

# Design for **Equity** in **Higher Education**

By:

KC Culver, Jordan Harper

# Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Liberatory Design Thinking .....	2
<b>Design for Equity in Higher Education .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Overall Conceptualization and Visualization.....	6
Equity-Minded Practice .....	6
Organize: A <i>Ne<sup>r</sup></i> Phase.....	7
Empathize .....	8
(Re)Define .....	9
Ideate .....	10
Choose: A <i>Ne<sup>r</sup></i> Phase.....	11
Prototype .....	12
Get Buy-In: A <i>Ne<sup>r</sup></i> Phase .....	13
Scale and Test (Evaluate and Refine).....	14
<b>Case Study: Harper College .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Case Study: California State University, Dominguez Hills .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Table 1: Design for Equity in Higher Education. Notes on Differences.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Table 2: Liberatory Design Thinking Mindsets &amp; Complementary Phases .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Project Team .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>About the Pullias Center for Higher Education .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Funding .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>35</b>



While this study is focused on improving conditions for NTTF, we imagine that the model we present can also be used for other design opportunities in higher education.

This report is organized in the following way. We first review the framework of liberatory design thinking. Given that this framework is aimed at addressing situations of inequity, we chose to conduct research on how liberatory design thinking is already being used to improve policies and practices for NTTF. We then describe modifications to the model that were identified in our research as important when adapting it to college settings. Lastly, we describe two case studies of campuses that have used liberatory design thinking processes to modify their policies and practices.

## Liberatory Design Thinking

Design thinking, which is defined as a human-centered and design-focused methodology to solving problems, has gained traction in business, government, and education as an approach that fosters innovation. While there is some variation in the way that design thinking is conceptualized and practiced (Nakata & Hwang, 2020), Figure 1 presents the way it is commonly defined, including the following five phases: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test (Interaction Design Foundation, 2020).

The liberatory design thinking model (Anaisie and colleagues, 2020; Clifford & design school X, 2020), created in 2018, was designed to address the inequities at the root of many problems and to emphasize power sharing in the design thinking process, expanding on the original design thinking model with two additional phases: notice and reflect, as shown in Figure 2. These phases focus on **what** designers do to add equity into the process and products of design thinking, while the creators of liberatory design

---

Figure 2

## Liberatory Design Thinking Process

**Notice:** This phase focuses on you, the designer in order to build a practice of awareness of your values, identity, biases and assumptions and your impact on the user and the context within which you are empathizing. This allows for authentic user centered design, not “you” centered design.

**Empathy:** This phase of the process is focused on understanding the experiences, emotions and motivations of others. Designers use specific empathy methods to learn more about the needs of the users for whom they are designing.

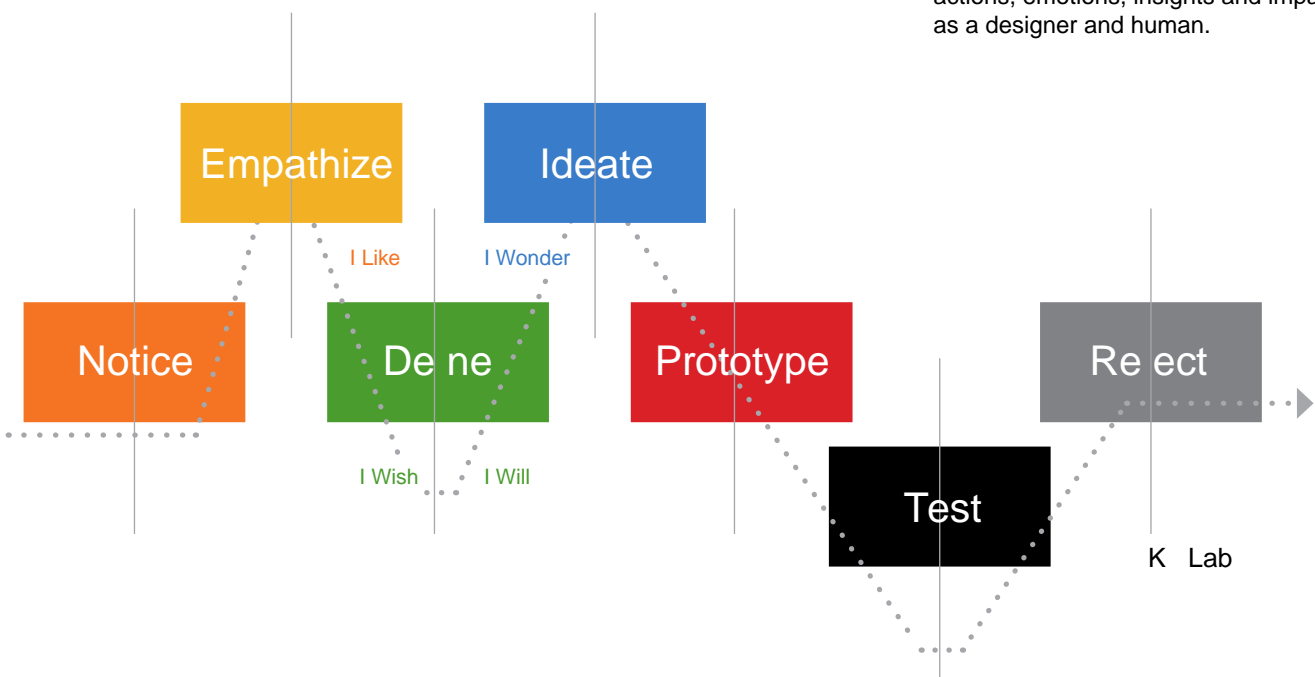
**Define:** This phase of the process is focused on developing a point of view about the needs of your user. During this phase of the process, designers narrow from lots of information to a statement that is inspiring and special.

