of her day. It doesn't matter who you are. I'd rather have somebody that cares.*

Beyond the support they received from the UMOJA program, the student-athletes praised the Vice President for Student Services for helping them resolve the financial challenges they experienced. They also appreciated the support they received from the Dean of Counseling and Student Success with regard to providing important information about transferring to a four-year institution. Lastly, they shared that their relationships with faculty members were positive overall and that they did not feel stigmatized and stereotyped based on their identities as student-athletes. However, they noted that it was important for them to be proactive at the beginning of the semester and reach out to faculty during office hours to "prove that [they] are not just athletes but are 'serious' students.



***She would always meet with me because I would say, “no, I only want to see her. I don’t want to see anybody else because she takes her time.” She spends time with you to go over your Ed plan.***

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings reported herein, we offer the following recommendations to inform the efforts of educators to improve African American students’ experiences at Napa Valley College:

### 1. Provide Cultural Competency Professional Development for All Faculty

In describing their experiences with Napa Valley College faculty, the participants distinguished those who were culturally competent from those who were not. Culturally competent faculty affirmed students’ identities (e.g., racial/ethnic, gender), intentionally provided space in the course curriculum for students to explore their identities, and were skilled at creating a safe and inclusive classroom ethos. Unfortunately, being enrolled in a class that is taught by a culturally competent professor was more the exception than the norm for these students. Ongoing professional development on racial microaggressions, implicit bias, and racial battle fatigue is necessary for all faculty. Moreover, the college should identify ways to support all faculty in becoming culturally competent and in creating a culturally relevant learning experience for their students. Providing the professors who were identified by the focus group participants with course release time to support the college in this effort may be a good starting point. Counseling and adjunct faculty must also be included in this effort and invited to participate.

## 2. Scale Programs That Serve Disproportionately Impacted Students

Clearly evident in the focus groups was the critical role that programs like UMOJA, EOPS, TRIO, and others that served disproportionately impacted students played in making the campus accessible, welcoming, and inclusive for students, which has a direct impact on their persistence and success at Napa Valley. Moreover, these programs are providing critical support and student services that are not as accessible to students outside of the context of these programs. The college should consider infusing resources into these programs so they can be scaled and serve more students who meet the criteria to participate. In doing so, campus leaders must be mindful to not compromise the core values, impact, and integrity of these programs.

## 3. Use Equity-Minded Hiring Practices

The lack of representation of African Americans among Napa Valley College's faculty and staff is a salient concern for the students who participated in the focus groups. Students expressed the need to have more faculty who "looked like them" and to whom they could potentially relate to culturally. Equally important is to hire faculty and staff who are equity-minded. Thus, the campus should

review its practices for recruiting, screening, hiring, and retaining faculty and staff to ensure they are aligned with equity-minded hiring practices. To the extent possible, candidates who can best position the college to achieve its equity goals and eliminate equity gaps should be brought on board. Moreover, having good practices in place to onboard and retain new faculty and staff are critical, especially African American faculty and staff of color who often feel marginalized in predominantly White departments.

## 4. Develop Effective Communication Strategies to Raise Students' Awareness of Campus Resources

The participants acknowledged and appreciated the multitude of resources and supports that were available to all Napa Valley College students. That said, they also declared that although resources and supports were plentiful, timely awareness of and access to these resources were challenges. Thus, campus leaders should assess the communication strategies that are used across the campus to advertise programs and services to students. Because there tends to be wide variation in how students access information (e.g., email, social media, text messages), using multiple channels of communication is essential to ensure students have equitable access to this information. Finally, it is important to not overlook traditional information sharing strategies like flyers and in-class announcements.

