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# Using Critical Race Theory to Redefine the Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers

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## — Abstract —

To meet the needs of the evolving student demographics that has seen a 300% increase in URM college going rates, higher education institutions began developing the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) position to govern and lead their mission as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion. More than 60 colleges have created a CDO position over the last 20 years with many more heading in that direction. However, because CDOs are relatively novel in the higher education space, the leading authority of diversity officer research, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), developed a set of guidelines to serve as a source of consistency for diversity officers. Although these guidelines have been very useful, we suggest that when viewed through a Critical Race Theory lens, the guidelines are laden in passive and color evasive language, supports slow-moving incremental change, and is absent of language associated with racism, sexism, gender bias, homo- & transphobia, ableism, and xenophobia among other discriminatory practices. Thus, in this conceptual critique, we report on how we use CRT to critique and identify improvements for the Twelve Standards of Professional Practice for CDOs.

Keywords: diversity, chief diversity officers, inclusion, diversity officers, Critical Race Theory

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Colleges and universities' focus on diversity has grown in importance over the years as more underrepresented minorities (URM) enroll in higher education. For example, while the overall college enrollment rate has increased by 73% over the last 40 years, URM college enrollment has increased by 300% during this period (Cokley, Obaseki, Moran-Jackson, Jones, & Vohra-Gupta, 2016; Penn Center for Minority Serving Institutions, 2013). Although diversity has grown in importance (American Council on Education, 2017), institutions have an underdeveloped framing and commitment to diversity that has an opposite effect than intended (Iverson, 2007; 2008). Furthermore, within the current political and social climate, institutions continue to see a rise of targeted incidents against minoritized and marginalized students, which stresses the importance of developing substantial best practices for inclusion and diversity (The Lead Fund, 2019). To be clear, for us, *minoritized* refers to a systemically-achieved low numerical representation of a particular demographic in any given population (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). *Marginalized* refers to the isolation, exclusion, treated as socially insignificant, and/or the withholding of power or influence within a population for a certain group with a shared identity (Reyes, 2007).

Thus, institutions that struggle with fostering diversity and inclusion have begun hiring a chief diversity officer (CDO) over the last 20 years (Leon, 2014). However, at their onset, the loosely defined and inconsistent roles and responsibilities for CDO's created issues across institutions. As a result, URM communities faced unwelcoming environments as institutions tried to develop best courses of action without alienating key stakeholders (e.g., students, alumni, faculty, staff, donors, and administrators of the majority culture). In response to these concerns, Worthington, Stanley, and Lewis (2014) proposed a set of standards of professional practice guiding the role and responsibilities of CDOs in higher education.

Although these standards serve as a synopsis of

inclusive practices for the CDO position, a closer analysis reveals that they possess neoliberal, color evasive, and heteronormative language that likely result in incremental progress. Given the current turbulent political climate, the increasing incidence of hate acts against URM students across U.S. universities, and the rise in the number of CDO appointments, it is critical to revise and improve the CDO standards developed by Worthington et al. to reflect the more progressive atmosphere. As such, the goal of this conceptual critique is to use critical race theory (CRT) to review and propose improvements to the standards of professional practice for diversity officers developed by Worthington et al. We argue that these improvements make these standards more congruent and responsive to the urgent calls for higher education institutions to more effectively address equity, diversity, and social justice issues.

To this end, we begin with our conceptualization of diversity in higher education. This is followed by a discussion of how the current CDO standards came to be and how they are utilized. We then explain how we use CRT to guide our critique of the CDO standards, and we close with recommendations for improvements.

### Conceptualization of Diversity

Scholars have pointed out that when higher education institutions readily adopt diversity, it can be a sign that diversity has lost the critical attributes that would normally place diversity in the area of social justice and equity (Ahmed, 2012). Furthermore, institutions often point to improvements in the numerical representation of particular student, faculty, and staff demographics as a reflection of their diversity; however, the development of a critical mass of people of color is only a first step and does not guarantee a sense of belonging on campus (Tienda, 2013). Often, to uphold neutrality and satisfy its White majority stakeholders institutions reduce diversity in such a way that transformative systemic changes are impossible feats (Stewart, 2017). It is imperative that

institutions consider reframing diversity in a way that better reflects the purpose of the CDO position. For this paper, we conceptually define diversity as the use of inclusive and equitable practices for marginalized and minoritized identities, whether singular or intersectional, and the ability to challenge policy and practices that harm or reduce groups or individuals who share those identities.