**Ideate:** This phase of the process is focused on generating as many solutions to a problem as possible. Once many solutions have been generated, students will select one to move forward to prototyping, for authentic user centered design, not “you” centered design.

**Prototype:** This phase of the process is an iterative development of tangible artifacts or experiences intended to elicit feedback and answer specific questions about a concept.

**Test:** This phase of the process is focused on getting specific feedback about how ideas can improve. It is important to remember during this phase that prototypes are imperfect but feedback is precious.

**Reflect:** This phase of the process is ongoing and transparent throughout the design thinking process. It allows you the time to focus and reflect on your actions, emotions, insights and impact as a designer and human.

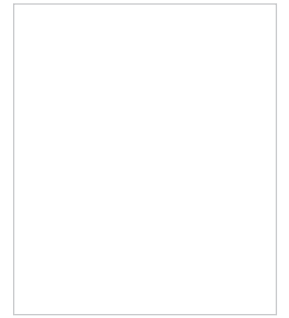


Scholars have taken various positions about the applicability of design thinking for policymaking, from suggesting that they are incompatible, to aligned at some stages, to game-changing (Lewis et al., 2020). In policymaking, there are hierarchical politics, and constraints that are not always present in corporate design processes, that result in new products or services. These issues can present challenges to the success of design thinking.

At the same time, design thinking offers an alternative that can address several challenges associated with traditional policymaking processes. For instance, in rational approaches, policymaking teams are comprised solely of policy experts.

who often underappreciate the perspective of the citizens or employees they create policies for, thus addressing surface issues without discovering the root problems (Lewis et al., 2020). Furthermore, in bureaucratic policymaking, a reliance on standard procedures and stability creates risk aversion and prohibits creative solutions (Schuurman & Tõnurist 2020).

---



EQUITY MINDED PRACTICE

-





throughout. Additionally, we emphasize the continuous nature of reflection based on the potential for designers to re-reflect on the design process in the present, rather than informing other efforts in the future. In other words, making equity-mindedness an ongoing practice allows designers to notice and address shifts in team dynamics and in the political environment in order to re-center intentions and actions around equity, which can further strengthen relational trust among the team. Table 2 (page 10) presents a list of liberatory mindsets, including a short explanation, and the phases of the DEHE process where they are most visible in our case studies.

### **Organize: A New Phase**

In policymaking contexts, design teams are often limited to policy experts who understand the contexts, constraints, and political will that shape opportunities and constraints to change (Howlett, 2020). The same is true in traditional design models, where the functional organization of teams generally privilege expert designers (Anaissie et al., 2020). As an alternative to these siloed approaches, design thinking applied in business contexts encourages the use of cross-functional teams (Nakata & Hwang, 2020); for instance, the design team might include one representative from several departments, including human resources, sales, customer service, and marketing.

While the cross-functional approach allows for multiple perspectives on solving design problems, designers are often disconnected from the end users they are designing for, limiting their understanding of the actual problem. In contrast, the liberatory design thinking model emphasizes participatory design, including end users as members of the design team in order to benefit from their first-hand knowledge of the problem. However, in policymaking contexts, participatory design can result in vast information asymmetry, as non-experts often do not have mastery of the wide variety of policy tools that are available (Howlett, 2020) and may not have a full understanding of the institutional environment. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the outcome may be more easily challenged in policymaking contexts when the design team is comprised of non-experts (Mintrom & Lutjens, 2003).

We add organization as a discrete phase of the DEHE model to address two aspects of the design thinking process that are particularly influenced by the organizational context of higher education: design team formation and the widespread role of political will in organization.

