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Introducing Boards to the Equity Conversation: State-Level Governing Boards and Discourses of Social Justice

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State-level governing boards (SLGBs) play integral roles in the leadership and governance of higher education. Oftentimes, though, their role and influence are understated or ignored in scholarship. In this article, the authors recenter the integral impact of these boards and push for a better understanding of their impact on higher education. Specifically, through an examination of 33 strategic plans, the authors consider how SLGBs can better manage the equity challenges within colleges and universities. Recognizing that higher education governance is complex and involves many moving parts, the authors present an argument for how SLGBs can influence postsecondary equity work. This article helps elucidate how SLGBs intersect with prevailing equity discourses and support higher education leaders to better recognize and understand the surreptitious ways equity is absent from pivotal discourses despite the best intentions and measured efforts of entities such as state-level governing boards.

Keywords: governance, higher education, inclusion, leadership, strategic plans

> Demographic shifts, legal and political contestation, economic and workforce imperatives, and increasing conversations regarding diversity as an educational imperative require institutions to transform themselves and make diversity goals central to their educational mission. However, planning and accomplishing diversity goals will continue to be a challenge into the foreseeable future.
>
> (Williams & Clowney, 2007, p. 14)

Growth spurred by the postwar baby boom and explosion of higher education in the 1960s led to state leaders' increased desire to acquire more influence in higher education (Thelin, 2011). During that time of growth, states created many of the coordinating and governing boards that exist in postsecondary education today. State-level governing boards (SLGBs), for example, serve as intermediaries between the public, state elected officials, and campus-level leadership (Knott & Payne, 2004; Lowry, 2007). Few studies operationalize SLGBs as intermediaries due to conflicting considerations regarding SLGB structure and influence (Morgan et al., 2021). However, some scholars illuminate how boards are influential in the policymaking process (Bastedo, 2005, 2009; Morgan et al., 2021) and are central to understanding the politics of postsecondary organizational behavior (Pusser, 2001, 2003, 2012). Furthermore, when considering intermediaries, "operate independently of . . . .two parties and provide distinct value beyond that which the parties alone would be able to develop or to amass themselves" (Honig, 2004, p. 83) SLGBs often offer this value to legislatures and governors at various stages of state policymaking (Morgan et al., 2021). On this foundation, Morgan et al. (2021) situate SLGBs as intermediaries, viewing "elected officials as principals, public postsecondary institutions as agents, and SLGBs as intermediaries" (p. 575).

These boards are designed and organized differently across the nation. Despite the variation among governance structures from state to state, the norm of governance by citizens who are not necessarily professional educators, commonly referred to as lay governance, reflects the priority of democratic structure and control. As intermediaries, SLGBs provide a buffer between the political process and institutional operations in order to protect academic freedom and facilitate the flexibility required for effective institutional management (Lingenfelter, n.d.). These boards "regulate and hold universities accountable" to priorities of the state through strategic planning aimed at "establishing state goals and objectives, evaluating the resources of all institutions and recommending public policy priorities" (McGuinness, 1997, p. 12) and pursuing the public interest and agenda for higher education (Lingenfelter, n.d.).

With respect to the public interest, U.S. postsecondary institutions are complex enterprises with diverse stakeholders responsible for creating optimal experiences for students, staff, and faculty. In addition to those entities that interact daily and directly on the physical campus, universities must also respond to the needs of many external government, industry, and community stakeholders (Gayle et al., 2011). Accordingly, a pressing challenge "for university governance within this context of diverse accountabilities and constituencies is the implementation of governance mechanisms that equitably represent and inclusively draw expertise from many diverse stakeholders across differing spheres of effect" (Graham et al., 2020, p. 1).

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Today, the push for equity is manifest across campuses (e.g., with the rise of chief diversity officer positions, calls for disaggregated data, etc.) nation-wide; yet, much work remains to be done. Decision-makers central to higher education have long been isolated from the discourses—policy texts in policy context (Saarinen, 2008)—designed to ensure equity among an increasingly diverse student body (Krisberg, 2019). One consortium of higher education leaders—governing boards—continues to be noticeably detached from the equity dialogue (Rall et al., 2019, 2020). The disconnect between boards and equity exists despite recent work that seeks to focus on the role of discourse in policymaking (e.g., Andrade & Lundberg, 2020; Orphan et al., 2018). Yet adding to this genre of scholarship, we focus intently on discourse as "language-in-action" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 2) located within the policy realm. Hence, when we invoke discourse throughout this article, we refer to the interplay between policy language and (in)actions that inform equity.

Bearing the concept of equity in mind, the oversight of locating boards is detrimental to the forward progress of the equity agenda; an agenda described by "a series of reforms to increase access among . . . potential students, as well as improving their progress through college, so that they too could have the benefits of postsecondary education" (Grubb et al., 2003, p. 220). The topics and issues related to equity and inclusion are not new (Astin & Astin, 2015). In his 1965 commencement address at Howard University, President Lyndon B. Johnson alluded to equity when he pointed out that all citizens should benefit from "equality as a fact and equality as a result"—that opportunity and results were necessary for success. Bane & Winston, (1980) examined the individual and societal benefits of equity via practices, principles, and policies in higher education. In 1987, Charles Willie problematized the view that equity and excellence were contradictory aims; he charged that excellence and equity complement each other. Equity and inclusion have been increasingly central to higher education scholarship (Harper et al., 2009). In fact, the 21st century has seen a heightened emphasis on strategic diversity initiatives (Williams et al., 2005). Some scholars have asserted that equity work must be "everyone's business" if it is ever to be meaningfully actualized in educational outcomes (Hoffman & Mitchell, 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Williams & Clowney, 2007). By "everyone," we imply each stakeholder and institutional agent in postsecondary education that has direct or indirect influence over students' access, experiences, and success (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators, boards of higher education).

In this article, we strive to merge the distinct conversations of equity and governance to highlight an area of educational research that has been rendered invisible due to the lack of published research on the overlap (Rall et al., 2019). We focus on discourses related to equity and diversity because prior work has indicated that more attention must be given to these discourses both in policy and practice and how decision-makers, such as SLGBs, respond to these issues (Morgan et al., 2021; Rall et al., 2019, 2020, 2022). It is imperative to question the dominant values and cultures (Blackmore, 2002) to understand why such omissions persist. Some argue that certain topics remain understudied because they are inconsequential or too esoteric to add to policy or practice insights (Perna, 2018). As noted in our previous work, what is most alarming is how disjointed governing bodies have remained in equity conversations despite their outsized and consequential role (Commodore et al., in press; Rall et al., 2019, 2020). Moreover, coupled with their slow-moving participation in equity conversations, boards tend to be uniform, excluding in large part women, people of color, and young people (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2017; Cordova, 2018; Espinosa et al., 2019). Yet, the onus to integrate diversity and equity into the organizational structure is on postsecondary institutions (Adserias et al., 2017; Arday, 2018; Williams, 2013), and boards are the fiduciaries tasked with guiding these institutions. Thus, we concluded that the untroubled norms of governance research and equity research must be revisited in order to move the equity agenda along.

