

February 9, 2022 #EquityChat

Sara Wiessman (@SaraWeissman), Reporter/Writer, Insider HigherEd (@insidehighered)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) It's Wednesday, @ 5PM PT which can mean only one thing...its time for #EquityChat sponsored by @CollegeFutures and hosted by @SDMesaPrez & @lamkeithcurry. Today, we're chatting with @SaraWeissman, Reporter @insidehighered. Welcome Sara!

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q1 @SaraWeissman Our education, background, and experiences make us who we are. Can you share three things we should know about you that aren't on your resume? @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[@SaraWeissman](#) The first real higher ed story I ever wrote was a journalism school thesis about Shia Muslim students pushing for more diverse Muslim campus programming. Talking to students about what inclusion meant to them was an entryway to this kind of reporting for me. #EquityChat (1/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) I come from a family of academics. I said I wasn't going to go into the family business, but here I am. Jokes aside, I think growing up with strong messaging about the value of higher education is a part of what drew me to this particular corner of journalism. #EquityChat (2/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) My journalism career really started in middle school when an English teacher signed me up for the school newspaper, instead of the class I'd chosen, and just told me I should trust her. Just goes to show, never doubt the power of an educator! #EquityChat (3/3)

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q2 @SaraWeissman. Tell us about @insidehighered and what excites you most about your work as a reporter covering nontraditional students and the institutions that serve them. @SDMesaPrez @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[@SaraWeissman](#) Older adult learners make up about 40 percent of students. The majority of students work while in college. About a quarter are raising children. The typical college student isn't full time and fresh out of high school anymore. I get to cover today's students. #EquityChat (1/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) I find that really exciting. Higher ed is often described as an engine for social mobility. My job is telling stories that explore how well colleges actually live up to that promise, what barriers and equity gaps hinder student success and what solutions exist. #EquityChat (2/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) Those are stories that desperately need telling. I also think journalism can help connect decisionmakers, administrators and policymakers, to the diverse voices and experiences of the students they serve. It's meaningful to me to play some small part in that. #EquityChat (3/3)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q3 @SaraWeissman. What was your favorite story to write about last year? @lamkeithcurry @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[@SaraWeissman](#) One story that really stuck with me from last year was about the tens of thousands of legal restrictions that limit job options for formerly incarcerated students and how higher ed programs in prison are responding to that challenge. <https://insidehighered.com/news/2021/12/15/incarcerated-students-face-maze-legal-obstacles-jobs> #EquityChat (1/2)

[@SaraWeissman](#) It's a complicated student outcomes issue that hasn't gotten a lot of attention. And in general, I think there are important stories to be told about college in prison, especially as incarcerated students regain access to the Pell Grant. #EquityChat (2/2)

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q4 [@SaraWeissman](#). What insights can you share about the enrollment decline we're experiencing in higher ed? What stories or reports do you recommend we read around this topic? [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#)

[@SaraWeissman](#) My colleague [@whitford_emma](#) has done some great coverage on enrollment declines in higher ed at large: <https://insidehighered.com/news/2022/01/13/enrollment-declines-fourth-semester-amid-pandemic> [#EquityChat](#) (1/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) I've been tracking how staggering pandemic enrollment declines affect community colleges. Hundreds of thousands of students left college altogether, and most community colleges are still struggling to recover: <https://insidehighered.com/news/2021/08/26/community-colleges-pursue-array-recruitment-strategies> <https://insidehighered.com/news/2021/10/25/community-college-enrollments-worry-campus-leaders> [#EquityChat](#) (2/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) Men, particularly men of color, have stopped out at high rates. There are a number of theories about why that's the case and colleges are taking some new approaches to address the problem: <https://insidehighered.com/news/2021/09/27/college-leaders-seek-boost-enrollment-black-men> <https://insidehighered.com/news/2022/01/19/colleges-hire-staff-focused-black-men> <https://insidehighered.com/news/2022/01/11/men-enroll-and-leave-programs-hardest-hit-covid> [#EquityChat](#) (3/3)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q5. Based on the stories you've written, what challenges do you see colleges facing in the future, particularly community colleges? [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#)

[@SaraWeissman](#) Enrollment declines continue to pose a financial challenge to community colleges that heavily rely on tuition revenue and state funding dependent on enrollment. Some colleges have already cut faculty and staff and undergone other belt-tightening measures. [#EquityChat](#) (1/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) Demand for food and housing support and mental health services is increasing, especially at community colleges, which disproportionately serve students hardest hit by the pandemic. Federal COVID-19 relief funds have been a significant help - but temporary. [#EquityChat](#) (2/3)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Yes, and after funds run out it will be challenging, building partnerships and removing outdated rules about participation will be critical.

[@SaraWeissman](#) On a brighter note, community colleges are trying some really creative outreach and retention strategies right now, and I suspect administrators will learn a lot about what works to re-engage students (and what doesn't) after collecting data on the outcomes. [#EquityChat](#) (3/3)

[@lamkeithcurry](#) Q6 [@SaraWeissman](#). What's a favorite book that you've read last year? And why? [@SDMesaPrez](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#)

[@SaraWeissman](#) In my free time, I actually read a lot of fiction, and I recently read and really appreciated "Long Division" by Kiese Laymon. [#EquityChat](#) (1/2)

[@SaraWeissman](#) It's not exactly related to higher ed, but the story focuses on the toll experiencing racism can take on the mental health and emotional wellbeing of Black young people in this country. So, my reading hasn't strayed too far from the kinds of issues I cover. [#EquityChat](#) (2/2)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) Q7 [@SaraWeissman](#) Why is it important for us, as educators, to read [@insidehighered](#)? [@lamkeithcurry](#) [@CollegeFutures](#) [#EquityChat](#)

[@SaraWeissman](#) At IHE, we're constantly talking to college leaders and educators across the country. We keep readers informed about national news and trends so you can see how what's happening at your institution fits into a broader constellation of forces and ideas. [#EquityChat](#) (1/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) Our journalism puts different voices in dialogue with each other – administrators, faculty, staff, students, policymakers and researchers – and I think the kinds of discussions that emerge from good storytelling can only benefit institutions and their students. #EquityChat (2/3)

[@SaraWeissman](#) I also think we put a particular focus on not just covering the ivies or big names. We're reporting on community colleges, minority-serving institutions, tribal colleges, rural colleges. We try to tell stories that will be relevant to you, wherever you might be. #EquityChat (3/3)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) That's something I appreciate @SaraWeissman - broad view and inclusive of @Comm_College

[@IamKeithCurry](#) Q8 @SaraWeissman. Any stories that you're excited to be working on right now, or topics you hope to cover this year? @SDMesaPrez @CollegeFutures #EquityChat

[@SaraWeissman](#) I'm really interested in how community colleges are addressing high rates of housing insecurity among students, particularly efforts by traditionally commuter campuses to invest in campus housing. So, I look forward to continuing to follow that issue this year. #EquityChat (1/2)

[@SaraWeissman](#) But I also welcome suggestions for stories I should be working on right now! Our best stories so often come from folks on the ground telling us what's happening on their campuses. My DMs and inbox are always open to tips. #EquityChat (2/2)

[@SDMesaPrez](#) TY for joining us for this week's #EquityChat! We're grateful for all our #EquityChat guests, followers & @CollegeFutures your continued support. Join us next week for #BestOfEquityChat with guest Dr. Walter Kimbrough, President of Dillard University on Feb 16!