USC Race and
Equity Center

HOW CAN LEADERS FOSTER A CAMPUS ETHOS TOWARDS INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR SYSTEMS-IMPACTED STUDENTS?

San T. Lu

Supporting Justice-System Impacted Students

February 2023

BIOGRAPHY

San T. Lu (he/him/anh/em)

Scholar Practional

"San T. Lu is a scholar-practitioner who was born in Saigon, Vietnam and raised in Napa, California. As a first-generation refugee, San received a bachelor's degree in business administration from University of San Francisco and master's in gerontology from San Francisco State University. He currently is the alternate media specialist at Napa Valley College's (NVC) Disability Support Programs & Services and is a doctoral candidate in educational leadership with a focus transformative leadership, social justice, and equity. San's research interests focus on systems-impacted students, community responsive pedagogy, critical leadership praxis, disability, and community college education. His dissertation centers leaders' voices and experiences while engaging through the institutional support program that serves systems-impacted students. San is rooted in ethnic studies with a lens that integrates a disability justice and critical leadership approach towards his "heart work".

San is inspired by his amazing wife to live an authentic life with two wonderful children, a caregiver for his parents, responsive to his community, and advocate for marginalized students. In his free time, he enjoys traveling, playing basketball, eating various foods, and spending time with his family.

The heart of the work: A practitioner's path towards a promising practice

I enter as a guest in the space of systems-impacted students through my work with the Disability Support Programs and Services (DSPS) within a community college environment. Three years ago I met a student during their assistive technology training session with a smartpen and Kurzweil that requested additional support with technology because of being impacted by the criminal justice system. I use the term *systems-impacted* to refer to folx who have direct experiences with the justice system or are affected by the carceral system (Cerda-Jara et al., 2019). I intentionally use the word systems-impacted because I believe it provides humane language and lifts up the overrepresented students of color who experience great harm by oppressive systems — the carceral, social, and educational systems. Although I have not experienced the injustices of the carceral system, I am committed to serving students who do not have the same privileges or resources. My experience with this one student started a cascade of wonderings.

Why aren't there any programs on our campus dedicated to support systems-impacted students? How many others are systems-impacted on our campus that I/we are not serving?

What is the purpose of this brief?

If your campus is considering starting institutional support programs and services to foster success for systems-impacted students, this brief includes strategies to put in place, so your campus can be on-board towards creating a environment that is welcoming and understanding. This work is necessary in order for students to feel safe, loved, and welcome not just within the reentry program but throughout the rest of the campus, such as our classrooms and student services. Lastly, this work is important in order to think of the sustainability of a reentry program. Many staff, faculty, and administrators come and go on our campus, but if we create an environment that institutionalizes this work for system impacted students, then it will carry on for many students and years to come.

I am sharing my story and experiences, so it can provide support to those trying to create programs. My experience includes the invisible labor, the barriers that I have encountered, and the small, yet impactful wins that are getting us to the goal of creating a program on our own campus. This can be a great opportunity to also be vulnerable. "I have experienced frustration, hope, and excitement during this journey. It's been hella difficult, hella rewarding, and humbling all at the same time." This is the real, real.

Below is a summary of my own personal journey and wonderings as I progressed along each step. Although it is presented in a sequential order, I believe the heart work will guide the process and some steps may even overlap. I also want to acknowledge these steps may vary as each practitioner's journey is unique with an abundance of interesting discoveries.

Steps of Pathway		Wonderings to Consider
1	Create an action strategy	Who can you align with when starting this work? Faculty? Admin? Staff Members?
2	Assess the environment	Is your institution ready for this type of work? If not, how can I help them understand that these are students we already serve? That these are students who are deserving of our care?
3	Be flexible	Who can you align with that you don't normally work with? What can they offer in this type of work? How can I take care of myself, in what potentially may be, this long journey?
4	Gain community support	Who are the key community partners? How can we build that relationship? Board of Trustees, local prisons and jails, community legal services, housing, career/employment, etc.
5	Build a core team	Who are the campus leaders, allies, co-conspirators, etc.? What type of training does everyone need? Who needs to be involved?
6	Identify financial opportunities	Who can help get the program started? What type of funding currently exists for underserved populations on our campus? Identify folx to work on with application/grant process for categorical Rising Scholar funding.
7	Recognize the inner work and education	What kind of work has been done so far on oneself, campus, and community? Why is it important to find folx that are committed and dedicated to this work? Why do we need to institutionalize this program and make the staff part of the district budget?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LAYING THE FOUNDATION ON CAMPUS