Team formation reflects why and how design teams are created. For instance, individuals in similar work roles may come together informally around a common problem and subsequently organize when a political opportunity presents itself. Alternatively, an administrative leader may identify an issue that needs attention and appoint individuals to a task force. Given the culture of shared governance in higher education, the design teams we studied reflected intentional consideration of representation and inclusion when identifying designers, not only by including *colleagues*

Considerations of political will that may vary based on design team organization include authority, objectives, and commitment (Post et al., 2010). For instance, a task force may carry great authority as a result of being established by an administrative leader, while a grassroots effort may have to intentionally foster legitimacy through collaboration. Additionally, the stated and unstated objectives of designers often vary and may not always be compatible. In higher education, designers may have

---

In addition to embracing the diversity of people and their experiences, liberatory design thinking requires designers to practice self-awareness and focus on human values when hearing users' stories. These mindsets require recognizing privilege, setting aside judgments, challenging assumptions, listening from a place of love, and honoring the stories people share (Anaissie et al. 2020). Practicing these skills may be more difficult in institutional cultures where hierarchies and marginalization are the norm.

### Empathizing in Higher Education

As a result of our research, we found that designers in the empathize stage went beyond the use of observation and interviews to get a holistic understanding of their colleagues. Teams used existing institutional data and/or collected survey data to give them a wider view of the institutional population. Additionally, the designers we studied also consulted scholarly literature to understand what was known about the topic more broadly and to learn about different perspectives; an approach which also gave them the ideas and language that supported later phases of the process. This emphasis on a "wide net" approach to learning is not always considered in traditional policymaking processes, suggesting that the DEHE model can offer improvements to traditional processes. In addition, designers often took time to learn more about the institutional landscape, including its structure, priorities, and funding, to better understand the experiences of colleagues holistically. In our cases, designers gave them a wider view of the institution.







Using an equity lens, it is critical for designers to notice who participates in the process of narrowing choices and how the “best” solution is defined. At the same time, the practice of considering radical ideas in the ideation phase may lead a design team to choose more creative solutions than would have been considered otherwise. Thus, it is important for designers to recognize and name oppression especially while choosing solutions to prototype to ensure an inclusive team process and to consider the unintended consequences that may result from different solutions (Anaissie et al., 2020).

Our study suggests that iterating between ideation and prototyping is far more constrained in higher education than in the private sector. Designers were aware that they would need to get a buy-in for their solutions, and so they considered feasibility and the likely responses of colleagues and key stakeholders when choosing which ideas to prototype. As a result, we found that designers sometimes found it difficult to be decisive within the team, instead moving several potential solutions forward into prototyping. Designers also revealed nuances in the equity-mindedness required in this phase. They emphasized the importance of addressing the emotional aspects of choosing as well as practicing self-awareness to let go of ego attachment. Additionally, the design teams we studied were keenly aware that the solutions they chose would have far-reaching impact beyond their colleagues, especially considering how chosen solutions may affect equity and inclusion more broadly among the institutional community.

## Prototype

During the prototype phase, the design team developed outlines and/or mockups, developing the solution as they build it. In design thinking, because of the expectation of iteration, rapid prototyping is key; rather than spending a lot of time and energy to fully develop a solution before testing it, designers quickly sketch out the solution in order to experiment with it. Prototyping is thus a form of thinking and learning by creating; as designers build out the specifics of a solution, they learn what works and what doesn't. This process is iterative and allows designers to refine their solutions based on feedback and their own observations. Prototyping is a key component of design thinking and is essential for creating innovative and effective solutions.

## Prototyping in Higher Education

In general, higher education is a risk-averse environment, and our empirical data suggests that maintaining a prototyping mindset was challenging for designers. This challenge resulted, in part, from the notion that key stakeholders often expect to be presented with a complete, polished solution that is ready to be implemented, rather than engaging in an iterative process with many “rough drafts.” As a result, designers tended to build multiple prototypes simultaneously, rather than iteratively providing options to increase their likelihood of success. Furthermore, when teams began sharing prototypes, they realized the importance of including key stakeholders in conversations before sharing out solutions more widely. In order to achieve liberatory collaboration, designers focused on transparency and storytelling to inform others about the redefined problem and their proposed solution. Especially because of the information asymmetry that is inherent in loosely-coupled organizations, designers crafted narratives of the redefined problem and solution as well as the design process to share alongside their prototypes, drawing especially from information gathered about colleagues in the empathy phase, in order to justify their proposed solution and to make their process transparent.

## Get Buy-In: A New Phase

Scholars have noted that design thinking doesn’t acknowledge the practical need to navigate contentious policymaking activities (Clarke & Craft, 2018; Lewis et al., 2020). We have added getting buy-in as a discrete phase of the process of designing equity in higher education. In policy contexts, a great deal of negotiation occurs between the proposal and implementation of a solution, work that is steeped in political considerations. While corporate design teams may have the autonomy to share a prototype for testing, environments like higher education often require approval from multiple key stakeholders, including administrative leaders, members of shared governance, unions, and/or even institutional trustees.

