



# Expert Spotlight

## Casey Chang

Casey Chang is an Asian American student advocate and transfer student from Mission College to University of California, Berkeley. She has a passion for social justice and advocacy, and she previously served as the student trustee to the West Valley-Mission Community College District Board of Trustees, as well as Vice President of Communication for the Student Senate for California Community Colleges.

Casey is passionate about the importance of representation in higher education leadership and faculty, pointing to several of her own role models as being essential to her success as a transfer student in higher education. The Campaign for College Opportunity interviewed Casey to learn how colleges and universities statewide can affirm the belonging of diverse students in the aftermath of a SCOTUS decision that threatens to erode inclusion on campuses. Learn more in our related publication, [\*How Universities Can Build and Sustain Welcoming and Equitable Campus Environments\*](#).





## The Importance of Representation

I am a transfer student from Mission College in the Bay Area to University of California, Berkeley, forging my path to my bachelor's degree as an Asian American woman pursuing a STEM major. I am also a Student Member of the California Community Colleges Board of Governors, where I advocate for 2 million students attending 116 unique colleges across the state.

Representation in leadership is personal and important to me. As a representative of millions of students, I deeply care about the experiences of students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. My greatest hope for all 2 million of us, plus the generations of community college students to come, is that we are able to succeed thanks to the careful equity-minded guidance of leaders who reflect us.

## Celebrating Our Diversity: California's Youth in Community College Enrollment

Serving on the Board of Governors, I can't help but feel great pride for our community college system. We are the largest, most diverse system of higher education in the country! As of 2021, over two-thirds of community college students in California are Latinx, Black, Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI), and American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN). This very closely mirrors California's youth ages 18 - 24.

# Addressing Disparities: Leadership Representation in Community Colleges

How does the community college system fare in terms of representation in its leadership positions? When the Campaign for College Opportunity first set out to [examine representation in higher education leadership in 2017](#), they found alarming trends: community college leaders across the board did not reflect the rich diversity of California. Looking at the data five years later, as I examine my own experiences on campus, the same holds true. Though some progress has been made, Latinx, Black, Asian American and NHPI, and AIAN Californians are still left out from critical leadership positions. These are people who shape curriculum, interact with students daily, shape campus climates, and do so much more.

When students like me are not reflected in leadership, we must ask: what kind of message are we sending to students, and what does that indicate about our values? Despite increased diversity within California's community college leadership, disparities persist. While Asian American and NHPI representation on the Board of Governors and academic senate has improved, there remains a struggle to adequately reflect the state's share of Asian American and NHPI youth among district trustees and campus senior leadership.



Similarly, Latinx representation has made impressive gains on the Board of Governors and academic senate, yet remains underrepresented in campus senior leadership and tenured faculty roles, failing to match the 47% Latinx student population. Meanwhile, Black Californians, who comprise 5% of student enrollment and 6% of the state's college-aged youth, are better represented within the California Community Colleges' campus-level leadership but remain underrepresented at the district level. White leaders continue to dominate community college leadership. Although white students make up nearly a quarter (24%) of the student population, they are significantly overrepresented in district, campus senior, faculty, and academic senate leadership, with all leadership bodies except the Board of Governors remaining at least 50% white five years later.



## Gender Representation

In 2017, women were underrepresented in California Community Colleges' leadership, holding less than half of most positions, despite being 53% of the student body. Over the next five years, representation improved, with notable increases of 16 percentage points on the Board of Governors and 24% in the academic senate, while campus senior leadership saw a modest 1% growth. Today, women make up 55% of the student body, and 50 out of 116 community college campuses are led by women, highlighting progress in gender representation.



## A Call to Action

While we see important progress, there are still significant disparities in the way of making Latinx, Black, Asian American and NHPI, and AIAN students and scholars feel fully included within our system. As an Asian American woman, I saw that firsthand. I served as a student trustee in my local community college district. The contrast between the district leadership at Mission College and the diversity of the Asian and Latinx communities the campus is surrounded by is stark. This is a leadership body that has a great impact, whose work is to benefit the community and students. If we don't reflect our community, our students, or their lived experiences, how can we say we are adequately serving them? While I celebrate the gains we have made to increase gender diversity in community college leadership, with few women faculty that I can look up to, it is hard to make those meaningful connections in a field already dominated by men.