To remedy such blind spots, we examine the strategic plans of SLGBs for if and how they employ equity and inclusion discourses and to what end. The question that guided this inquiry was: How are equity and diversity discourses operationalized in the strategic plans of SLGBs? We operationalize SLGB and introduce the role of strategic planning in diversity efforts. We then transition to offer an overview of a theoretical framework rooted in interest convergence and nonperformativity that begins to illustrate how governance and equity dynamics might operate in tandem. Next, we describe the design of this study that seeks to uncover the ways in which equity discourses show up in SLGB strategic plans. We conclude with implications for practice and recommendations for future research in this space.

Literature Review

At present, research on equity and postsecondary institutional governance in higher education has not been woven together (Rall et al., 2019). Recent efforts to address issues of equity and diversity within leadership in the broader educational sector exist (e.g., Blackmore, 2006; Lumby & Coleman, 2007; Lumby & Morrison, 2010; Ross & Berger, 2009; Wilkinson, 2008). Yet, studies of higher education governance and how states deal with equity and opportunity issues are uncommon (Bastedo, 2009; Douglass, 2000). For instance, Knott and Payne (2004) provide empirical insight into board regulatory power but do not specifically center equity issues in their design or cataloging of different boards. Terms like diversity, justice, and inclusion are frequently used in policy and practice discourses, yet are not integrated into the research and theory of educational leadership and management (Lumby & Morrison, 2010). For example, scholars have noted the evident dearth of scholarship exploring race and leadership within higher education (Adserias et al., 2017). At the same time, organizational leaders such as boards represent a small group that can modify organizations like higher education over time (Kotler & Murphy, 1981). We attempt to reconcile these two points of exclusion: (a) the higher education leadership literature in large part ignores or underestimates the integral role of governing boards in implementing change, and (b) the higher education equity literature neglects the influence and role of the board in addressing issues related to diversity, inclusion, and equity. For example, there is inadequate treatment of race in leadership research (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

Scholars suggests that leaders struggle to effectively engage with race-related issues in education (Carpenter & Diem, 2013; DeMatthews, 2016; Miller, 2021). Some available research focuses on specific campus leaders (e.g., student affairs professionals and faculty) in stimulating change in pressing issues such

as equity (Kezar & Eckel, 2008; Leon, 2014), but governing boards remain invisible in both the leadership and the equity literature. Specifically, we draw attention to the intensification of equity and social justice discourses divorced from most higher education governance structures. Through the intersection of equity and governance, we believe we "have the potential and the power to influence the field of race and leadership in profound ways" (Spiller & Watson, 2021, p. 4). Ultimately, our review led us to conclude that we must devise a critical theoretical framework to effectively understand equity discourses through the lens of SLGB strategic plans.

Studies of strategic planning in higher education are limited (Ozdem, 2011). We opted to review strategic plans because regardless of whether individuals agree on whether issues such as equity and inclusion are important, there is a consensus that strategic plans lay out institutional priorities (Dooris et al., 2004). Said differently, strategic plans have equity-centered communication, then there is an assumption that equity is an institutional priority. Conversely, equity is not assumed to be an institutional priority if equity is not communicated via the strategic plans' verbiage. Further, strategic plans are beneficial beyond merely the promise of action; key stakeholders unite around a collective process. The institution undergoes self-examination, and vital decision-makers can be held accountable to the public—all facets ultimately advantageous for enhancing equity in higher education (Rankine, 2019). Strategic plans "influence what issues are addressed, by whom, how, when, and in what arenas . . . to determine who gets what, when, and how much" (Moore, 2003, p. 17). Accordingly, all strategic plan components must be in sync with the mission (Hinton, 2012). Institutions and boards with equity-centered practices usually have related policies and/or documents (LePeau et al., 2018; Mock & Masemann, 1989).

Across disciplines, a distinguishing feature of boards is that they only monitor and influence strategy and stop short of everyday implementation and administration (Fama & Jensen, 1983). Boards are unique groups to study because of the juxtaposition of their control and service tasks (Forbes & Milliken, 1999). The control role pertains to the board's legal duty to monitor the management (of institutions) on the shareholder's (state's) behalf. The service role describes the board's role in formulating and advising strategic decisions (Forbes & Milliken, 1999). Within the corporate and nonprofit governance sectors, gender equity has received some consideration (e.g., Blackmore, 2011; Shaiko, 1996); yet, we have not seen these same conversations manifest related to boards of higher education despite data indicating that women and other minoritized populations continue to be underrepresented on these pivotal decision-making bodies (Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 2013; Aud et al., 2010; Bustillos & Siqueiros, 2018).

Equity and Social Justice Imperative in Higher Education

The pursuit of educational equity stems from the foundation of higher education as an experience reserved for a select few (Thelin, 2011). The evolution of postsecondary education has been a story of expansion and contraction in terms of who higher education is for and what should be the outcome (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Hence, the challenge with tracing the evolution of equity in higher education is partly rooted in the multiple epochs of time where the prevailing discourse focused on a particular set of issues. For example, as social and economic trends evolved in the early 1900s, questions regarding access to education for women, people of color, and other oppressed groups began to predominate educational reform efforts (DuBois, 1935; Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; Harper et al., 2009; Perna, 2000). This reality has led some advocates to shift attention to minoritized students' experiences and outcomes within postsecondary education (Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus, 2014). In particular, scholars often draw attention to disproportionate rates of access to specific types of institutions, graduation, and experiences with different forms of oppression (Jayakumar & Garces, 2015; LePeau et al., 2016; Price & Tovar, 2014; Quaye & Harper, 2015).

