



# **ADVICE FOR EDUCATIONAL COUNSELORS, ADVISORS, FACULTY, AND STAFF :**

## **PAVING THE PATHWAYS TO POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION: REMOVING BARRIERS, & CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR AND FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS TO FLOURISH**

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*Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center*

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## About the Centers

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Great Lakes Equity Center (Center) is an educational research and service center located in Indiana University's School of Education at IUPUI. The Center engages in equity-focused technical assistance and related research with educational and community agencies focused on systemic improvements to serve all learners with particular focus on educational access, participation and outcomes for those who have been historically marginalized. Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center is a project of the Center and provides technical assistance related to educational equity based on student race, national origin, sex, and religion at no cost to public educational agencies throughout its 13-state region in the Midwest and Plains.



## Introduction: Note from the Authors

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As you begin to read this pamphlet, which is paired with a second one directed at high school students, particularly students of Color (SOCs) and those poised to be the first in their families to attend college, it is fair to ask, "Where do these pieces come from?" "Why should we listen to you?" So it follows that we should introduce ourselves and explain briefly the challenges that we are trying to address. We should also clarify that while some of this advice pertains to education environments students encounter after high school (i.e., after P-12), the transition to higher education is often fraught, especially for SOCs and high schools sometimes get blamed for not sufficiently helping students get ready when a better explanation of the challenge is the lack of articulation between high school and what comes after. This document is intended to help counselors, educators, and others with roles in various parts of students' transition from high school to postsecondary education to be on 'the same page.'

The lead author of both pieces, Dr. Amanda R. Morales, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning, & Teacher Education (TLTE) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL). For more than a decade, primarily in Kansas and Nebraska, she has studied SOC and prospective first-generation college students' (FGCS) access to college. While she has particularly focused on diversifying who becomes K-12 educators, her broader inquiry has focused on the 'three R's' (recruitment, retention, and rhetoric) that bring SOCs and FGCSs to postsecondary institutions and then enable them to stay and thrive irrespective of field of study. This line of inquiry has included noting that for both financial reasons and issues of proximity to family, SOCs and FGCSs often begin their postsecondary journeys at community colleges and later transfer to 4-year institutions to pursue bachelor's degrees. This means the considerations of high school teachers and guidance counselors should often anticipate not just the transition from high school to college, but also the transition from a 2-year



## Introduction: Note from the Authors (cont.)

school to a 4-year school. It also means 4-year schools need to consider not only how to welcome SOCs and FGCSs directly from high school, but also as transfers from 2-year programs. While Dr. Morales' recommendations are grounded by more than a decade of inquiry, they are also grounded by autobiography. Her path to becoming a tenured professor at a research-intensive university began as an FGCS/SOC at Barton County Community College (Kansas) and later a transfer to Kansas State University. Indeed that autobiography explains her use of the first-person singular in the advice pamphlet intended directly for students and her characterizations of her recommendations as *consejos* (advice).

Dr. Edmund 'Ted' Hamann is a Professor also in TLTE department at UNL. He is coauthor of both pieces (i.e., this one and the advice to students), although to preserve the feeling of direct advice to SOC and FGCS students from 'one who has been there' (i.e., Dr. Morales), his role on the brief for students is uncredited. For more than two decades Dr. Hamann has studied high school reform and local school district responses to demographic change, particularly to the growth in Spanish-speaking immigrant enrollment. In 2016 he became an Equity Fellow with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (the producers of these resources). In 2020 the American Educational Research Association (AERA) honored his career achievements by naming him an AERA Fellow.

In the pages that follow, we distinguish our advice into four categories or themes—Preparation, Recruitment, Retention, and Transfer. In each case, it is worth having high school teachers, counselors, and students know more about what can come next, including possible pitfalls that might be encountered by an SOC if/when they make it to higher education only to encounter a setting that seems unprepared to fully welcome them and/or otherwise retain them so that their studies culminate in earning associates and/or bachelors degrees. We wanted to clarify that the advice shared here is research based, hence the introduction of some key terminology and the inclusion of various citations, but we recognize at the same time that such academic writing can feel less accessible. So we include a list of key terms that are further defined (see pp. 4-5) and we point to additional syntheses of research at the end that we call "Additional Resources for Students and Families."

