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Faculty & Staff: A Toolkit for Mid-Level Managers

# Measures of Structural Change

These are metrics used to assess the extent to which policies and practices create institutional conditions that yield equitable access, opportunity, experiences and outcomes for students in racially minoritized communities, first generation students and those with low incomes.

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Every student deserves a strong start in their first year of college. This toolkit is part of a SSTF three-part series, providing resources to assist postsecondary leaders design and implement reform strategies that support equitable outcomes for students who are marginalized and racially minoritized.



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## Measures of Structural Change

Measures of structural change are metrics used to assess the extent to which policies and practices create institutional conditions — and not necessarily student-related measures — that yield equitable access, opportunity, experiences and outcomes for students in racially minoritized communities, first generation students and those with low incomes. In developmental education reform efforts, examples of structural change that can be measured include:

- Placement policy
- Advising practice
- Alignment of courses with programs of study
- Sufficient number of sections for corequisite courses based on enrollment projections in the previous years
- Proportional representation of student groups enrolled in corequisite courses based on overall enrollments or program of study designations
- Student experiences in corequisite courses

To determine equitable access and experiences, all data will be disaggregated by student group, including race/ethnicity, gender, age, Pell grant recipient status (socioeconomic status) and other groupings relevant to the institutions' equity goals. Quantitative indicators should be examined and used in conjunction with qualitative indicators (e.g., feedback from interviews or focus groups with students/families).

### **Why do they matter?**

Measures of structural change matter because they help mid-level leaders better understand and more effectively influence the factors that impact the quality of implementation of large-scale reform priorities.

**What is the difference between structural change measures and student outcomes measures?**

Structures are policies and practices that create conditions for student success. Outcomes are skill, knowledge, completion, attitude and perception-based indicators that measure student progress (e.g., GPA, course grades, graduation rates, retention rates, and social emotional and academic learning). Structural change measures are precursors to student outcome measures. Creating structures that attend to equitable access, opportunity and experiences may lead to equitable and sustainable student outcomes (if the right quantitative and qualitative data are consistently reviewed, updated, critically queried and used as the basis for equitable action).

**How and when do mid-level leaders use structural change measures to inform their practices over time?**

Compared to other groups, mid-level leaders are uniquely positioned with respect to impacting measures of structural change. While mid-level leaders often lack the formal authority and “levers” for change that senior leaders enjoy, they are the most influential leaders when it comes to building will, capacity and resilience for such efforts on behalf of those whose support is essential for successful implementation (i.e., frontline faculty and staff).

**What affects the timeline?**

The timeline for measuring structural change depends on college and departmental calendars. For example, measuring changes in advising practice might be done annually after fall registration. For measuring academic programs, late spring/early summer might be most appropriate.

**How is a cohort defined?**

A cohort is defined as the number of first-time students enrolled in the fall or spring of their first academic year. Cohorts can be defined based on overall first-time, first-year (FTFY) student enrollment and disaggregated by student group. Determine the proportion of student groups by dividing the student group total by the cohort total. For example, the fall 2021 cohort includes the total number of students who enrolled as first-time, first-year students in fall 2020 plus the number of first-time, first-year students enrolled in spring 2021. If the total number of FTFY students enrolled in fall 2021 was 1,634, and the total number of FTFY students in spring 2021 was 495, the fall 2021 cohort has 2,129 FTFY students. If a total of number of FTFY students (across both semesters) who identified as Latino was 649, 30% of FTFY students in the fall 2021 cohort were Latino.

For measuring structural change for policies, see the [Policy Typology](#) section of this toolkit.



# About This Toolkit

This toolkit was conceived by the Dana Center and Sova with the goal of bringing together leading lessons and insights gleaned by these organizations over the years through direct work supporting hundreds of institutions committed to scaling ambitious, equity-grounded student success reforms. Based on our combined insights, we built this toolkit to provide institutions and systems with practical resources to help mid-level managers become more effective leaders of complex change, and to help inform institutional and system leaders tasked with providing professional development for mid-level managers.

## Toolkit authors

### Martha Ellis

Martha M. Ellis, Ph.D. is president of Mellis LLC, a consulting firm bringing deep experience, substantive knowledge, and research-based innovation to leaders as they confront the challenges and opportunities facing higher education today and in the future. She is the senior pathways lead for the Texas Success Center, Achieving the Dream Leadership Coach, and professor in residence at the University of Texas at Austin.

Previously, Martha was managing director for the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to joining the Dana Center, Martha was associate vice chancellor of Academic Affairs for the University of Texas System. She has 35 years of experience in universities and community colleges in Texas, New Mexico and Oklahoma, including two college presidencies, provost, chief information officer, graduate and undergraduate dean, and faculty member positions. Martha has won numerous teaching awards, has written scholarly publications and is an invited presenter at national conferences. She was recognized by the U. S. Congress and Texas House of Representatives for her leadership in higher education.

### Alison Kadlec

Alison Kadlec is a founding partner at Sova, where she leads a body of work focused on accelerating the pace and improving the quality of large-scale, equity-grounded reform of higher education. She has worked with scores of colleges and universities across the country to support the capacity of senior and mid-level leaders to effectively engage members of their communities as constructive partners in the hard work of change on behalf of equitable student success. Alison and her team also work with state policymakers and system leaders in more than half the states in the U.S. to help improve the quality of policy development and implementation around higher education and workforce issues. She has been active in the Guided Pathways movement since its origins, led the 2020 update of the Core Principles for Transforming Remediation, and is working in several states on issues related to scaled redesign of developmental education.



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## About Strong Start to Finish

Strong Start to Finish is a network of policy and research partners, institution and systems leaders, and foundations advancing system reforms in developmental education, so every student can succeed in their first year of college. In particular, we support college success for Black, Brown, Asian American, Indigenous students, adult learners, and students with low incomes, who have been underserved by the education system for too long. We work to scale the use of proven, proactive strategies that remove barriers that typically impede these students from earning essential college credits in English and Math courses in their first year. Education Commission of the States is the host of the Strong Start to Finish network.





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