As a result, the design teams we studied engaged in complex work to move solutions into implementation and testing. Liberatory mindsets defined by Anassie and colleagues (2020) were critical in the buy-in phase: share, don’t sell; and embrace complexity. As designers shared their problem-and-solution narrative, they connected their story to institutional objectives related to accreditation, strategic planning, and student success to inform and persuade various key stakeholders. Designers also acknowledged emotional challenges related to the liberatory practice of non-attachment, as they had to let go of some solutions and compromise on others to get buy-in. They did so, in part, because they

### Scale and Test (Evaluate and Refine)

After buy-in has occurred, the solution can be implemented. In traditional design processes, designers iteratively refine prototypes internally, developing a “perfect” solution before taking it to scale. Design thinking contrasts that model by encouraging designers to pilot solutions that meet minimum standards, knowing that user testing will reveal further issues that need to be resolved. User testing also improves users’ satisfaction, as they feel like they’ve been included in the design process. Thus, designers often observe usage and collect user experiences through interviews and talk-alouds to garner feedback on the process. Additionally, the testing and evaluation process may help designers identify new challenges that need to be addressed.

### Scaling and Testing in Higher Education

While some design solutions in higher education may result in pilot testing, implementation of the negotiated solution at scale is far more common. At the same time, the policy context creates expectations aligned with design thinking that evaluation and refinement would be ongoing. Indeed, our case studies indicated that implementation of new policies and practices requires buy-in from multiple key stakeholders, so solutions were often further shaped and developed while they were being implemented at scale. To promote credibility, designers continued to share their problem-and-solution narrative, especially to shape the validity of their recommendations for implementation. Such flexibility in implementation allows for improvement, but may also result in slippage. Furthermore, given the turnover of individuals in varying positions, implementation and evaluation requires engagement in ongoing negotiation for buy-in. In our case studies where evaluation was ongoing, assessments were often conducted by key stakeholders rather than by the design team.





Case Study:  
**Harper College**



Harper Community College noted that they utilized a design thinking model to develop a new professional development program for part-time non-tenure track faculty (adjuncts) through their newly formed Academy for Teaching Excellence.

**Organize**

In 2016, Harper College embarked on a process of reflecting on and designing a professional development program for adjuncts called the Level II Adjunct Faculty Engagement Program. They had previously redesigned the faculty evaluation process so that the process better contributed to faculty members' professional growth. As a result, there was increased visibility and value associated with adjunct faculty and they realized the need for more robust professional development that adjuncts could access.

This awareness led the head of the Academy to work with the adjunct faculty union and the provost to negotiate the existence of a program that would formalize adjuncts' development of expertise in teaching and associate excellence with incentives, and these details were integrated into the adjunct faculty contract. In particular, this program would be open to adjuncts who had taught for four consecutive semesters, and adjuncts who earn the Level II designation receive increased compensation, priority course assignment, and a guaranteed phone interview for full-time faculty positions for which they are qualified.

In order to design the structure and process of the program itself, they convened a design team in 2017 that included Academy staff members, a member of the adjunct union, and one adjunct from each division of the college. They called the team the adjunct faculty advisory group.

Politics surfaced during the organizing phase. In order to navigate the politics, the advisory group intentionally reached out to academic leaders and the union to obtain initial buy-in with the hopes of making program implementation easy and successful.

**Empathize**

In the empathize stage, they shared college-level data about adjunct faculty to help everyone develop a common understanding about their experiences, motivations to teach, type of adjuncts that are teaching (freelancers, freeway teachers, aspiring academics), length of service at the college, and basic information so everyone was more or less on the same page. Adjuncts in the advisory group design their own experiences, and the design team used this information to create a program that would be more relevant and useful to them.

As a result of the empathy phase, the advisory group realized that it's hard to have just a few adjuncts to represent all of them because they have so many different perspectives, including non-teaching adjuncts such as librarians. As one person noted, "It was so important to have adjuncts from every division; it was eye opening to hear the different experiences of the different groups. Obviously one adjunct can't necessarily be the representative for the entire college, but there was a real disconnect between an experience of one adjunct from a certain division and an adjunct from another division." This design process has impacted future efforts where they bring in a much more diverse voice among adjuncts and do not try to have a few people represent the diversity of voices.

Empathizing did not just happen at the beginning but throughout the process. For example, from the define through the prototype stages, the individuals on the adjunct faculty advisory group were made point people for anyone to raise concerns to during the planning process so that the process (and its design) could be changed and ensure appropriate feedback loops.