We are aware that students of any background can struggle with the transition from secondary to higher education, but we are equally aware that certain students struggle more often for multiple reasons. FGCS cannot readily turn to family members for familiar advice about higher education because, per definition, FGCS do not have family



## Introduction: Note from the Authors (cont.)

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members with such experience. In turn, the strategies of welcome and the norms of operation in higher education settings often were not initially designed with SOCs in mind and thus are not as intentionally responsive to such students as to the primarily White students who they were originally designed for. This pamphlet attempts to 'level the playing field' by giving different education stakeholders a common ground to discuss high school-to-higher education transitions.



## Key Terms

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**Anti-Racism:** The policy or practice of opposing racism and promoting racial justice. A commitment to dismantling racism at all levels (Kendi, 2019)

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies:** A commitment to foster and sustain “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation”. It challenges school systems and all actors within them to sustain the “lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 1)

**Deficit Thinking:** When educators and or administrators assume that some children are inferior or less than based on their cultural, linguistic or experiential backgrounds (Nieto & Bode, 2018). This deficit thinking “blames the underachievement of ethnic minority groups in schools on perceived deficiencies relating to the minority students themselves, their families and their cultures” (Gonzalez et al., 2009, p. 666).

**Equity Literacy:** “Equity literacy is a comprehensive approach for creating and sustaining equitable schools. The foundations of equity literacy are (1) a commitment to deepening individual and institutional understandings of how equity and inequity operate in organizations and societies, and (2) the individual and institutional knowledge, skills, and will to vigilantly identify inequities, eliminate inequities, and actively cultivating equity” (Gorski, 2020, para. 1).

**Funds of Knowledge:** The “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing” or “sources of knowledge available to students and households, apart from formal educational sources” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 669).

**Gatekeeping Courses:** Those courses that often create barriers for students due to lack of educational opportunities or access to quality curriculum and instruction in those areas (e.g. mathematics and the sciences).

**Opportunity Gaps in Education:** Gaps in access to foundational social, economic, and educational resources needed for well-being across the contexts of schools, communities, and society writ large. This extends beyond safe schools, quality teachers, relevant curricula. It includes but is not limited to: taken-for-granted resources such as quality health-care, food, shelter, and transportation (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006).



## Key Terms

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**Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs):** Predominantly White Institutions are those social, governmental, and educational institutions that were designed by, designed for, and predominantly populated by individuals from White non-Hispanic heritages.

**Racial Micro-Aggressions:** Racial microaggressions are “commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of Color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271).

# Four Dimensions of Improved High School-to- Higher Education Transition



## Dimension One: PREPARATION

### Preparing your Institution for Students of Color

- Establish and make public a clear and collective vision for *why* your program, department, and/or institution is committed to supporting Students of Color (SOCs) and First-Generation College Students (FGCSs) as well as how your team(s) will deal with issues of equity as they arise – particularly among students who have experienced *opportunity gaps* (Carter & Welner, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

- Strengthen administrative, instructional, advisory, and counseling services by



**Image Description:** [Aerial view of a group of people of varying ethnic & racial backgrounds, and gender expressions, having a meeting, sitting around a table filled with office supplies.]

providing ongoing professional development on *anti-racism* (Kendi, 2019), *culturally sustaining pedagogies* (Paris, 2014), cumulative advantage (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006), the *educational debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2006), *racial micro-/macro-aggressions* (Sue, 2010) and *equity literacy* (Gorski, 2016). This will increase faculty and staff

knowledge of how social, historical, and institutional structures have and can either limit or accelerate SOC and

FGCS opportunities in higher education. These ongoing critical and self-reflective learning opportunities can increase staff/faculty awareness of their own biases as they learn to name and unpack them. They can also give faculty/staff strategies to dismantle *deficit thinking* and change other damaging behaviors in themselves, colleagues, and those they supervise.