The goal of this brief is to guide practitioners towards amazing possibilities grounded in hope, joy, and love where we honor students that have been impacted by the criminal justice system to aspire towards a better tomorrow. In reimagining an educational system as critical leaders, we can create an educational community that connotes a sense of belongingness and communal notion of human existence and welfare --- one that is humanizing with a strong sense of community and collective responsibility. I recognize this brief may not provide all the answers to your wonderings and may just pique your interest enough to learn more. I strongly encourage a deeper dive with the wealth of knowledge from other scholar-practitioners and those provided in the references. I also hope this brief will inspire more practitioners to reach out and collaborate with their regional colleges and communities towards serving systems-impacted students. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the tremendous ongoing efforts the Rising Scholar Network, California Community College Chancellor's Office, and all community service providers because without these relationships, none of this would be possible.

In the upcoming sections, I will unpack the recommended areas, provide key takeaways, and include reflective questions for practitioners while offering my own personal struggles in moving this work forward.

Areas of recommendations for practitioners to address when creating new services and providing wellness for systems-impacted students:

Recommendation One: "Create an action strategy,"

Recommendation Two: "assess the environment,"

Recommendation Three: "be flexible,"

Recommendation Four: "gain community support,"

Recommendation Five: "build a core team,"

Recommendation Six: "identify financial opportunities,"

Recommendation Seven: and "recognize the inner work and education".

RECOMMENDATION ONE: "CREATE AN ACTION STRATEGY"

In a 2018 Corrections to College report, a statewide survey conducted of 73 community colleges and mostly CCC Presidents and Vice Presidents resulted in the following:

> 78% of 73 colleges that responded already have a formal or informal program for system-impacted students, or seeking to build a program.

For colleges that do not have a program but intend to create one:

> 87% identified "knowing who is formerly incarcerated" as their biggest challenge.

For colleges that do not have a program and do not intend to create one:

> 67% believe there are between 1-20 students on their campus.

The most-selected biggest challenge to starting a program was "knowing who is formerly incarcerated" (43%).

It is essential to create intentional strategies that target key areas within your campus, personnel, community, and students. Over a three year time frame, we had numerous informal conversations and Zoom meetings with folx who had previous experience with systems-impacted students, campus advocates, related reports/articles, and college leaders about their ideas and strategies in order to get the collective 'us' to move the work forward. We finally received an opportunity and took it. With the hiring of a new VP of Student Affairs rooted in social justice, my colleagues and I were given a real platform.

We met with the Rising Scholar Coordinator, Dean of Workforce and the VP Student Affairs. We all decided it would be best to prepare an informational presentation, so the VP could plant the seed with the new President during one of their weekly meetings. This action would set the stage for future conversations and eventually an opportunity to talk with the Board of Trustees. We figured

that if we could get buy-in from the President and the Board, then the next step was to assemble a core team who will then capture participating members from campus such as Admissions & Records, Financial Aid, Counseling, etc. These core members don't necessarily have to be folx who do all the work but more so people who can create the most influence on campus.

Reflection. What other factors do you need to consider to start this work? Who can you align with when starting this work? Faculty? Administrators? Staff Members?

RECOMMENDATION TWO: "ASSESS THE ENVIRONMENT"

This journey has given me ample time for critical reflection on these questions and more. As hard as it was to come to this conclusion, our campus was not ready. If you ask me now, I can eagerly say our campus is at least ready for this conversation. We envision including a proposal in the next round of grant applications.