The sentiment that connects pursuits of access and calls for attention to experiences and outcomes for minoritized individuals is an explicit concern with redressing higher education's historical foundations (Bensimon, 2020). The initial formation of higher education was largely predicated on exclusion, the myth of meritocracy, whiteness (Patton, 2016), racism (Tichavakunda, 2020), and a host of other oppressive forces (Kimball et al., 2016; Renn, 2010). In response, the notion of educational equity tries to capture efforts aimed at whether different groups are able to be socially, economically, and civically mobile and self-determined (Jordan, 2010). Neither equality of opportunity nor outcome exists because of various cultural, linguistic, financial, and social realities within and outside of educational institutions. As Jordan (2010) argues, equity can be positioned around our understanding of how structural dynamics inform student success and the capacity of the educational institution.

Within higher education literature, there is a focus on the impact of different practices, programming, procedures, and policies (Dache-Gerbino, 2018; Harper et al., 2009) and the roles of various stakeholders in addressing issues of equity (Kelly & McCann, 2014; Leon, 2014; LePeau et al., 2018). These studies often pinpoint the challenges endemic in equity work on college related to the array of needs that minoritized groups possess in terms of intergroup (Museus et al., 2008; Saenz et al., 2007) and intragroup (Harper & Nichols, 2008; Rankin, 2005) dynamics. Furthermore, research has shown challenges in equity work related to unclear authority (Leon, 2014; LePeau, 2018), difficulty accessing resources (LePeau et al., 2016; Worthington et al., 2014), and lack of training (Bresciani, 2010).

From our synthesis, we contend that the political nature of equity work and an ever-evolving understanding of what equity entails in a diverse society keeps the concept elusive. As others have also acknowledged (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Museus, 2014), equity work is political because it includes the (re)allocation of resources to different populations. The (re)allocation of resources exerts power in ways bound to create a sense of winners and losers. Hence, when striving for equity, battles and jockeying for resources and power play out at all levels. Despite these efforts, inequities remain in higher education. Additionally, educational equity has become an umbrella term that lacks the nuance to name the realities of different minoritized populations. This shortfall unfolds simultaneously as scholars and the broader public seek to draw attention to an ever-increasing agenda of how different stakeholders are excluded or unable to realize particular outcomes (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). Scholars demonstrate ways research becomes susceptible to

inadequately grappling with the oppressive forces that shape the experiences and discourses of higher education stakeholders while claiming to center equitable outcomes for minoritized groups (Harper, 2012; Harris & Patton, 2019). Heeding these calls, we turn to our intentionally curated theoretical framework intended to help us remain sensitive to the tensions inherent in the equity imperative discourse in higher education.

Theoretical Framework

Centering inequity in our theorizing strengthens our understanding of intermediaries doing boundary work (Pereira, 2019). Therefore, we crafted a two-pronged theoretical framework to help respond to the complex subtleties associated with how intermediaries are positioned in the political ecosystem, how political discourse operates, and the ever-evolving practices related to equity and inclusion. Specifically, we highlight how the concepts of interest convergence and nonperformativity can help illuminate the relationship between SLGB strategic plans and the equity imperative in higher education.

While an exhaustive review of all the tenets of critical race theory (CRT; Delgado & Stefancic, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016) is beyond the purview of this article, one tenet—interest convergence—helps draw attention to why we might expect to see some manifestations of diversity, equity, and social justice discourses in the strategic plans of the boards. Bell (1980) introduced the principle of interest convergence in the field of legal studies stating, "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). These interests include the ideologies, needs, and expectations of Whites (Milner, 2008). Embedded in the principle of interest-convergent is the loss and gain binary; typically, the dominant group has to concede something in order for interests to align (Bell, 1980; Donnor, 2005).

Grounded in interest convergence, equity of any form can only be achieved through the sacrifices and opportunity distribution of the majority that has long assumed it is the rightful owner of higher education (Harper et al., 2009). Applied to this study then, we might expect only to see discourses of diversity, equity, and social justice in terms of economic or political benefit to the state (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004) and not as a means of liberation and a recognition of the agency and humanity of minoritized populations (Giroux, 2002; Hooks, 1994). Examples of when interest convergence has been used in higher education include, but are not limited to, the study of the experiences of doctoral students (Felder & Barker, 2013), diversification of the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines (Baber, 2015), and diversity and affirmative action (Aguirre, 2010). Additionally, interest convergence has been presented as a tool that can be used to examine and analyze policies and practices within education (Milner, 2008). Specifically, Milner (2008) applies interest convergence to teacher education. An interest-convergence framework can offer a distinct and enhanced understanding of how implanted norms influence inequities even within a postsecondary environment inundated with heightened calls for access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice (Baber, 2015). Here, we attempt to use interest convergence to study how the pervasiveness of race, racism, inequity, and similar topics may manifest in the policies, practices, procedures, and institutionalized systems of strategic plans drafted and maintained by SLGBs. For example, while equity and diversity may be seen as valuable goals for campuses, through the lens of interest-convergence, application and support of these goals via strategic plans may minimize the acknowledgment of historical and continuing marginalization for groups that would benefit most from equitable practices (Bell, 2003, 2004).

Additionally, we adopted Ahmed's (2006) theorizing about antiracism's nonperformativity in institutional speech acts that make claims about institutions' commitments to racial equality. Ahmed (2006) makes a subtle but precise shift in the definition of a nonperformative speech act by explaining that "the nonperformative does not "fail to act" because of conditions that are external to the speech act; rather, it "works" because it fails to bring about what it names" (p. 105). In other words, nonperformatives establish the illusion of addressing an issue like racism or inequity without ever truly addressing racism or inequity (Jackson, 2018). Because terms like "diversity" in higher education contexts have often come to symbolize "a difference that makes no difference" (Stikkers, 2014, p. 6), it is helpful to consider whether institutions treat issues such as diversity and equity as "more than a bureaucratic educational policy agenda and whether they truly make an impact on promoting equalities amongst ... groups" (Kimura, 2014, p. 525).

There is an apparent distinction between "what diversity is meant to mean, is meant to bring about, and what it actually brings about or has come to mean" (Marten, 2016, p. 128). Like the speeches examined by Squire et al. (2019), strategic plans often put forth concern around certain issues while concurrently protecting the authors for doing what they state. We cannot merely take texts such as strategic plans at face value; to assess what these texts do, they have to be followed to see what changes and actions support the words included (Ahmed, 2006). Accordingly, we sought to highlight the nonperformative discourses of how SLGBs allude to or describe inequity issues without committing resources or articulating plans on how to address the identified injustices.