- Establish effective information distribution within and across departments and institutions related to SOC and FGCS programs. Clear communication protocols across campuses and key offices is vital to ensure students at all levels (high school, community college, university) experience smooth transitions into, and across, support units, programs, and institutions.



## Dimension One: PREPARATION (cont.)

- Evaluate program, department, and college-level requirements for admission and continuation within your programs. Consider what ways your current guidelines, deadlines, etc. might be reinforcing inequities and limiting access and persistence for SOC and FGCSs. Evaluate your procedures. What can be done at the structural level to remove unnecessary obstacles? Consider establishing metrics that allow for students to demonstrate their strengths and potential in various ways beyond just grades and standardized test scores. Create opportunities for SOCs and FGCSs to draw on and display their *funds of knowledge* (Gonzalez et al., 2005).
- Explore funding opportunities for targeted and general programs in support of SOCs and FGCSs. Explore partnership opportunities within local and regional communities. Related to teacher education, partnerships with districts, businesses and foundations located in regions with teacher shortages can lead to financial and programmatic support for SOCs and FGCSs (e.g., ‘grow-your-own’ programs).
- Remember that in most cases, you are “selling” a student’s entire family on your institution. Family support and buy-in is often central to a student’s decision to attend a post-secondary institution, especially for SOCs and FGCSs, and it can stay central for their persistence. Therefore, it is important to consider potential questions and concerns that address and go beyond basic things like financial aid, academic programs, and housing. Families need to trust that their children will be safe and well taken care of in your community and on your campus; that they will have someone there for them who sees them and understands them. While in one way this is true for all families and parents, remember that for families of FGCSs what you offer may be unfamiliar. Additionally, long histories of structural racism can make SOC’s family members more hesitant towards and less trusting of PWIs.
- Remember that high schools are often the settings where FGCS and SOCs are likely to first hear about your program. Make sure that high school teachers, guidance counselors, students and their families can gain understanding of your programs while learning about them in high school settings.





## Dimension Two: RECRUITMENT

### Successfully Recruiting and Enrolling of Students of Color

- Use paid advertisements and announcements via popular local radio and television outlets (e.g., Univision and local Spanish radio) in the languages of the communities from which you hope to recruit.
- Tailor recruitment and orientation systems to the audiences you hope to serve. Seek out feedback and suggestions from current SOCs and their families, and be tuned in to listen. What are/were their questions and greatest concerns as incoming students? What recruitment strategies worked to sell them on your program or institution? What were/are the most common short-term and long-term needs of potential SOCs that you can respond to? If you can, see if you can also get data from prospective SOCs who chose not to come to your institution. Why didn't they pick you?
- Organize faculty field trips out to visit schools and after-school programs within *Communities of Color*. Also, establish campus visit opportunities for SOCs and FGCSs to come explore your programs, department, and college. Schedule targeted open house and orientation sessions for specific groups (e.g., non-traditional students, rural students, multilingual Latina/o/x/ students) that would allow you to tailor your messaging to their specific needs.
- Create opportunities to welcome parents and family members to join activities. Pay attention to when and how long sessions are scheduled. Be willing to offer weekend and evening activities for those families who cannot take time off during the workday to attend a recruitment event. Have an expansive definition of who counts as family—much younger siblings and/or extended family may be accompanying the prospective students you're targeting. Ensure that all feel welcome by incorporating them in the recruitment experience.
- Involve members of minoritized student organizations to inform the planning of, and to participate in, recruitment efforts. Create opportunities for potential students and their families to hear voices of other SOCs and to *see themselves* within your department and institution.