Do all community colleges need a support program? As I often pondered this question, I recall a recent conversation with the Restoring our Communities (ROC) team at Laney College. A practitioner and leader embarking upon this heart work, Vincent Garrett, recommends that "we need to look at our data on our campuses and the

"I see no place in California, and I see no place in the nation really where contact with the criminal justice system wouldn't hamper a person's ability to attain a certificate or degree from a California Community College."

Roger Viet Chung, Faculty Lead for Restoring Our Communities (ROC), Laney College

data involving parolee release rates in our counties to determine this need." In addition, Roger Viet Chung adds, "our campuses at the very least are essential in providing professional learning or development opportunities that educate and help campus staff understand that systems-impacted students are already here on our campuses."

Reflection. Within the context of your campus, start thinking about your own path and how you can move the work forward in your institution? Are you able to come up with realistic timeframes, objectives, and goals? Is your institution ready for this type of work? If not, how can we help them understand that these are students we already serve and that these are students who are deserving of our care? What data have you gathered about students?

Community college campuses have historically served students within the carceral setting and at the same time *invisibilized* this entire marginalized student population through the aggregation process of their student data. As a result, campuses have not been able to acknowledge this group because of the non-existent data.

Ensuring management information system (MIS) data accurately reflects the number of systems-impacted students served.

Working with your admissions and records (A&R) department to successfully implement attribute codes GS-02 (systems-involved) and GS-14 (formerly incarcerated) with student information system (ex: Colleague or Banner) in order to support and report accurately the number of students reflected on our campuses per semester.

Making data informed decisions.

Working with key stakeholders to collect data in your county for individuals being released or paroled.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: "BE FLEXIBLE"

It really took us three years to finally get this in motion at our campus. We had different Presidents, COVID, financial problems, and many other challenges or obstacles to even come this far. As practitioners ground in this work, we stuck with it and kept finding allies and co-conspirators along the way. If you think you have to change your strategy, then change it when needed. We learned to pivot with each obstacle, so we became a

river that flows around the rocks trying to block our path. This notion of being flexible still isn't easy for me, and yet if we don't have the capacity to change, then our students will be most impacted.

Reflection. Who can you align with that you don't normally work with? What can they offer in this type of work? How can I take care of myself, in what potentially may be, this long journey?

> **"Another service we run is a financial coaching program that helps recover a student's credit, do their taxes, and assist with restitution so the courts can't hold it against them."**
>
> **Roger Viet Chung, Faculty Lead for Restoring Our Communities (ROC), Laney College**

Some practical ways to support students' non-academic needs are starting a student club, building off campus network of partners, connecting with community-based organization, etc. (Corrections to College, 2018a).

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: "GAIN COMMUNITY SUPPORT"

This connection is especially important. Connect with students who have identified as system impacted and building this relationship with our community. Connect with other community college campuses such as Laney, Chabot, Solano, and Santa Rosa. Connect with Rising Scholars, BASIC, Project Rebound, and other organizations doing the work. Connect with local jails, prisons, transition services, legal services. etc. These connections have given me the inspiration to continue and the opportunity to connect especially being someone who does not have experience with the carceral system.

In a recent report, system-impacted students were asked about their non academic needs and five themes emerged as essential for support programs (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021):

Targeted Student Support

Parole and Probation

Housing

Employment

Career Transition

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: "BUILD A CORE TEAM"

It can get messy real quick if there are too many people. In my experience, trying to schedule with a team for 4-5 individuals is always cumbersome and at times frustrating to find a time. So when these precious meetings are available figure out how each member can move the work forward, and continue to meet regularly to keep the momentum going. The members of our team need to move with intentionality because the space we occupy is different.

Reflection. Who are the campus leaders, allies, co-conspirators, etc.? What type of training does everyone need? Who needs to be involved? Who have you identified as core members? How can each member move the work forward?

How do we implement a community responsive support program and services?
When reenvisioning a support program for systems-impacted students where they feel secure, a sense of belonging, and their needs met, practitioners can be reassured serving systems-impacted students is core to the California Community Colleges' mission and closely aligned with the Chancellor's *Vision for Success* goal to reduce

equity gaps among traditionally underrepresented student groups.