A myopic focus on interest convergence as a way toward equity is insufficient (Driver, 2011). At the same time, an overemphasis on nonperformativity tries to separate what important institutional documents name from the norms and modes of production/(re) articulation (Almeida, 2016). Grounded in interest convergence, SLGBs seek to maximize the benefits of their racial advantage (Driver, 2011); rooted in nonperformativity, SLGBs indicate of the ways in which words like "equity" and "diversity" might illuminate how organizations are centered in whiteness and privilege individuals already in positions of power (Ahmed, 2006). The nonperformativity of strategic plans must be called out because it influences the intermediary role of pivotal entities like SLGBs in "profound, systematic, and detrimental ways" (Pereira, 2019, p. 358). Nonperformativity may also indicate how the contents (and often related inaction) of strategic plans may not move the needle on equity because of the lack of interest convergence between those with the power and those seeking more equitable opportunities within higher education. Recognizing the strengths and limitations of interest convergence and nonperformativity both individually and collectively, the research question that guided this inquiry was as follows*: How are equity and diversity discourses constituted in the strategic plans of SLGB?*

Research Design

To most effectively respond to the research question, this study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is primarily concerned with how power shows up in discourses that inform and shape how people interact with each other and within society (Blommaert, 2005). CDA assumes a connection between the use of language and the social and political contexts in which the language occurs. We leveraged CDA because it allowed us to analyze the text and language of the boards' strategic plans within their social context and consider how these plans can shape and be shaped by said context. Additionally, CDA centers issues of identity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, identity, etc.) and how identity is constructed in and carried by the texts. This study further synthesizes CDA with Fairclough's (2010) argument that there are three dimensions of discourse for analysts to consider.

The first dimension is "discourse-as-text," which includes the characteristics and format of material discourse artifacts. In this study, each institution's strategic plans serve as the unit of analysis within this domain. The second dimension is "discourse-as-discursive-practice," or the way discourse is "produced, circulated, and consumed in society" and how a text is perceived and used within a space. Strategic plans are a genre of text built on assumptions of planning and intentionality, as shared in the introduction (Dooris et al., 2004). The final dimension is "discourse-as-social-practice" or the "ideological and hegemonic processes in which discourses operate (Blommaert, 2005, pp. 28–29). We contend that as political intermediaries,[1] SLGBs must find ways to communicate their monitoring and control capacities (i.e., social practice) to elected officials, institutions, and citizens. Simultaneously, the discourse around equity and inclusion creates opportunities for SLGBs to address these issues with the strategic plan as a particular mechanism to convey institutional commitment.

Data Sources

Data for this project come from a novel data set the authors manually focused on SLGBs' strategic plans. Our process for deciding which states to include was informed by Knott and Payne's (2004) study that organized SLGBs into three tiers based on their regulatory power (i.e., high, moderate, minimal) over budget and program approval. We leveraged their study as an organizing mechainsim because, to date, it has been one of the few empirical attempts to identify similarities and differences between the functions of SLGBs. Further, we contend elsewhere that SLGBs with high regulatory authority are more likely to influence institutional culture and policymaking around issues of diversity, equity, and social justice (Morgan et al., 2021). Consequently, we focus on the publicly available strategic plans of 33 high regulatory power states (see Table 1), as categorized by Knott and Payne (2004). Table 1 offers the state characteristics and strategic plan details (e.g., title of the strategic plan, duration of the plan, and the political party in control of the state) of the plans included in this study. To qualify for analysis, strategic plans had to come directly from a state-level governing board, or else the plan was removed from the analysis. We also did not include the strategic plans of SLGBs that exclusively govern 2-year institutions out of an effort to not conflate nor subsume the unique focus and realities of these sorts of boards and institutions with the scope of state-wide or 4-year institution boards. Each strategic plan was downloaded from the organization's website and uploaded into Dedoose qualitative analysis software for examination.

Data Analysis

Discourse and CDA

When examining discourse, it is important to recognize that the words used in policies are not simply rhetoric (Saarinen, 2008); they are documented intrusions into practice (Ball, 2015). According to Ball (2015, p. 311), "discourse is the conditions under which certain statements are considered to be the truth." How we see the world is informed by text, and these texts impact the environment; "policy discourse describes, conceptualizes and creates actions in the world" (Saarinen, 2008, p. 725). When we use discourse in this article, we intend it as the various social, economic, recorded cultural practices (Fairclough, 2010) that manifest in the our nation's common practices, procedures, and politics within the U.S. (Keller, 2006).

There are theoretical, methodological, historical, and political implications of CDA (Fairclough, 2010; Meyer, 2001). Theoretical implications connect to social action; methodological perspectives support claims regarding the perpetuation of social structures; historical implications highlight the utility of texts as measures of change; politically, CDA is tied to critical objectives regarding social control that is reproduced (Saarinen, 2008). Discourse analysis is useful for "tracking the policy changes, raising issues and describing them, [and] identifying, understanding and explaining some of the developments that lead up to the implementation of the policies and the ideologies which are embedded in the debates" (Saarinen, 2008, p. 725). In this study, we put forth that strategic plans have greater influence beyond their symbolic purposes based on how they present prevailing discourses. We attempt to identify a more nuanced understanding of state-level governing boards.

The methodology here runs parallel to prior work on SLGBs and strategic plans, which served as the larger study from which this piece was extracted (Morgan et al., 2021). The larger study used collaborative governance and the policy streams model of decentralization agenda setting to identify and contextualize potential dimensions for SLGBs to exert influence as policy actors working to achieve institutional and state-level priorities. Following Fairclough's (2010) process, we engaged in an initial descriptive reading of the plans as a "typical reader" (Huckin, 1997). Reading as a "typical reader" allowed for each member of the research team (assigned six or seven strategic plans) to individually decipher and compare the documents within the context of the state's unique mission, plan, and purpose (Huckin, 1997). At least two team members read each strategic plan. The assigned strategic plans were coded based on the "typical reader" lens, which would serve as the basis for the secondary analysis.

In particular, coders focused on: unearlthing the mission/vision of each document; stated goals and outcomes; the intended audience; identified accountability mechanisms; mention of concepts or topics related to diversity, social justice, equity, and inclusion; as well as partnerships to advance specified outcomes between various stakeholders.