## (Re)Define

After getting a better understanding of the vast array of adjunct experiences, the advisory group wrestled with the reality that the program would need to be designed to accommodate multiple set of faculty interests and concerns as well as serving the different types of adjuncts and their needs. Discussions related to defining the problem in the context of serving a very diverse population were sometimes hard because the adjunct faculty members had very different experiences within the institution and had difficulty coalescing around what the problems were and what a way forward might be. There was also a lot of frustration about their poor working conditions and discussions sometimes shifted in other directions, suggesting other design issues in need of attention. It was critical to document these issues for future design processes, but also to refocus the discussion around this particular practice.

## Ideate

They spent six months identifying several characteristics of the program that they thought were important and looked at a number of models from other institutions to inform their thinking. During the ideate stage they emphasized how understanding the different adjunct faculty experiences through the empathize and redefine stage was absolutely critical to being able to design the program to meet the needs of so many different adjuncts. They debated prescriptive and more open-ended approaches to the program.

**It was so important to have adjuncts**

## Choose

After consideration of several models, they decided on creating the program to be similar to a model they had looked at in the ideate phase. They noted how it was extremely challenging to make final decisions about the design and that it was shaped by many different interests and some very emotional responses. For instance, they considered whether it was better to have the program hosted internally or whether to use an outside organization that specializes in faculty development. They had to navigate individuals who wanted a more prescriptive approach and those who wanted to provide options for adjuncts to learn and demonstrate professionalism around teaching. They ended up choosing a program that could be facilitated by the Academy staff and that was more open ended by being sensitive to and addressing concerns that were voiced.

## Prototype

The advisory group then developed a prototype that included an online learning community hosted within their learning management system each summer, with participants creating an ePortfolio demonstrating reflective and evidence-based teaching. Adjuncts who completed all of the program

---

each of these different groups about their concerns and helped allay their fears. It was at these moments that the idea this was just a “trial” helped convince some to move forward.

The planning team admitted that it would have been easier to exclusively develop the program fully within the team and put it in the union contract so that there would not be any negotiations required, but they think this process served the adjuncts better in the end. As a result, they also designed evaluation and revision into the program itself. They noted, “Because we knew [a set practice and policy] was not going to be a good idea, we developed a test process, and we left the door open to evaluate it every October to make improvements. Each year we knew we were going to have to put in this renewal process in place.”

**Scale and Test**

Once the advisory group completed their design work, the process of getting buy-in and implementing the program took about a year, with the first Level II cohort participating in the learning community during the summer of 2018. They conducted a training with the dean's council, who would be responsible for reviewing applications and recommending adjuncts for the Level II program. Some deans felt they had been left out of the planning process, even though they had been invited to take part of the process early. The deans also wanted more input on who received the Level II designation, even though they in-

The Academy has made some changes based on implementation issues. In particular, they had to create more detailed instructions about the process, because they learned from the implementation that some of the faculty members and department chairs were not sure of the process. For instance, some adjuncts believed that they would receive the Learning Specialist designation automatically and were very disappointed when they completed the program but the committee decided that their ePortfolio did not reflect the necessary level of development. In addition, some participants were surprised to find out

---

on the feelings that emerged and acknowledged their experiences. The reflection on the many voices that were communicated allowed them to create a program that meets the needs of lots of different adjuncts and an ongoing approach to program evaluation and reinvention that captures the many voices they heard in this open time of reflecting.

### Collaborate

Liberatory collaboration was present throughout their design process, particularly as they organized the design team to be inclusive of many different adjunct faculty voices, including non-instructional adjuncts like librarians. The struggle to broadly represent the distinctive adjunct

faculty on the advisory group was a commitment to a liberatory collaborative process. And there was also a concerted effort to partner with the adjunct faculty union to make sure that voice was included in the conversation.

As certain key stakeholders were considered, the group had to navigate power conditions, especially in terms of evaluation of Level II candidates. For instance, they addressed the potential for power dynamics and relationships to determine whether adjuncts received the Level II designation if the dean was the sole person responsible for deciding. They imagined potential problems from the adjuncts' perspective: "If they didn't have a relationship with the dean or if the Dean had some bad experience involving them and they had a misperception or something." So, the advisory group wrestled with power conditions that might stifle career advancement and decided instead on a more collaborative model of evaluation, where having a committee review and make decisions would result in a more just process.

They also recognized that adjunct faculty collaboration is a struggle as adjuncts are often isolated from campuses, so they needed to work hard to make sure adjuncts felt included. They noted the importance of "Just having really clear, consistent communications that help adjuncts, because they do feel very disconnected. They work at multiple schools."

### Policymaking and Politics

In addition to empathizing being present throughout their process, they described how navigating politics was core to the process, a major consideration at all times. For example, above we described the need for buy-in from the dean's court. Concern about deans' involvement in the planning, the need to work closely with the union and the like are all instances where politics came into play. The organizing, choosing, and buy-in for prototyping represented key times where they navigated politics more intently. But as shown throughout this case study, navigation of different interests is inherent in design processes in higher education.