In a 2017 report, "Toolkit: Fostering Success for Formerly Incarcerated Students on Campus", some additional takeaways with strategic actions that support systems-impacted students can be found. The Degree of Freedom (Mukamal et al., 2015) report also recommends that support programs should incorporate the development of soft skills as vital learning outcomes.

> In a 2017 report, "Toolkit: Fostering Success for Formerly Incarcerated Students on Campus", some additional takeaways with strategic actions that support systems-impacted students can be found. The Degree of Freedom (Mukamal et al., 2015) report also recommends that support programs should incorporate the development of soft skills as vital learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION SIX: "IDENTIFY FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES"

When our team gets to this step we will be communicating with campus leaders to find out if we are able to receive an immediate investment to start our program from current on-campus equity funded sources. Then we will start planning backwards from the submittal deadline for our categorical funds through the Rising Scholar Network in the next round. When talking with the Roger Viet Chung, the faculty lead from Restoring Our Community at Laney College, he emphasized the importance of also moving towards a sustainable funding model by making sure the staff position(s) are eventually part of the institutional budget. This 2-3 year long process for Laney College involved the President(s), human resources, staff testimonials, faculty lead, the Board, and overcoming the racialized structures and institutional hiring practices that excluded systems-impacted individuals.

Reflection. Who can help get the program started? What type of funding currently exists for underserved populations on our campus? Identify folx to work on with application/ grant process for categorical Rising Scholar funding. What funding opportunities do

you have on your campus? What financial opportunities have you identified to get the program started/going or even starting a reentry program?

In 2010, Assembly Bill (McCarty, 2021) authorized the office of the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges through the Rising Scholar Network ($10 million) to provide additional funds for services in support of postsecondary education for systems-impacted students.

What are three steps to fund a reentry program?

Applying for a grant to fund a program will take some strategic planning. Some possible steps your campus can take are as follows:

- **Step 1- Funding.** Completing a Rising Scholar Network Request for Application (RFA - *Rising Scholars Network*) to be an approved college campus to receive funding
  - Track 1: Implementation Grants are for colleges who already offer some services to incarcerated or formerly incarcerated students.
  - Track 2: Planning and Implementation Grants are for colleges who do not yet offer services specifically for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated students.

- **Step 2 – Current equity or grant funds.** Inquire, allocate and secure existing equity or grant funds to hire staff who have personal experience with the criminal justice system with the intentional strategy of institutionalizing the position.

- **Step 3 – Starting through existing programs and continue building relationships.** Starting new programs can be a daunting process for many campuses, so some practitioners choose to expand offerings that meet the needs of systems-impacted students through existing programs, such as disability support programs and services, equal opportunity programs, veterans services, foster youth, or other programs for economically disadvantaged students.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN: "RECOGNIZE THE INNER WORK AND EDUCATION THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE"

Currently, institutional support services and transition programs for systems-impacted students have expanded on California State University campuses and over half of our community colleges. The number of programs and services continues to increase every

year, and with your help they will reach all 116 California Community Colleges. Through this intentional action of creating more programs and services, we commit our institutions to disrupt and dismantle the racialized structures that disproportionately impact students of color returning to campus from the carceral setting.

Reflection. What kind of work have you done during this journey? Why is it important for others to identify this for themselves?

(Re)envisioning the future: *A reflection for practitioners in leadership.* My own journey to unlearn, decolonize, and heal has been the most challenging and will always be an ongoing development through critical self reflections. If the notion that harmed folx continue to harm folx, then my dream is that healed leaders can also heal others and their communities, a dream that not only considers a student's experiences but also

> **"In order to heal others, we first need to heal ourselves. And to heal ourselves, we need to know how to deal with ourselves."**
>
> **Thích Nhất Hạnh**

"centers the wellness of students by providing them an education where they feel valued, cared for, and humanized" (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2021, p. 4). By moving towards a transformative leadership model and college programming that critically challenges how too often we operate through race-neutral approaches or a student deficit lens, we can move beyond traditional conceptions of educational leadership to begin addressesing oppression and the cultivation of critical leaders.