## 5. Inquire About the Experiences of Student-Athletes at Napa Valley College

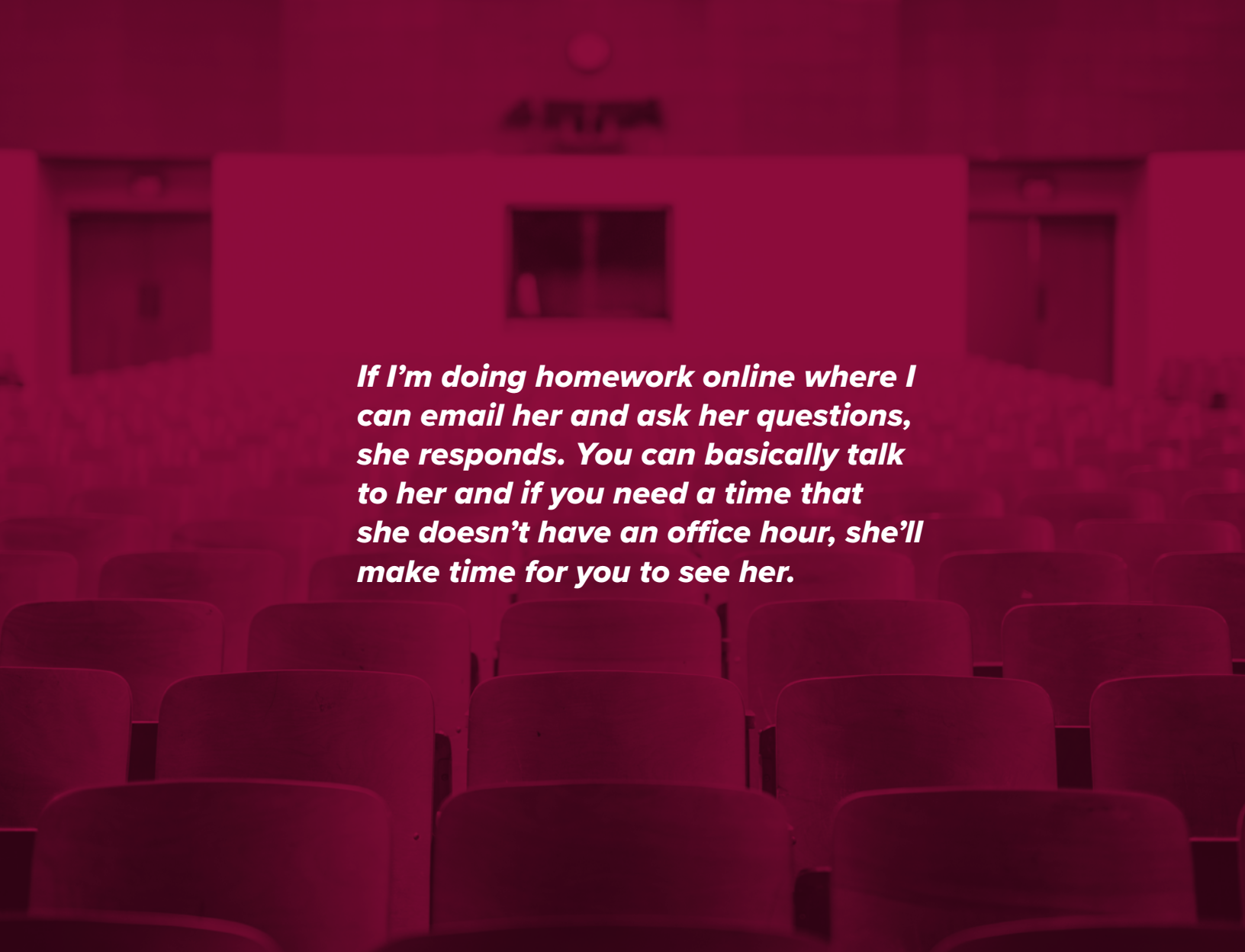
One of the most concerning findings from the focus groups was the experiences of the African American student-athletes. The experiences of the five student-athletes who participated in the focus groups may or may not be representative of the larger African American student-athlete population. Thus, some additional inquiry is warranted. Gaining insights from African American student-athletes who compete in sports other than the one that was represented in this project would be value-added in this regard. That said, the concerns they raised regarding unmet promises for financial and housing support that were made by coaches are disconcerting and suggest that some ongoing intervention in the athletics department is necessary. Student-athletes who reside out-of-the state who want to enroll at Napa Valley College should be required to meet with the Vice President of Student Affairs and/or a designated dean before they are allowed to enroll. The goal of these meetings is to confirm that the student-athlete has the support they will need to have their basic needs met while enrolled at the college. These students should also be informed of what (if any) institutional support is available to them. These conversations should not be left to the discretion of coaches or the athletics department.

## 6. Address Invisible Labor for Women of Color

We observed that many of the faculty and staff who were going above and beyond to support these students were women of color. According to the students, these faculty and staff were supporting them in dealing with acute issues that extended beyond what they were required to do according to their job descriptions. On occasion, these women made themselves available to students outside of their “normal” work hours. This “invisible labor” can have a deleterious effect on their health, well-being, and work performance, which can lead to chronic fatigue, burnout, and a diminished career trajectory. Thus, we suggest that the institution take some proactive steps to support colleagues who consistently enact extraordinary measures to ensure African American students are successful.

## 7. Devise a Strategy to Act on the Findings and Recommendations of This Report

This project was informed by the College’s CCSM findings. The college should come up with a systematic plan, work group, committee, or task force to review both reports and devise a strategy to make the findings and recommendations actionable. In doing so, the campus should prioritize findings and recommendations that are aligned with its Student Equity Plan and its Guided Pathways Action Plan. Finally, the Planning and Research Office should be involved in developing a plan to evaluate and monitor the strategies that are enacted based on the recommendations provided in this report.



***If I'm doing homework online where I can email her and ask her questions, she responds. You can basically talk to her and if you need a time that she doesn't have an office hour, she'll make time for you to see her.***



THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EQUITY ASSESSMENT LAB

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***"Napa Valley College prepares students for evolving roles in a diverse, dynamic, and interdependent world. The college is an accredited open-access, degree- and certificate-granting institution that is committed to student achievement through high-quality programs and services that are continuously evaluated and improved. The college serves students and the community in the following areas: transfer courses, career-technical education and training, basic skills, and self-supporting contract education and community education classes. Napa Valley College is a community of people excited about learning, where students are first and foremost in everything we do."***

Napa Valley College Mission & Values