**Just having really clear, consistent communications that help adjuncts, because they do feel very disconnected.**



Case Study:

# California State University, Dominguez Hills





In fall 2017, increasing faculty-student ratios at California State University, Dominguez Hills, along with increasing numbers of non-tenure-track faculty (lecturers) compared to tenure-line faculty created a heightened level of stress on the faculty. As a result, the president of Dominguez Hills and the chair of the academic senate jointly decided to create a task force to examine working conditions of lecturers. Lecturers make up nearly 70% of instructional faculty at Dominguez Hills, and most of lecturers are part-time. The task force members described using aspects of the design thinking process to identify wa

---



and the California Faculty Association Lecturer Representatives. They also met with the chairs council of five colleges and conducted in-depth interviews with deans.

The task force engaged in sense-making activities to redefine their understanding of the problem. For instance, one activity they conducted was to write the issues they had identified on post-it notes so that they could classify them into different categories. Their use of literature and external partners also facilitated comparative sense-making, allowing them to more clearly identify where the institution was doing well and where there were opportunities for improvement. In talking directly to academic leaders at Dominguez Hills, task force members were able to understand what policies and practices should be changed within the Dominguez Hills context. While literature can provide general ideas, campus context matters and talking to department chairs and deans helped team members to identify specific, local needs and issues.

The consideration of political will in the organizing phase helped them put together a diverse and well networked committee which gave them access to the right information. Task force members described how it was beneficial to have people on the committee that had multiple levels of experience and in multiple roles, which benefited them throughout their design thinking process. In the (re)define stage, in particular, the fact that some members had connections to the central office and other institutions facilitated their use of liberatory collaboration. In addition, using literature and their networks allowed the team to situate the issues they identified within a larger and ongoing conversation, reflecting politically savvy that likely benefited them during the buy-in phase.

## Ideate

Because of the data collection approaches used by the task force, there was a good deal of overlap between the empathy, re(define), and ideate stages. The literature they reviewed, data they collected, and conversations they had all included some attention to recommendations for best practice. For instance, their survey asked lecturers about their perceptions of being valued as well as suggestions for ways the institution could be more supportive.

One person said, “Having the ideas generated before coming to a definition is sometimes helpful in the way that we think about being able to implement some kind of new system.” Task force members therefore found themselves in an ongoing state of brainstorming ideas as they kept identifying new issues that needed to be addressed. They talked about how important it was for them to list as many ideas as possible before narrowing down what they wanted to implement.

Their approach proved to be advantageous as they got to learn about others' ideas for improvement from a group that represented a wide diversity of perspectives. This information was pivotal for their ability to imagine potential solutions.

## Choose

Moving from the ideate phase into the choose phase proved to be a difficult process for Dominguez Hills. With so many suggestions flowing from key stakeholders and the task force, they had a hard time narrowing down which ideas to initiate and perhaps which ones to put on hold. Additionally, because the task force had been charged with recommending best practices for lecturers, they were able to include a wide variety of suggestions in their report.

At the same time, they did work to hone their list of recommendations by considering many factors, including time, resources, and necessity. Task force members were also very conscious of feasibility and political will. One member said, “A lot of things that non-tenure-track faculty need don’t cost money, but it requires political will.”

They also acknowledged that political will changes in different environments, such as the larger institutional level versus the departmental level. For instance, there is no cost associated with advertising tenure-track jobs to lecturers or making a conscious effort to include lecturers in departmental faculty meetings, and both practices can help lecturers feel like they belong, but very different types of political will are necessary to implement each practice.

## Prototype

The recommendations outlined in the report of the task force

## Get Buy-In

Task force members acknowledged that the task force was formed and co-sponsored by the academic senate, so a lot of buy-in and support for the recommendations was already in place. The task force made choices that were made in the phases of their process, such as including members of the academic senate in their empathy work and using scholarship as evidence in their report. At the same time, the task force also needed the approval and support of other senior level administrators who controlled resources needed to implement some recommendations put forth by the task force.

For instance, the task force met with the provost and went through the recommendations, line-by-line, to assess what would take to implement each recommendation and to explore where needed funding might come from. In another instance in 2019, members of the academic senate attended a conference on shared governance, including some who were on the task force, and so they invited along a few members of the provost's office. One of the biggest takeaways from the conference was that non-tenure-track faculty cannot have a voice if they are not represented in shared governance. The message resonated with the academic leaders who attended and they brought the idea back to campus with them, paving the way for better representation of lecturers in the academic senate.

The task force thus worked to get buy-in using relational approaches, working more at the level of key stakeholders than broad coalitions. In addition, the evidence from this case suggests that the team worked throughout the design process to create buy-in. In fact, their proactive approaches to redefining the problem by talking with so many lecturers, department chairs, and deans also probably contributed to their success, as these efforts made these stakeholders feel included and heard.