Daus-Magbual & Tintiangco-Cubales (2016) state traditional leadership has been the dominant paradigms used to discuss organizational and educational leadership over the past thirty years. These traditional leadership practices are rooted in oppression, domination, authority, and hierarchy. Leadership models grounded in these ideals are problematic for serving systems-impacted students because they are not responsive in supporting a campus environment that values equity, social justice, and student wellness. As we grow more community responsive leaders, we have the opportunity to dream of using education for personal and social liberations for our students. These

individual leadership goals allow the leader to connect themselves to the people and communities they belong to and determine how they will take action towards improving and transforming one's life and their community (Tintiangco-Cubales, 2010). This critical leadership approach utilizes a holistic lens with deliberate equitable practices allowing leaders to reenvision new and existing programs in order to acknowledge the emerging scholar in each systems-impacted student.

CAMPUS PLANNING MODEL
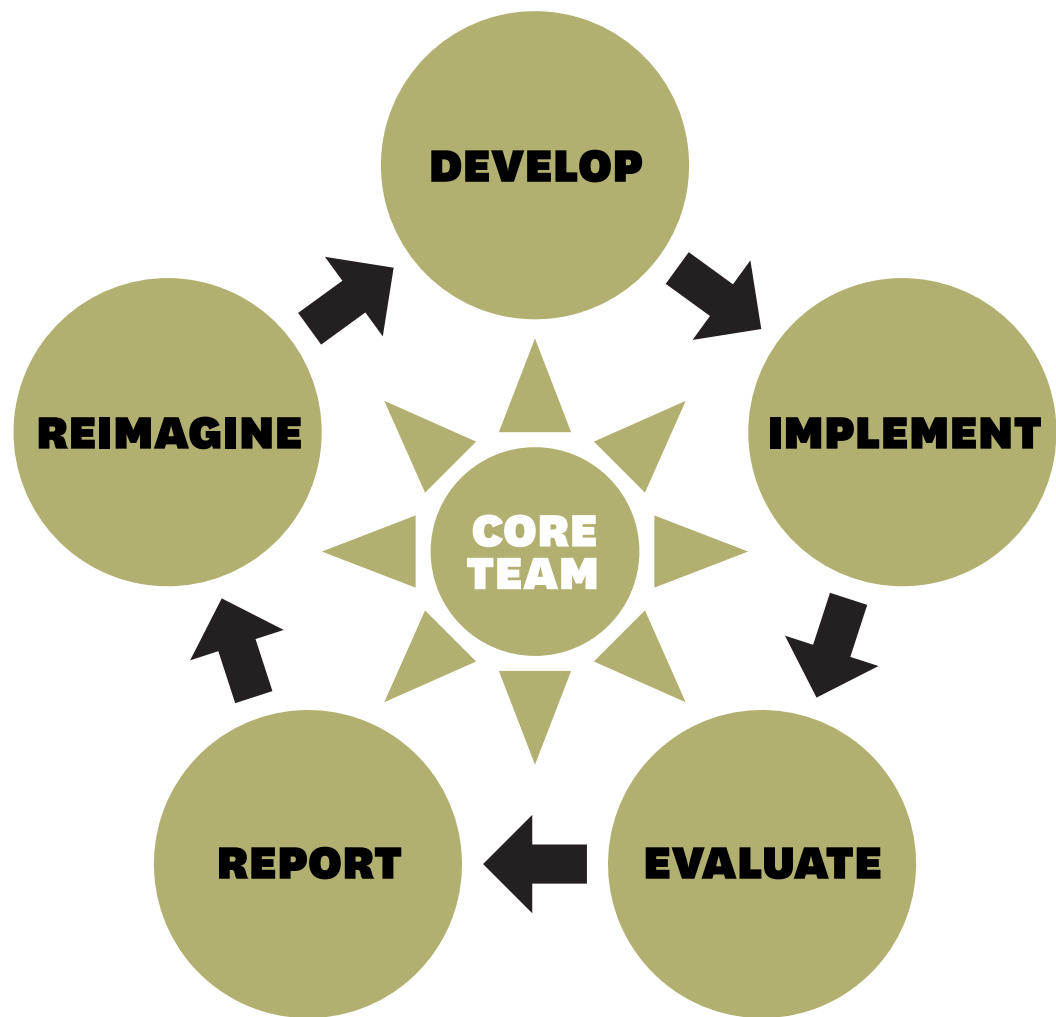
(Image adopted from the Integrated Planning Model developed by veteran community college professional and RP Group integrated planning consultant, Maria Narvaez.)