*Image Description: [Group of Black students of varying gender expressions, standing in a line and smiling.]*



## Dimension Two: RECRUITMENT (cont.)

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- Provide information and recognition for supportive faculty and staff members and let families know who they are! Bring them in to talk to potential students and families. Faculty and staff of Color on your campus are particularly important to make note of as their perspectives and sheer existence on your campus speaks volumes about the type of institution you are or are aspiring to become.
- Be specific. Print admissions requirements, required courses, and key deadlines on program fliers and advising documents. Providing clear information on paper (and online) about financial aid and scholarship opportunities is essential.
- Be inclusive. Provide information about admission requirements, deadlines, curriculum and course requirements, financial aid, housing/dining services, campus resources (e.g., library, multicultural center, tutoring center) and community resources (churches, stores, centers) in both English and students' heritage languages.
- Create clear directional signage to assist students in locating important offices, and for outlining key *procedures* that they need to be aware of. These should be provided in multiple languages. Post them within your buildings, especially during campus visits, move-in days, parent visitation days, and at the beginning of classes each semester.
- Make sure that your materials are available to high school stakeholders (i.e., teachers and counselors) who are already working with the students you are trying to recruit. If high school personnel are students' trusted sources of information, then make sure these personnel have the information about your program that they need.



## Dimension Three: **RETENTION**

### Creating Environments & Opportunities for Successful Retention & Graduation

- When rigid requirements are unavoidable, such as the state required [CORE exam](#) within the field of teacher preparation, communicate these requirements early on, so that students and families are aware of and able to plan for them. This includes letting them know if these requirements include an extra cost (like an examination



*Image Description: [Feminine-presenting student of Color in a hijab, wearing a graduation cap and gown. Student is smiling while looking over their shoulder.]*

fee). Planning for college starts in high school (or before). Make sure that advice and information about your program that students and their families are accessing includes this information even before students transition to your higher education setting.

- Tests like the SAT and ACT have troubling patterns in terms of who scores well (Freedle, 2003). To help 'level the playing field' assure that SOCs and FGCS's have access to anxiety-reducing test-prep classes. By developing and providing effective tutoring and test preparation sessions early and often, you can ensure students to have ample time to complete and pass the required exams.

- In relation to required exams such as the Praxis CORE exam for teacher education, there are many free and economic resources to use/share with students such as those offered directly from [ETS](#) and from [Khan Academy CORE Praxis Prep](#) (tutoring videos via YouTube). Institutions also can partner with formal teacher education associations in their state (such as the [Nebraska State Education Association \(NSEA\)](#) who often offer effective training sessions.
- To enhance retention, when possible, structure living-learning communities in dorms based on students' needs, interests, major, age, and current life situations. As the work of the Posse Foundation and other efforts have shown, SOCs and FCGSs are more likely to make it to graduation if they have a peer group for support instead of feeling isolated and misunderstood.
- Establish warm, welcoming spaces for studying and hanging out within your



## Dimension Three: RETENTION (cont.)

department that are easily accessible to SOCs and FGCSs. Having frequent exposure to faculty and staff lessens the mystique surrounding “those in power.” Students will have increased chances to interact with their professors in more authentic and informal situations, which often increases students’ comfort level, and the likelihood that they might reach out to someone if they need assistance.

- Provide for educational goal-setting discussions, early and often. This includes clearly articulated *long-range plans* with course progressions, milestones, and deadlines noted. This also includes conversations about setting a study schedule each semester to ensure students are building in sufficient study time to be successful academically.
- Engage in ongoing and direct conversations with SOCs and FGCSs about finances and financial aid to ensure that they understand tuition, fees, housing, and book expenses, as well as their financial aid packages. When needed, work with them to establish a budget and talk about making wise money choices for meeting short-term and long-term needs/goals.
- Explain locations and accessibility to campus resources (computers, printers, gym, library, food pantry, etc.). Create opportunities for them to physically visit these locations and explore the services with a peer or in small groups, when possible. Often, SOC and FGCSs do not utilize resources available to them because they are fearful or uncertain about where to go or how to access them (Kim, Morales, & Avalos, 2016).
- Clearly outline information on tutoring services (when and how to access them). Create opportunities for students to physically visit the locations and explore the services with a peer or as a group as well. This will lessen the ambiguity and any stigma associated with using tutoring. (Indeed successful students often extensively use tutor supports.)
- As the profile of the college-going population continues to change (becoming older, more “non-traditional”, more ethnically diverse), so should our perceptions, services and procedures. Evaluate the age, ethnicity, language, and parental status of your current and potential student enrollment. Consider providing innovative services such as language translation support (during campus visits and enrollment/move-in days) for multilingual families as well as affordable child-care for students who are parents.