One of the largest lessons the task force learned was that buy-in and support from senior leadership matters in order to navigate the challenges of resources and priority setting. The initiatives, policies, and practices that were implemented were a result of being able to persuade senior leadership to make these issues priorities for the campus.

## Test at Scale

After the task force presented the report, the academic senate began to implement a number of recommendations. Some of the recommendations put forth in the task force report that have been implemented at scale include inviting eligible lecturers to apply for tenure-track positions, providing compensation for lecturers who participate in the academic senate, and creating an onboarding handbook for lecturers.

## Evaluate and Refine

While many of these recommendations have been implemented without any major flaws or backlash, policies and practices are also being evaluated and refined in an ongoing fashion.

One issue that has been hotly contested relates to the representation of faculty in the senate. While lecturers now have more representation on the senate, some feel that the senate will only represent them when the makeup of the senate reflects the faculty population, which would double the number of seats on the senate. Other faculty do not believe it is equitable or even necessary to double the size of the senate. As an alternative, the academic senate created a lecturer advisory board, which allows lecturers to have a greater voice and provides compensation for advisory board members without changing the size of the senate.

Another policy that reflects the iteration of prototyping, getting buy-in, testing, and refining relates to compensating lecturers for serving as senators. Initially, these lecturers were compensated at the equivalent to one course, based on the recommendation of the task force. However, the reality is that this was cost-prohibitive in the long run and that no other CSU offered such compensation. This new policy has gone through about six rounds of revisions between the senate and the provost's office. It reflects decreased compensation but also a dedicated source of funding from the provost to ensure continuity.

Thus, the task force's design thinking process showcased many examples where, after testing and assessing, policies and practices change accordingly. This prototyping mindset, in fact, is one of the benefits of design thinking.

## Keeping Equity in Mind

### Notice

Having task force members from different backgrounds, including lecturers and others who were familiar with the culture of lecturers, was extremely helpful in thinking through the policy and practice changes needed to build a more equitable faculty culture at Dominguez Hills. Team members noticed power and acknowledged that their work was seen as valuable in part because of the way the task force was initiated by the president and chair of the academic senate.

There was also awareness of power within the team. One lecturer said, "I am always a little uneasy about participating in this kind of group and that comes from being a non-tenure-track faculty." Even though the team included a mix of lecturers and senior administrators, members noticed positionality and treated one another with respect.

This equity work in the team came in part from centering the voice of lecturers in order to understand the issues. Lecturers provided testimonies regarding their unfair treatment during the focus groups. One lecturer talked about being excluded from department meetings for three years, while another lecturer shared that many of their part-time faculty colleagues do not

invited to faculty happy hours or acknowledged in the hallway by their tenure-track/tenured peers. In noticing the experien

some areas in which Dominguez Hills excelled and others where there were opportunities for improvement. Their work helped to solidify many collaborative relationships, which can continue to be a beneficial resource for guidance and collaboration in future efforts.

## **Policymaking and Politics**

Task force members demonstrated awareness of power and leveraged political opportunities throughout the design thinking process.



**Table 1: Design for Equity in Higher Education. Notes on Differences.**

Phase	Higher Education Context
Equity-Minded Practice	Equity-minded lies at the heart of the phase, especially a level of participation of design and a culture of shared governance.
Organize	We add this phase to account for the additional design team and organized and the role of political will.
Empathize	Design team members bond in empathy and observation, learning more about the institution and their colleagues through institutional data and dialogue.
(Re)Define	Because team members all formed around a perceived problem, this phase focuses on identifying the problem as a level of learning through empathy.
Ideate	Ideation is a more constrained. Team dialogue and model of innovation are essential.
Choose	We add this phase to identify the feasibility of central in the choice process and have team choose multiple solutions as a challenge.
Prototype	The prototyping mind is the dominant aim. Because of the high-stakes nature of higher education, team build multiple prototypes to learn and adapt to a problem-and-solution model.
Get Buy-in	We add this phase to acknowledge the inherent risk of negotiation, collaboration, and compromise required to get buy-in for the solution, as well as the complex environment, the multiple coalition contributions to approval of the solution. Team have the problem-and-solution model.
Test, Evaluate, and Refine	This model often occurs a cycle. Team continue having the problem-and-solution model of a flexible implementation. Evaluation and feedback occur more publicly through collaboration, and it is often ongoing.