[1] Intermediaries operate between at least two parties to facilitate change of those parties (Honig, 2004)

Table 1
State Characteristics and Strategic Plan Details

State	Strategic plan title	Plan duration	Race[a]	Educational attainment[b]	Household income	State party control[c]
AL	Building Human Capital	2018–2030	57.21%–73.37%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
AZ	Impact Arizona	Unspecified	<57.21%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,380	Republican
AR	Closing the Gap 2020	2015–2020	73.37%–81.32%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
CO	Colorado Rises	Unspecified	57.21%–73.37%	>63.7%	>$62,518	Divided
CT	BOR Mission, Vision, Goals	Unspecified	57.21%–73.37%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,380	Divided
FL	2025 System Strategic Plan	2016–2025	<57.21%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Republican
GA	Strategic Plan and Public Agenda	2013–2018	<57.21%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Republican
ID	Board Mission and Strategic Plan	2018–2023	>81.32%	59.9%–63.7%	< $48,393	Republican
IL	Illinois Public Agenda for College and Career Success	Unspecified	57.21%–73.37%	59.9%–63.7%	$48,380–$53,571	Divided
IN	Reaching higher, delivering value	2016–2020	73.37%–81.32%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
IA	Strategic Plan	2016–2021	>81.32%	59.9%–63.7%	< $48,380	Republican
KS	Foresight	2010–2020	73.37%–81.32%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,401	Republican
KY	Stronger by Degrees	2016–2021	>81.32%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
LA	Strategic Plan	2014–2019	57.21%–73.37%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
ME	University of Maine Strategic Plan	Unspecified	>81.32%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Divided
MD	The USM through 2020	2010–2020	<57.21%	>63.7%	>$62,518	Divided
MA	The Degree Gap	Unspecified	73.37%–81.32%	>63.7%	>$62,518	Divided
MN	Educating for the Future	Unspecified	>81.32%	>63.7%	$48,380–$53,571	Divided
MO	Preparing Missourians to Succeed	2015–2025	73.37%–81.32%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Republican
MT	MUS Strategic Plan	Unspecified	>81.32%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,403	Divided
NV	Expanding by Careers	Unspecified	<57.21%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Divided
NC	Higher Expectations	2017–2022	57.21%–73.37%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,411	Divided
ND	Daring to be Great	2017–2022	>81.32%	>63.7%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
OR	Strategic Plan	2016–2020	73.37%–81.32%	>63.7%	$48,380–$53,571	Democrat
RI	Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Public Education	2015–2020	73.37%–81.32%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Democrat
SC	Leveraging Higher Education	Unspecified	57.21%–73.37%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Republican
SD	South Dakota Board of Regents Strategic Plan	2014–2020	>81.32%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,408	Republican
TN	Tennessee Succeeds	Unspecified	73.37%–81.32%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
UT	A State of Opportunity	2015–2025	73.37%–81.32%	>63.7%	>$62,518	Republican
VT	Strategic Planning	Unspecified	>81.32%	59.9%–63.7%	<$48,380	Divided
WV	Leading the Way	2013–2018	>81.32%	<56.59%	$53,571–$62,518	Republican
WI	2020 FWD	2016–2020	>81.32%	56.59%–59.9%	$48,380–$53,571	Republican
WY	Breaking Through	2017–2022	>81.32%	>63.7%	>$62,518	Republican

Note. Race, educational attainment, and household income data are from the 2016 American Community Survey 1-year supplemental estimates. BOR = board of regents; USM = University System of Maryland; MUS = Montana University System.
[a] Race: Non-Hispanic White. [b] Educational attainment: some college or more. [c] State control: "When the same party holds both legislative chambers and the governorship, that party has state control. When any of those three points of power is held by another party, state control is divided." Data from (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020).

From the individual codes previously established in the "typical reader" segment of the analysis, through consensus building during team meetings, we established ten overarching codes to offer a more rigorous codebook for a secondary level of analysis (Huckin, 1997). The ten codes captured what we described internally as debated concepts between various strategic plans (e.g., how the plans portrayed students' identities, the identification of geographic differences within a state, the contested role of higher education, the debated public purpose of higher education, etc.). Each member of the research team used the codebook to guide a second critical review of six to seven new strategic plans, focusing on how these plans were "either inconsistent in connecting goals to action or lacking tangible execution plans based on the codebook" (Rall et al., 2020). More specifically, in this round of coding, we examined nonperformatives or instances of interest convergence within the debated concepts of the strategic plan. we leveraged interest convergence and nonperformativity to tie the data gleaned from the analysis of the strategic plans during the explanatory phase to the systemic practices that work to exclude and reduce the role of historically marginalized populations in higher education. This narrower and more critical read of the plans led to the identification of what we describe as places where equity concerns intersect prevailing discourses in prominent ways that shed equal insight into discursive practices within the strategic plan and the equity (in)action also present.

Although many other discourses were present (see Morgan et al., 2021), we consistently identified these five discourses, with state-specific nuances, across multiple strategic plans. After defining and providing representative examples of the discourse, we highlight if and how the education discourse intersects with prevailing equity and inclusion discourses within our analysis.

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the reliability of the research conducted, data analysis was conducted in two separate stages by five team members. As demonstrated in the data analysis section, no team member coded the same strategic plan twice. Instead, each team member coded a minimum of six strategic plans; two team members analyzed each plan. The purpose of using this approach is to provide this study with a stratification that ensures a robust, unique read of each strategic plan to provide reliability to the data analysis. Validity was

safeguarded by matching research questions to a sound design that thoroughly answered each proposed research question (Lincoln et al., 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The research design synthesizes CDA with Fairclough's (2010) three dimensions of discourse for analysis; by using the two in conjunction with one another, we enhance validity by creating a critical lens through which to view the strategic plans.

Limitations

Lastly, we identify two important limitations. First, the analysis relies solely on the most recent public strategic plan of various states. Not every state has a strategic plan specifically for higher education, nor does each state produce an annual strategic plan. Thus, certain strategic plans might be older than others or in their final year of implementation. Second, our research decision to utilize ten codes creates a limitation itself. These ten codes could limit the study because they do not necessarily acknowledge each state's higher education culture, state-specific wants and needs in education, or local, regional, and national context during the year each plan was released. Using ten codes to analyze and compare strategic plans gives this study a great deal of generalizable data, but it does not explain each state individually.