## Dimension Three: RETENTION (cont.)

- Create opportunities for SOCs and FGCSs to build community with students like them in your program, department, and/or institution. Hosting events and establishing student organizations tailored for SOCs and FGCSs are important. These affinity spaces can buffer against feelings of isolation, loneliness, and marginalization often experienced by minoritized students within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and can serve as powerful tools for retention.
- If students are part of a cohort program, try to cluster students in similar general education classes, so they can rely on each other for information sharing and support when needed.
- For multilingual learners, provide opportunities for intensive English practice through peer collaboration (buddies), but also identify on and off-campus opportunities where their multilingual skills can be further developed and applied.
- Evaluate textbook requirements and expenses associated with your programs frequently. Consider the overall cost of your programs when textbooks expenses are factored in and determine if and where changes can be made.



*Image Description: [Masculine-presenting Black young adult student sitting in a chair, reading a book in braille. ]*



## Dimension Four: Transfer

### Additional Considerations for Supporting Transfer Student Success

- Build and maintain positive relationships with local and regional community colleges and trade schools (2-year institutions). They likely have and will continue to enroll increasing numbers of SOCs and FGCSs. Demonstrate that your administrators, student support services staff, and faculty value their expertise working with these populations. Be authentic and open to learning from them and listening to their experiences and ideas. They want their students to succeed at their institutions—and then yours. In turn, make sure that students in high school know how to attend a 2-year institution (community college) and then transfer into your 4-year school, so that such a pathway is a well understood plan from the moment a student first embarks upon it.
- Demonstrate that your department and college/university is committed to being team players within a true partnership by sharing insights and opportunities when they arise. Consider power dynamics and the positionality of the program and/or 2-year institution you are working with (relative to your program and/or institution). Make sure you are sharing power and resources equitably whenever possible.
- Streamline procedures for transfer admission, financial aid, and enrollment (limit the amount of paperwork and “red tape” required) for students to successfully transfer into your institution.
- Establish generous course transferability policies and efficient and clearly delineated articulation agreements between institutions. Special attention should be given to course requirements within your program(s), and a course-by-course equivalency matrix should be created and updated annually to ensure transfer students know which courses will transfer as equivalent to specific requirements, moving them forward towards earning their desired bachelor’s degree. Note that students sometimes earn college credit from dual-enrollment programs while still in high school. Make sure your program has means and methods to count such credits so that students are not surprised by learning that something doesn’t ‘count’ that they were long assured would do so.

*Image Description: [View from under of several students of varying ethnic & racial backgrounds, and gender expressions, standing in a circle with overlapping hands. They are looking down, smiling.]*



## Dimension Four: Transfer (cont.)

- Maintain well-defined and consistent communication protocol between instructional, administrative, and student support services faculty and staff across partner institutions.
- As part of an effective partnership, establish a co-advising model with counselors and faculty advisors at the 2-year institution and your institution. This will ensure clear communication of transfer admission and course requirements, as well as key deadlines and milestones to be prepared for early on in a transfer students' post-secondary career.
- As mentioned previously, institutions that are committed to addressing access and opportunity gaps for minoritized students must be willing to bridge those gaps with the necessary supports. For example, it is helpful to collaborate with 2-year partner institutions to provide test preparation support to students who plan to transfer to your institution. Entrance exams, such as the Praxis CORE, can be challenging and expensive. Providing sessions on-site at students' current 2-year institutions can better prepare students, increasing their likelihood of passing the exam in a timely manner.
- Focus on acceleration, not remediation. Implement best-practice strategies and early interventions for success in “*gatekeeping*” courses. For example, when SOCs and FGCSs are part of a targeted program (e.g., a grow-your-own-teacher program) consider cohorting students when possible. This will increase the likelihood that students can provide contextualized support to one another. This can also create opportunities to offer group tutoring more efficiently, when needed.
- When SOCs and FGCSs are part of a targeted transfer program, they will have some different needs than traditional, 4-year, full-time students. Therefore, program leadership can/should conduct frequent cohort meetings (open to students' entire family and at convenient times). These types of semester check-ins not only serve as an important information-sharing and accountability mechanism, but they also build cohesion among the group and ensure students are maintaining forward momentum.
- To ensure inclusivity, key information sessions designed for SOCs and FGCS within transfer programs should be conducted in English *and* the students' heritage languages when possible, and programs should offer childcare during these sessions when needed.