## The Impact of Diverse Leadership on Student Success

When our progress is limited, we send a message of exclusion—a message about who belongs in college, who students have access to, and what resources are available to them. This ultimately shapes their experiences as they try to navigate an already difficult journey. As a student member on the Board of Governors, I feel a big responsibility for making sure that ALL students are supported to succeed, and that includes ensuring we have the right leadership to support our students. So, when I see data like this, like the fact that Latinx representation continues to lag severely despite comprising a significant portion of our student body, I feel alarmed for my student peers.

## The Role of Intentional Hiring

Being intentional in our hiring of diverse college leaders can counter this by transforming community college campuses into inclusive spaces. I am inspired by Mission College's president, Dr. Seher Awan, a woman who has been an exceptional mentor who always empowers students. When she became president in 2022, Mission College's campus climate, which was already in a good position, progressed even further. It was her selfless leadership that further centered students through intentional action. She has worked to increase critical supports to students, like financial aid, scholarships, and basic needs. She has also embraced equity-minded strategies, like strengthening transfer student success. Along with Dr. Awan, I've found inspiration in Dr. Sonya Christian, the first woman and Asian American Chancellor of the California Community Colleges, who has a long track record of advancing equity-minded change for students.





## Making Inclusion an Expectation, Not an Afterthought

As research points out, these kinds of leaders are needed to set the tone, challenge the status quo, and question assumptions when it comes to creating a system that truly allows diverse students to thrive. Representation matters! The benefits are abundant. In an increasingly global and multicultural world, students of all backgrounds benefit from greater exposure to diverse and inclusive leadership and faculty. Students see higher pass rates, higher grades, higher persistence rates—including in STEM fields that often struggle with racial and ethnic diversity—better career aspirations, and a greater sense of belonging when they have leaders of the same race or ethnicity to guide them. That’s why it’s not enough to simply be committed to equity. Inclusion in college leadership must be an expectation, not an afterthought.

This is especially critical at a time when students, particularly students of color, are increasingly doubting their place in higher education. Facing mounting issues with financial aid and seeing attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts nationwide, students need to be affirmed and empowered to access higher education. Diversity in college leadership is key to that affirmation. We need that professor, that president, that administrator, to reach us in culturally affirming ways. We all have a role to play in making that happen across California higher education. The numbers paint a stark picture: without diverse faculty and leadership who hold a shared background with our diverse campus communities, California is hindering the equitable success of two-thirds of our community college students and America risks losing the talents of thousands of diverse students.



## About Casey Chang

Casey Chang is an Asian American student advocate and transfer student from Mission College to University of California, Berkeley. She began her community college journey as a dual enrollment high school student and continued on after high school as a full-time student studying both Environmental Science and Political Science. She currently serves as a Student Member of the California Community College Board of Governors.

Outside of the classroom, Casey previously served as a Conservation Technician for Stanford University's Habitat Conservation Program. In addition, she served as a STEM Peer Support Specialist with the Mission College STEM Learning Center, where she worked to uplift and empower her fellow STEM students.

She also formerly served as the student trustee to the West Valley-Mission Community College District Board of Trustees and as Vice President of Communication for the Student Senate for California Community Colleges from 2022 to 2023.

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The Campaign for College Opportunity is a California non-profit bipartisan policy and research organization focused on a single mission: to ensure all Californians have an equal opportunity to attend and succeed in college in order to build a vibrant workforce, economy and democracy. In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court announced a decision to curtail the use of race in college and university admissions, a powerful tool that has been used to address the legacy of racial injustice and advance the inclusion and integration of Latinx, Black, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI), and American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) students. In response, the Campaign for College Opportunity has launched a national initiative, [Affirming Equity, Ensuring Inclusion, Empowering Action](#), promoting evidence-based solutions through practice briefs and toolkits that advance more equitable strategies in college preparation, admission, affordability, and success to ensure those who have been historically excluded and underserved by our colleges and universities have a real opportunity to go to college and succeed.