Findings

As noted in our literature review, the cross-road between postsecondary education governance and moves toward equity and inclusion is still maturing because culturally sustaining governance practices remain inconsistently (or ineffectively) operationalized by those with the most institutional or system-wide power. Our prior work (Morgan et al., 2021) unearthed that SLGBs operate in a policy and governance context that exposes them to myriad discourses, some of which directly deal with postsecondary education (e.g., increasing postsecondary attainment) and others that can be read as potentially more indirect (e.g., state economic impact). Bearing this in mind, the findings from our subsequent CDA reveal that the strategic plans of SLGBs intersect with prevailing equity and inclusion discourses in the broader governance and policy context in subtle but essential ways that begin to highlight how policymakers and policy-enactors are engaging these rapidly evolving language and practice realities. Examples of prevailing equity and inclusion discourses come from a variety of sources including the media, policymakers, researchers, the broader public, college leaders, and students. Examples of these discourses are versions of things such as follows: encouraging credential completion, broad postsecondary education attainment goals, racial equity, first-generation to college access, and affordability concerns, among many others. Therefore, each intersection identified in our analysis and presented below highlights how the content from the SLGB's plans interfaces with popular or trendy equity and inclusion considerations with a critical eye toward the nuances uncovered by viewing the intersection through a CRT or nonperformative lens, per our theoretical framework.

Equity Discourse Intersection: All Jobs and Citizens Matter

A primary discourse across all the strategic plans was a desire to articulate how the state's postsecondary education goals were going to not only be a value-add to the state's economic agenda but particularly consequential, in short the plans capture a state economic impact discourse (Morgan et al., 2021). Yet, a more critical assessment of this sentiment reveals that most plans did not explicitly attempt to intersect their economic focus with equity and inclusion discourses that seek to redress poverty or economic stratification. In these discursive moves, the underlying rationale for improving states' economic and financial status was so that *all/every* citizen(s), rather than particular groups, would benefit. Nevada's plan articulates a key goal of "putting Nevadans Back to Work," and North Carolina's plan states, "Every North Carolinian deserves the opportunity to rise and thrive." Kentucky's plan has a stated objective of "Improv[ing] the diversity and inclusiveness of Kentucky's campuses through the state-wide diversity planning process and related initiatives." The objective offers conflicting strategies of wanting to increase the cultural competence among students, staff, and others so "everyone is welcomed, valued, supported, and accommodated' while also stating a more specific goal of "Increase[ing] the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority students, faculty, and staff." The reliance on the general nature allows legislatures and institutions to read into the specific groups that experience inequities without having to make it a substantive part of the broader appeal to a brighter economic and financial future. Interest convergence is manifest here wherein the interest of increasing the economic prosperity of minoritized individuals in these states is served in the interest of the overall enhancement of the state's economic future (Bell, 1980).

Equity Discourse Intersection: Nonmonetary Benefits, Benefit All

Another prevailing discourse was that postsecondary institutions provide important nonmonetary benefits to states that must also be acknowledged and planned for (Morgan et al., 2021). The intersection here with a prevailing equity discourse was difficult to ascertain in consideration of noneconomic factors because it is inherently predicated on the notion that these nonmonetary benefits are positive for all individuals. The absence of an intersection with equity discourses in this domain is all the more striking because the plans that do name inequitable education outcomes frame the issue in terms of access, attainment, or career success, but not in terms of the nonmonetary benefits. For instance, Minnesota's plan notes:

> While the state moves closer to meeting its attainment goal, populations of color have a longer path to reach 70 percent. Among the total people of color population, only 41 percent have a postsecondary credential. It is very important that racial disparities are closed. Getting to 70 percent requires working together to address attainment trends among our most vulnerable communities and addressing Minnesota's demographic shifts.

Iowa's plan asserts that the SLGB will "ensure all students have equitable access to curricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular experiences to support their learning goals" and insists that institutions make annual reports on "the number of students participating and their demographics." Yet, only if a student articulates nonmonetary outcomes as part of their learning goals would resources be put forth to help them realize the aim of equitable access. Iowa's SLGB also espouses "service that fulfills public purpose" and "civic responsibility that enhances quality of life" as part of its mission statement. Though this "service" and "civic responsibility" are

espoused, the reality exists that few strategies were provided in the plan to advance this particular discourse. Due to this it is reasonable to conclude that this discourse serves a nonperformative function (Ahmed, 2006). This specific discourse's general and surface-level inclusive nature, by presenting rhetoric unsupported by actual resource supported strategies, indicates concern for achieving these outcomes without materially supporting equitable ends. The messages support equity in words but without the investment in material resources.

Equity Discourse Intersection: Intentional Representation (Addressing Specific Student Populations)

Moving beyond all-student narratives, some states look at the representation of specific student populations. Some plans, such as North Carolina, Indiana, and Florida, look at low-income students. North Carolina's highlights University of North Carolina (UNC) Asheville's advancement via individual determination (AVID) for Higher Education program, which supports Pell-eligible students through college, noting that "Asheville's 2014 AVID Scholars returned for their sophomore year at higher rates than a peer comparison group and passed more of the first-year courses than other students." Additionally, North Carolina's plan addresses goals to, "by fall 2021, increase enrollment of low-income students by 13% over fall 2015 levels ... to reduce the existing participation gap" and "increase the number of low-income graduates by 37% ... over 2015–2016 levels by 2021–2022." Similarly, Florida's plan aspires "to have every university have at least 30% of their undergraduate students receiving a Pell grant." Indiana's plan applauds the work the state has already been doing: "the promise of 4 years of paid college tuition has helped nearly 70,000 low-income Hoosiers pursue higher education."

Some plans discuss the growing population of adult learners: "The State Regents should explore and support strategies that would maximize adult degree completion in Oklahoma," and "more affordable options will be necessary for [Indiana] adults balancing the financial priorities of their family with the cost of returning to college." Oklahoma's SLGB vows "to provide support for our veterans and to address the unique issues they face." Nevada's plan calls attention to the fact that all of the state's public institutions "have offices dedicated to the service of veterans." North Carolina's plan makes specific reference to rural students, aiming to, "by fall 2021, increase enrollment of students from ... [rural] counties by 11% over fall 2016 levels ... to reduce the existing participation gap" and "increase the number of graduates from ... [rural] counties by 20% over 2015–2016 levels by 2021–2022."

Indiana demonstrates intentionality in its strategic plan by "Publishing college completion rates for all student demographic groups annually and state and campus levels." Florida's strategic plan includes populations that have been marginalized in higher education and has dedicated metrics and "... recognizes the important role that nontraditional students play in the current and future landscape of postsecondary education." Florida also highlights students of all socioeconomic strata and minority communities. These SLGBs demonstrate how discourse intersects with equity and inclusion via their strategic plans to demonstrate a focus on representation in myriad forms for various marginalized groups.

Equity Discourse Intersection: But Really, Accountable to Whom?

