

# Equity and inclusion are strategic priorities, PCC president says

By Maileen Hamto  
The Asian Reporter

Taking the helm of Oregon's largest post-secondary institution is a unique leadership challenge. Mark Mitsui, who has served as president of Portland Community College (PCC) since the fall, assumed the role at an interesting time that has truly called upon his commitment to equity and inclusion.

Case in point: Responding to concerns shared by students and faculty about fever-pitch threats of deportation for undocumented students, Mitsui issued a statement on behalf of the board of directors about adopting the term "sanctuary college" in December.

The move was widely applauded by community leaders, activists, and advocates for immigrant rights, but it did not come without controversy. Shortly after the announcement of PCC's sanctuary designation, board chairman Gene Pitts tendered his resignation, according to *Willamette Week*. In a letter to the PCC board, Pitts noted "that the decision to use the term 'sanctuary college' politicizes the college."

The designation does not offer legal protection from federal immigration laws, but it allows the college to provide symbolic support for undocumented students and their families. As a sanctuary college, PCC has vowed to "protect the privacy rights of all students," by not releasing immigration status information, unless "legally compelled" to do so. Noting that PCC safety officers do not have legal authority to "enforce federal immigration laws," they will not engage in deportation activities. The designation also secures in-state tuition for all students who meet PCC residency requirements.

"PCC strives to be ... a catalyst for change and hope for our entire student body — a place that values dialogue, civic engagement, and learning," Mitsui wrote. "Indeed, one key intention within PCC's strategic plan is to 'create a nationally renowned culture for diversity, equity, and inclusion.'"

Observers have noted that how Mitsui has dealt with challenging situations early in his tenure has revealed the substance of his values and leadership style, which he has characterized as "hit the ground, listening." Indeed, that's what he has been doing since returning to the Pacific Northwest: meeting with various stakeholders and consulting on a variety of issues.

"PCC has a recently developed strategic vision that deeply resonates with me. This strategic plan, coupled with the goals that our board of directors have set, highlights student success and access, innovation and quality teaching and programs, a responsibility to our internal and external communities, and a deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. These are my priorities for PCC — to help move the college forward in these key, strategic areas," Mitsui said.

Before joining PCC, Mitsui served as the deputy assistant secretary for community colleges within the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education for the U.S. Department of Education. For more than three years, he focused on advancing the White House's community college agenda through partnerships with numerous federal agencies and national stakeholders.



Mitsui said his original goal was to go to Washington to learn all he could at the national level and bring that knowledge back to a college where it could benefit students directly. After three years in D.C., he said he was happy to be back in the Pacific Northwest. "I knew that Portland Community College was doing great things," he said.

At PCC, Mitsui considers the opportunity to interact with students as the most rewarding part of his role. He relishes connections with PCC's diverse student body.

"We are proud to serve international students from across the globe, first-generation college students, those just out of high school, returning adult learners with children and jobs, people from across the region, coming to our community college to find a better life. It is so fulfilling to hear students' stories and to be part of their accomplishments," he said.

Mitsui's unwavering focus on student success means he prioritizes diversity and inclusion as among PCC's most important endeavors and commitments.

"A fundamental set of skills for living and working in a globalizing world includes the ability to effectively interact with people who are different from you — who have different life experiences, goals, and perspectives. I believe that it is our responsibility as a higher education institution, especially as a community college, to not only create welcoming, inclusive learning and working environments, but to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to learn and to practice interacting across areas of difference," Mitsui said.

While he emphasizes that the success of all students is an important component of the college's strategic plan, an intentional focus on success rates among students of color is important in ensuring equity and access among underserved communities.

More than 30 percent of PCC students identify as students of color, with specific campuses such as Rock Creek, Cascade, and Southeast reflecting the growing diversity of the communities served. He speaks proudly of PCC's Men of Color Leadership Program, which he wants to expand along with other initiatives to

enhance graduation rates among students of color.

"When we speak of student success at PCC, we understand that our success matrices must be intentionally equitable," he said. "Not every path to success looks the same; we know that the complexion of our student body looks very different on the first day of school than it does at graduation. We want to open that up and explore multiple ways to equitably enhance student success."

It is no secret that Portland's demographics are rapidly changing: about a

**PCC PREZ.** Mark Mitsui, the new president of Portland Community College, Oregon's largest post-secondary institution, started his tenure in the fall. (Photo courtesy of Portland Community College) third of K-12 students are children of color. Mitsui is relying on community outreach and engagement to prepare PCC to best meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community, as well as the internal, structural changes within PCC's recruitment and retention practices.

"One of the most important things that we can do is to recruit, hire, and retain diverse faculty and staff and to value culturally responsive teaching," Mitsui said. "Students do best when they are able to learn from and work with people who understand their experiences and who value diverse perspectives. PCC is committed to being a leader in diversity, equity, and inclusion. We owe it to our students and to our community."

Mitsui lauds PCC leadership, staff, and faculty for their collective ability to listen to and work with multiple partners — in the K-12 system, in other colleges and universities, and in the business community. PCC exists to serve diverse communities: from dual credit and other pathway programs, to career technical education, to programs that help students transfer to four-year institutions.

"We evolve as our communities evolve," Mitsui said, adding that "our greatest potential lies in our ability to adapt to the ever-changing 21st-century life and workspaces that our students encounter."

PCC is the largest post-secondary institution in Oregon, serving nearly 90,000 full-time and part-time students. The college includes four comprehensive campuses, eight centers, and dozens of independent locations. To learn more, visit <[www.pcc.edu](http://www.pcc.edu)>.

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