## Dimension Four: Transfer (cont.)

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- Because 2-year college student profiles vary greatly (e.g., from full-time traditional students to part-time, non-traditional, vocational, certificate-only, and transfer students), 2-year institutions often struggle to meet student graduation metrics. Though community colleges and trade schools might feel obligated to encourage their students to complete an associate degree before transferring, this is sometimes not in the best interest of university-transfer students. However, the bottom line is when students transfer without completing an associate degree or certificate, this can count against the 2-year institutions' metrics. Therefore, universities can support students' needs while also mitigating this issue for their 2-year institution partners by establishing *reverse transfer agreements* ([National Student Clearinghouse](#)). This includes implementing mechanisms to ensure that credits earned at the university (that fulfill missing AA degree requirements) are transferred back to the 2-year partner institution when applicable. This kind of system is a win-win for both institutions, as it gets the transfer student through their bachelor's degree program most efficiently and results in the student earning both the AA/AS (retrospectively) and the BA/BS degree.





## Summary

While the potential for increased revenue from grant funding and student tuition dollars typically catalyzes most institutional partnerships, for those individuals, programs, and colleges that desire to increase access and create more hopeful futures for the youth of their region, strategic action is key. As change agents we must challenge the status quo, push for the critical examination of longstanding policies and procedures that limit opportunities for minoritized students, and leverage the social, intellectual, experiential and cultural capital present within our communities to reimagine spaces and places in higher education that are affirming and effective for *all* students. That said, by increasing access and improving pathways for SOCs and FGCSs, institutions will certainly stand to gain a great deal. They will benefit from not only the increased student enrollments and the increased capacity to compete for grant dollars, but also from the profound *innovation* that comes from a diversification of ideas, experiences, and relationships fostered within more equitable institutions. The pathways that bring more of this diversity and value to higher education start at high school (or before) and high school stakeholders and high school settings need to be considered not just as sites for recruitment, but also for where kept promises about preparation, retention, and transfer logics all get shared.

### **Additional Resources for Students and Families**

*SET TO GO* (a JED Foundation program for First Generation College Students)

*Coalition for College* (a Coalition of 150 top US colleges and universities)

*Excelencia in Education!* (a Latina-founded and led non-profit research and advocacy organization)

*Guide to Understanding Financial Aid* (resource produced by US News & World Report)

*Where First-Gen Students Can Find Scholarship Help* (resource produced by US News & World Report)

*Image Description: [Shadowed view of people throwing their graduation caps in the sky. A sunset is in the background.]*





## About the Authors

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**Dr. Amanda Morales** is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Teaching, Learning, & Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. A multicultural education specialist and first-generation college student from rural western Kansas, she negotiated the high school to community college to four-year university pathway that she has since endeavored to improve as a vehicle for prospective teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to gain certification. Author of more than a dozen journal articles and book chapters, she is a contributing author to AERA's forthcoming Handbook on Teachers of Color.

**Edmund 'Ted' Hamann** is a Professor in the Dept. of Teaching, Learning, & Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and in his fourth year as an Equity Fellow with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. Currently, President-elect of the American Anthropology Association's Council on Anthropology and Education, he has long used anthropology to consider teacher professional development and school reform and how to improve school responsiveness to transnationally mobile students and their families. In Fall 2019 he completed a Fulbright in Tijuana Mexico studying higher education partnerships for enhancing teacher responsiveness to migration.



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# IMPACT:

*Educate, Engage, Empower — For Equity*



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