**Table 2: Liberatory Design Thinking Mindsets & Complementary Phases**

Liberatory mindset	Description	Most relevant phases of DEHE
Practice self-awareness	We design from how we are. So we need a clear mindset to be effective how we are happens here, how we relate, and how we design.	Organize Empathize
Focus on human values	Seek a manner a possible opportunity to end the including immediate, objective, and co-design.	Empathize Choose
Recognize oppression	Oppression depends on how we frame a challenge. So we need a clear understanding of how oppression may be a platform for change.	Redesign Choose
Embrace complexity	When we go together, we are open to possibilities. Powerful design emerges from the messy, not from a voiding it.	Empathize Choose
Seek liberatory collaboration	Recognize diversity in people and identity. Design is in the lead of form.	Ongoing
Build relational trust	In emotionally in relationship, especially across diversity. Honor stories and lived experience.	Empathize Generate-In
Bias towards experimentation	The complexity of oppression requires collaborative action. Build to think and learn.	Prototype
Share, don't sell	Practice a presence of process and non-achievement of ideas.	Generate-In Test and Evaluate
Attend to healing	Doing equity work include on-going healing from the effects of oppression on individuals and agencies for liberation design.	Ongoing
Exercise your creative courage	Each human has the capacity to be creative. Before hesitation, hesitation is courage required to navigate self-doubt and creativity is fragile.	Ideate Prototype
Catalyze opportunities to transform power	Inequity is a result of power imbalance. Look for a way to transform power in the and experience liberation collaboration. Move away from power of the old and design our own power in the and identify in the process of production of power dynamic.	Empathize Ideate Test and Evaluate
Work with our fear and discomfort	Fear and discomfort are an anticipated part of the work. This includes feeling related to the idea, a challenge has to bring power to a design to generate how we are. Identifying the source of the fear and discomfort allows us to advance our design work if good to address it if harmful.	Ideate Prototype

Note: The liberatory mindsets and descriptions were copied from the Liberatory Design Card Deck developed by Anaissie et al. (2020).

# Project Team

**Adrianna Kezar, Director and Principal Investigator**

Adrianna Kezar is the Dean's Professor for Higher Education Leadership at the University of Southern California and dire

## About the Pullias Center for Higher Education

The world's leading research center on student access and success in higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education advances innovative, scalable solutions to improve college outcomes for underserved students and to enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions. The Pullias Center is located within the USC Rossier School of Education, one of the world's premier centers for graduate study in urban education.

Since 1995, the mission of the Pullias Center for Higher Education is to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political, and economic issues in higher education. Our work is devoted to the key issues of college access, retention, and accountability for underserved students—and the effectiveness of the colleges and universities that serve them. Both directly and through our research, we engage with institutional leaders, policymakers and the community at large to address the most pressing challenges in educational equity today. For more information, please visit: <https://pullias.usc.edu>

## Funding

This research and publication was supported by funding from the TIAA Institute. The content, findings, and conclusions are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of TIAA or the TIAA Institute.

The TIAA Institute helps advance the ways individuals and institutions plan for financial security and organizational effectiveness. The Institute conducts in depth research, provides access to a network of thought leaders, and enables those it serves to anticipate trends, plan future strategies and maximize opportunities for success.

This research is also based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. (NSF DUE-19-01111). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

---



Howlett, M. (2020). Challenges in applying design thinking to public policy: Dealing with the varieties of policy formulation and their vicissitudes. *Policy & Politics*, 48(1), 49-65.

Interaction Design Foundation. (2020). *5 stages in the design thinking process*.

<https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/5-stages-in-the-design-thinking-process>

Kolko, J. (2010). Abductive thinking and sensemaking: The drivers of design synthesis. *Design Issues*, 26(1), 15-28

Kolko, J. (2018) The divisiveness of design thinking. *Interactions*, 25(3), 28-34. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3194313>

Lewis, J. M., McGann, M., & Blomkamp, E. (2020). When design meets power:

Design thinking, public sector innovation and the politics of policymaking. *Policy & Politics*, 48(1), 111-130.

Micheli, P., Wilner, S. J., Bhatti, S. H., Mura, M., & Beverland, M. B. (2019). Doing design thinking: Conceptual review, synthesis, and research agenda. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 36(2), 124-148.

Mintrom, M., & Luetjens, J. (2016). Design thinking in policymaking processes: Opportunities and challenges.

*Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 75(3), 391-402.

Nakata, C., & Hwang, J. (2020). Design thinking for innovation: Composition, consequence, and contingency. *Journal of Business Research*, 118, 117-128.

Post, L. A., Raile, A. N., & Raile, E. D. (2010). Designing political will. *Politics & Policy*, 38(4), 653-676. Project Fellows.

(2020). "How might we" questions. Stanford d-school. <https://dschool.stanford.edu/resources/how-might-we-questions>

Schuurman, D., & Tönurist, P. (2017). Innovation in the public sector: Exploring the characteristics and potential of living labs and innovation labs. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 7(1), 7-14.

Sørensen, E., Waldor, S. B. (2014) Collaborative policy innovation: problems and potential.

*The Innovation Journal*, 19(3), 1.