The challenge with not specifying an entity to whom the plans are accountable allows anyone to read into the plans a sense of responsibility that may not exist. Further, uncertainty regarding accountability may mean that if all of us are accountable, no one is accountable. When sufficient information is given to offer accountability "standards" yet the same text is still ambiguous enough to leave questions about how the standards will be established and by whom, the strategic plans may be void of the planned impact. To illustrate, Alabama's plan conveys the intent to expand "prior learning assessments" to "award college credit and identify business and industry training for which college credit can be awarded." However, this raises equity questions around what type of prior learning will count toward credit, especially given the segregated labor experiences many people experience (Mutz, 2006). Another example was vague notions of accountability that may render certain groups invisible is when states choose metrics that inherently ignore or marginalizes the concerns of minoritized groups. For instance, Kansas' plan, the "University Excellence Profile," highlights a focus on "select rankings, composite financial index, and assessment of economic impact." Without detailing a concern for the outcomes of minoritized populations within these broad metrics, it becomes easy to demonstrate accountability while still not materially changing the realities of populations most in need of help and support. Here, we identify another example of a nonperformative (Ahmed, 2006), wherein the lack of specificity allows SLGBs to appear to be advancing equity efforts while not actually committing resources, or in this instance, metrics to monitor the progress of essential outcomes. This discourse is necessarily related to managerialism which is a conflict of the shape and substance of key facets of education today; strategic planning is limited by the wishful thinking it fuels coupled with the substantive lack of support for its efficacy (Rowe, 2014).

Equity Discourse Intersection: K–12 and Postsecondary Education Coordination

Within the K–12: Postsecondary Education Coordination, the most prevailing discourse across the analyzed state plans is the concept of "achievement gaps" in education. Specifically, within the K–12 coding analysis, equity discourse became a salient intersection to highlight due to higher education's inherent nature of coordinating with K–12 schools. Indiana's strategic plan addresses this concept head-on by stating that:

> Explore college affordability strategies for middle-class Hoosiers, including clear benchmarks for college saving and shifting reliance on student debt ... , promote institutional analysis and action plans to address gaps in student support, e.g., affordable transportation and close-to-campus childcare ... [and] integrate financial literacy courses and instruction as required components of the core curricula for all Indiana high school and college students.

The focus on increasing high school students' access to financial information prior to entering college addresses a larger issue at hand, which is the equity of access to financial aid and information. This discourse specifically addressed middle-class "Hoosiers," the need for institutional analysis to address access and support gaps, and the

integration of financial literacy into Indiana high schools, all of which seek to decrease the achievement gap and increase the anticipated academic trajectory of Hoosier students through K–12 coordination. The aforementioned is not the only example of a state addressing achievement gaps; Oregon addressed the state's issue by stating:

> The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) is dedicated to fostering and sustaining high quality, rewarding pathways to opportunity and success for all Oregonians through an accessible, affordable and coordinated network for educational achievement beyond high school.

While the excerpt does not address K–12 coordination directly, Oregon's strategic plan went on to describe the state's goal of developing a "pipeline" that would ultimately "support colleges and universities in fostering deeper partnerships with school districts and community or regional organizations to improve PreK–12 outcomes." The plan discussed how Oregon would accomplish this by aligning high school and higher education learning standards and outcomes, which can only be done by coordinating Oregon's higher education and K12 education systems.

Discussion

Sociopolitical inequities may be maintained or exacerbated when considerations of interest convergence and patterns of nonperformativity go unnamed, undertheorized, and ultimately depoliticize the study of intermediary work in policymaking (Morgan et al., 2021) and practice (Pereira, 2019). So, the question we explored in this article, "How are equity and diversity discourses operationalized in the strategic plans of SLGBs," is but one question that needs to be answered to address the gaps in knowledge and perspectives of the board's leadership role in advancing equity in higher education. Given the understudied nature of governing boards but the robust literature on educational equity, we take this opportunity to be liberatory and imaginative (King, 2017) in situating the significance of our study.

With a research focus on the process of social change, what stands out from the strategic plans we reviewed is that there are no explicit articulations about how the metrics and dashboards that will be or have been developed to inform the performance of accountability will seek to identify and disrupt inherent and preexisting inequities in data collection or interpretation. In other words, a new materialist interpretation (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010) of our results would argue that it is dangerous to presuppose that accountability efforts as articulated by SLGBs and the metrics that inform them can be disentangled from the prevailing hegemonic norms that are understood to inform interpersonal dynamics but assumed to not exist within constructs that are viewed as technological. For example, assessments should not be assumed to be accessible in the same ways by all students, given concerns around ability (Kimball et al., 2016) and gendered experiences (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). What is at stake if these dynamics are able to take hold in policy and practice on campus in depoliticized ways is the ability "constrain the movement, process, and potentialities for and of social change" (Dixon-Román, 2017, p. 444). Said differently, as some have found with accountability efforts in other educational contexts (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Iverson, 2008), SLGBs could reinforce or exacerbate inequities because of the very way they are initiated. Hence, our study leverages the tools of interest convergence and nonperformativity to underscore the discursive practice of highlighting particular efforts with an eye toward equity (e.g., accountability) that is in the best interest of all students while doing so in a way that reinscribes inequities from the genesis of the action.

Additionally, our findings locate a partnership discourse (think back to the strategic plan from Oregon) that highlights the multiple constituencies to which SLGBs are tethered. In a separate article, we further contextualize the challenging nature of SLGB serving multiple and, at times, competing consciousness (Morgan et al., 2021). Relevant here is how this work is further complicated by the inequities in the K–12 space (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Furthermore, unlike Iverson (2008), who was able to discern "change agents" and "entrepreneurs" as responsible entities for the enactment of the plans, the SLGB strategic plans we reviewed are less insightful in terms of the responsible party for carrying out the equity work. Future research is needed to further consider if the language devoid of accountability metrics in SLGB's strategic plans are connected to which political party controls the state or if SLGBs, regardless of affiliation, simply do not care about or support equity measures. For example, was the strategic plan in Kansas more ineffectual in presenting accountability mechanisms because republicans were in control of the state, and how would the language in Kansas' strategic plan be different if democrats were in the majority? As noted, this enables the plans to engage in nonperformative behavior that does little to address inequities. Only when framed in the broader "all students" discourse was the utility of interest convergence able to highlight the locus of responsibility.

