New Report Illuminates Barriers to Equity in Digital Learning for Underrepresented Students
Higher education struggles to develop practices and policies informed by disaggregated data

Boulder, CO (September 1, 2022) – The Every Learner Everywhere network has released a new report illustrating how barriers to equity in digital learning differ across racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds – and are exacerbated by higher education's tendency to aggregate student data into monolithic categories.

Toward Ending the Monolithic View of "Underrepresented Students:" Why Higher Education Must Account for Racial, Ethnic, and Economic Variations in Barriers to Equity synthesizes commentary, research, and programmatic activity on how higher education has so far grappled with disaggregating and using student data to confront and close equity gaps for particular student populations. The report findings include takeaways from original interviews with 17 experts, including faculty, administrators, researchers, advocates, and students.

Based on the mission and priorities of Every Learner Everywhere, *Toward Ending the Monolithic View of "Underrepresented Students:"* outlines evidence-based insight into how barriers to equity vary for college and university students in the U.S. who are Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American and Pacific Islander, poverty-affected, and first-generation.

While aggregated data about students in these populations is sometimes necessary to initiate analysis and discussion, overreliance on aggregated data about all "underrepresented" or "disadvantaged" students leaves a critical gap in knowledge in U.S. higher education, report authors contend.

Policies, support programs, and teaching practices intended to address student equity barriers to equitable learning (including differences in college-going knowledge, academic readiness, community support, informational access, financial resources, and more) are limited by the tendency to treat all racially and ethnically minoritized, poverty-affected, and first-generation student populations as a monolith whose circumstances and needs are generally the same. In contrast, the students and other experts featured in the report describe how disaggregating data has many potential benefits.

For example:

- It illuminates differences within groups, illuminates what is and isn't effective to support specific groups of students, and elevates the voices and experiences of individual students.
- It empowers faculty to refine teaching practices and develop data-informed partnerships across their institutions.
- It empowers institutions to confront the effects of systemic inequities.

The report also includes background and context on related issues such as the various ways "first generation" is defined and how historically Black colleges and universities and tribal colleges and universities provide models for equity-centered institutional culture.

"The voices of the students and other experts we talked to bring home the enormous variety obscured in the racial, ethnic, and economic categories that higher ed has relied on and why accounting for that variety can enable success for every student," said report researcher and author Robert McGuire of McGuire Editorial & Consulting.

"Readers will get a comprehensive breakdown of how disaggregation of data matters across campuses, from course design and classroom practices to strategy and budgeting. Higher ed has been giving serious attention to equity for minoritized, poverty-affected, and first-generation students, and we hope this report helps advance those conversations in ways that are more informed by data."

Though the report advocates the need to balance disaggregated and localized data with making space to hear how students bring specific facets of their identities to learning, it does not offer a comprehensive methodology for doing so. Rather, it tries to specify and illustrate why breaking apart the monolithic view of those students matters, and how doing so could advance high-level conversations about equity and learning.

To download the free resource or learn more about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org. To contact Every Learner Everywhere, email everylearner@wiche.edu, or call (303) 541-0206. Follow Every Learner on Twitter @EveryLearnerNet.

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Every Learner Everywhere is a network of twelve partner organizations with expertise in evaluating, implementing, scaling, and measuring the efficacy of education technologies,

curriculum and course design strategies, teaching practices, and support services that personalize instruction for students in blended and online learning environments. Our mission is to help institutions use new technology to innovate teaching and learning, with the ultimate goal of improving learning outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students, poverty-affected students, and first-generation students. Our collaborative work aims to advance equity in higher education centers on the transformation of postsecondary teaching and learning. We build capacity in colleges and universities to improve student outcomes with digital learning through direct technical assistance, timely resources and toolkits, and ongoing analysis of institution practices and market trends. For more information about Every Learner Everywhere and its collaborative approach to equitize higher education through digital learning, visit everylearnereverywhere.org.