REFERENCES
and additional resources

Cerda-Jara, M., Czifra, S., Galindo, A., Mason, J., Ricks, C., & Zohrabi, A. (2019). *Language guide for communicating about those involved in the carceral system*. Underground Scholars Initiative, UC Berkeley.

Corrections to College California (2017). *Toolkit: Fostering success for formerly incarcerated students on campus*. https://correctionstocollegeca.org/assets/general/College-in-Jail-ToolkitMarch-2018.pdf

Corrections to College California. (2018a). *Don't stop now. Foundation for California Community College: Rising Scholars Network*. https://risingscholarsnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/assets/general/dont-stop-now-report_v2.pdf

Corrections to College California. (2018b). *Formerly incarcerated students at California Community Colleges: Survey results*. https://correctionstocollegeca.org/assets/general/CEO-Survey-Results.pdf

Daus-Magbual, A. & Tintiangco-Cubales, A. (2016) *The Power of Ethnic Studies: Developing Culturally and Community Responsive Leaders*. From book by Sandoval, D.M, & Ratcliff, A. (2016). "White" Washing American Education: The new culture wars in ethnic studies. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Duncan-Andrade, J. (2009). Note to educators: Hope required when growing roses in concrete. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(2), 181–194. http://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.2.nu3436017730384w

Foundation for California Community Colleges. (2021). *Vision for success*. Retrieved from https://vision.foundationccc.org

Giroux, H.A. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning*.

Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Inc.

Mukamal, D., Silbert, R., & Taylor, R. M. (2015). *Degrees of freedom: Expanding college opportunities for currently and formerly incarcerated Californians*. Stanford Criminal Justice Center. https://law.stanford.edu/publications/degrees-of-freedom-expanding-college-opportunities-for-currently-and-formerly-incarcerated-californians/

Nair, T. B., Albertine, S., Cooper, M. A., McDonald, N., & Major, T. Jr. (2016). *Becoming a student-ready college: A new culture of leadership for student success*. Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Brand.

Prisoner Reentry Network. (2020). Preservation Park in Oakland, California. https://prisonerreentrynetwork.org/

The Campaign for College Opportunity. (2021). *The possibility report from prison to college degrees in California*. https://collegecampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Possibility-Report.pdf

Tintiangco-Cubales, A. (2010). *Critical leadership praxis*. Unpublished manuscript.

Tintiangco-Cubales, A., Kohl, R., Sacramento, J., Henning, N., Agarwal-Rangnath, R., & Sleeter, C. (2014). Toward an Ethnic Studies Pedagogy: Implications for K–12 Schools from the Research. *The Urban Review, 47*(1), 104–25.

Tintiangco-Cubales, A., & Duncan-Andrade, J. (2021). Still fighting for Ethnic Studies: The origins, practices, and potential of community responsive pedagogy. *Teachers College Record Journal*.

USC Race and Equity Center

Verna and Peter Dauterive Hall
635 Downey Way, Suite 214
Los Angeles, CA 90089-3331

CONTACT

Dr. Adrián Trinidad
Associate Director for Community College Partnerships
altrinid@usc.edu

Dr. Minh Tran
Director of Racial Equity Research Partnerships
mctran@usc.edu