Finally, the above findings demonstrate that we must continue to problematize the notion that institutions do not need to take specific and explicit approaches to making (and implementing) goals and actions for certain constituent groups on campus as articulated in the documents they construct like strategic plans. Tran's (2019) recent essay, which builds on Harris (2019) notion of the "grammars of governance," is an important reminder of why the way things are framed in discursive artifacts matters in the project of educational equity. Tran draws attention to how a North Carolina Supreme Court ruling (State v. Mann) went so far as to assert that slaves were not only subhuman but that they were subproperty in the Court's efforts to justify the ruling of not finding a white slave owner liable for the brutal attack and rape of a slave (Lydia). Because the defendant was renting the victimized slave, the Court had to invoke a subtle shift in how it referred to slaves (i.e., the grammars of governance on race and slavery) "as not only subhuman, but also subproperty to make them even less consequential than property" (Tran, 2019, p. 26). Although chiefly concerned with contemporary school segregation, Tran goes on to make the astute point that:

> Our contemporary vestiges of racial subordination are no longer visceral or bald as de jure segregation or overt forms of racial violence with impunity. Bald assertions of power have been overshadowed by a toupée of social acquiescence to the status quo where there are no longer racists ... in a still deeply racialized world. (p. 26)

Like the work of Tran, it is our fear that at some point the rhetoric that everything and everyone matters will continue to mask the inequities present before, during, and after certain student groups enter higher education. The concern is that an environment focused on blanket goals not disaggregated by group, defaults to the perspective that everything matters. When everything matters, nothing matters,

and instead of focused reform, the solution is hollow (Tierney & Rall, 2018). Simultaneously, it is concerning that while strategic plans have commonly been considered "kitchen sink" documents that include something for everyone, some of the plans we reviewed failed to include considerations of equity at all. Further, even when strategic plans illuminate specific target areas, groups, and populations for improvement, there is ambiguity surrounding accountability. While these plans are improvements on the plans that fail to acknowledge the specific needs of distinct populations, the lack of agency, responsibility, and answerability present a different yet similarly problematic outlook (Mortimer & Sathre, 2007).

The work of governance entities such as SLGBs should be interwoven within both leadership and equity higher education research. Unfortunately, these research trajectories have developed in isolation from one another. Though commitments to equity, inclusion, diversity, and social justice may be articulated and even championed via some strategic plans, without application at the highest level of university control, such promises cannot permeate the core of institutional change (Rall et al., 2022). Among those steps: including equity training in a board's new member orientation; reviewing current practices, policies, and plans for opportunities to advance equity; keeping equity in mind when developing future objectives, and engaging in and requesting equity education and training.

Implications for Policy and Future Research

Given the understudied nature of governing boards and the robust literature on educational equity, we take this opportunity to be liberatory and imaginative (King, 2017) in situating the significance of our study. We recognize that improvement in this area is no simple task; "Equity work has always been fragile in universities" (Blackmore, 2002, p. 425). Our study demonstrates that we need to take the next step beyond mission statements and simply valuing the idea of equity to actually do the work of equity. Moreover, unfortunately, "university administrators and leaders across the country . . . often seem more concerned about emphasizing the value of the legal standards than the value of the lives that are being diminished, demeaned, and dehumanized" (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 253). How do we manifest actions that mirror the espoused values found on article? For the development and implementation of policies and procedures for equity to become and remain a priority, decision-making entities such as SLGBs must lead the way. They need to model such practices and make such policies mandatory. According to provincial standards and according to their particular needs and context, boards can develop and implement policies effectively. SLGBs should assist the other campus constituencies in establishing and sharing the requisite information and resources and provide the support and guidance necessary for effective work in this area. Other campus stakeholders should be able to look to SLGBs for leadership and guidance in this area because the board itself should practice the integral focus on equity.

While governing boards' role in advancing equity within higher education is still emerging, there are still several steps boards can take to help create and sustain equitable opportunities on their campuses. First, there is a need to identify other stakeholders who influence policy and outcomes for their role in realizing educational equity. Future research needs to continue to study higher education boards and other high-level leaders to ascertain how these individuals' work can be aligned with a push for equity. Second, it is essential to consider whether interest convergence is positive or detrimental when related to policymaking. Third, it is important to propose longitudinal and multisite case studies in order to help us better understand the breadth and depth of the influence of equity work on real-time practices and experiences. Finally, it is imperative to investigate how the diffusion of equity discourses permeates the policymaking process. We need a sense of whether boards and board professionals possess working knowledge and understanding of equity. While the role of governing boards in advancing equity within higher education is still emerging, there are still a number of steps boards can take to help create and sustain equitable opportunities on their campuses. Future iterations of strategic plans should reflect critical equity issues like those examples presented in our findings and simultaneously avoid ignoring or inadequately addressing equity issues. By identifying (in)equity as a prevalent issue in higher education, gathering the necessary disaggregated and long-term data that elucidates issues of equity, acknowledging what we do not know, and asking important questions will help to fill these gaps and identify other ways of implementing policies and procedures that are more inclusive.

Conclusion

Increased consideration of the influence of governance on organizational outcomes is needed (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001). Institutional leaders have a civic and legal responsibility to ensure equality of opportunity (Massey, 2007). Those at the apex of decision-making in higher education support, empower, prohibit, and constrain activities and actors on campus or campuses (Scott, 2013). Our study of the role of SLGBs as related to the push for equity in higher education further highlights the integral role of intermediaries in bolstering the connections between research, practice, and policy in education. Formal, operational, and personal relationships between boards and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)s reflect and reinforce the interests, standards, goals, and beliefs of postsecondary institutions that advantage some student groups and disadvantage others (Bastedo & Gumport, 2003; Levin, 1991, 2008). Specifically, the governing board, with the support and advice of a chief executive officer, has formal legal authority and institutional responsibility for policy decisions, such as admissions, tuition, budgets, and human resources, among other weighty areas (Association of Governing Boards of Universities & Colleges, 2010; Kaplan, 2005; Tighe, 2003). Boards influence how institutions respond to external and internal pressures to meet the increasing demands and expectations to promote equity and inclusion (Kerr & Gade, 1989).

A focus on equity and social justice is necessary but not sufficient to improve conditions for marginalized populations in higher education. It is imperative to acknowledge, confront, and deal with the discomfort that comes with aligning words and actions. To be sure, "success requires us to be willing to tolerate that discomfort as we learn to communicate, get to know one another, and make deeper efforts to shift the underlying cultures that lead to bias and exclusion" (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 292). Everyone in higher education is not currently engaged in the business of equity. Still, they should be, and we hope that as we continue to locate additional areas of growth at the intersection of governance and equity, they will be. Consider this

your call to action to enter the equity conversation—let us make it a good one.

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