In his book, *Strategic Diversity Leadership*, Williams (2013) proposes a four-quadrant conceptual model to describe diversity; this model has significant implications for those in charge of the strategic diversity mission of an institution. The four quadrants include (a) a *conceptual perspective*, (b) a *group identity perspective*, (c) an *ideological perspective*, and (d) an *institutional perspective*. The *conceptual perspective* describes the constant evolution of language to continually use and redefine multiculturalism, diversity, equity, access, and inclusion in its description of engagement with underrepresented, marginalized, and minoritized communities. The *group identity perspective* recognizes that each person can hold multiple identities from a primary, secondary, or historical context that often shape their ideals about the world and how they engage with others. The *ideological perspective* describes diversity through the ideological lenses of economics, equity, racialization, centrist, color evasiveness, reverse discrimination, and universal approach, which shapes how individuals discuss and engage with diversity and inclusion issues. Lastly, the *institutional perspective* addresses diversity through formal institutional definitions, statements, and policies that express the institution's values and beliefs about diversity.

Williams (2013) introduced three common models for diversity in higher education and discussed how these models can overlap to provide a more cohesive approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (see Figure 1). The affirmative action and equity model have its roots in social justice and policy changes, as it obligates colleges and universities to make a concerted effort to provide opportunities to historically disadvantaged groups to alleviate past and present

discriminatory practices. The multicultural and inclusion diversity model includes supporting the varying identities and cultural values of members of an institution. The learning, diversity, and research model involves understanding the importance of (a) incorporating diversity scholarship into curriculum, (b) diversity in academic success, and (c) conducting more diversity-related research. Given the limitations of each model, researchers can apply the models in synergistic ways for richer impact. Together, these different models of diversity serve as an ideal framework on which CDOs can expand their programmatic and outreach efforts within institutions.

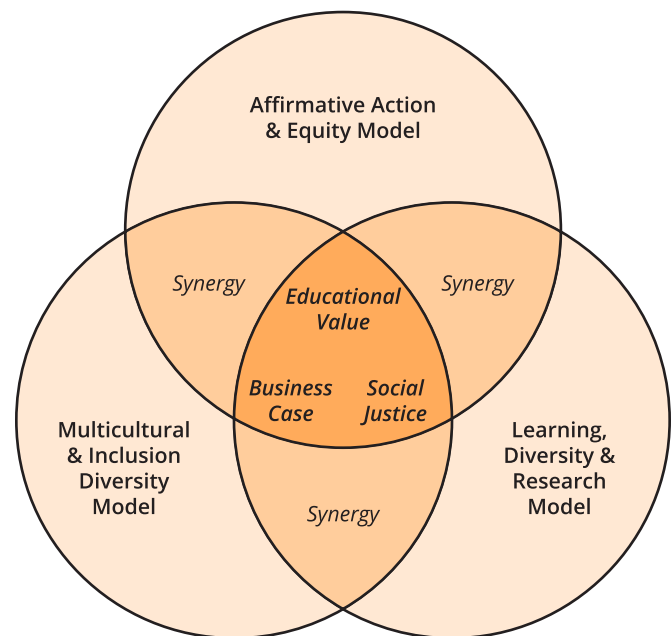


Figure 1. The three primary models of diversity in higher education. Williams, D. (2013). *Strategic Diversity Leadership*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Defining diversity and the models for diversity are important for this conceptual critique as they collectively enable the exploration and dismantling of the various concerns associated with the standardization of the CDO position with specificity. Additionally, Williams (2013) states that “in too many instances, they [colleges and universities] may want a new leadership role, or a more integrated effort, but have no desire to reframe their current infrastructure or strategic framework to become more cohesive” (p. 132).

Simply put, higher education has a long way to go as questions arise about whether institutions have the capacity to foster diversity that's critical and employs a social justice framework to authentically support marginalized and minoritized communities (Patton, 2016).

### Chief Diversity Officers

To lead the conceptualization of diversity at individual institutions, colleges and universities have begun to hire CDOs. More than 60 colleges have created a CDO position over the last 20 years to address challenges associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion, and more, universities are heading in that direction (Leon, 2014). The CDO is a senior executive-level administrator who leads, implements, and make changes to diversity initiatives and programming in an effort to recruit and retain a diverse campus community and cultivate an inclusive environment (Wilson, 2013; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). While a formal definition for CDOs exists, there is variation in how institutions govern this position, make resources available to these individuals, define CDOs' authority, and structure the organizational hierarchy.

Furthermore, the role, responsibilities, and structure of CDOs are increasingly complex within the current political and racial climate of the United States, where racialized political discourse is used to scrutinize those from oppressed groups. Wong (2017), a CDO at San Jose State University (SJSU), indicated that:

Following the 2016 presidential election, my office began receiving calls from professors who were anxious about facilitating discussions in their classrooms. At SJSU, a significant number of students were upset by—and fearful about—incidents of hate and harassment nationwide. (p. 34)

Chief Diversity Officers in higher education also face issues because of poorly constructed roles, organiza-

tional structure, resources, responsibilities of the office, and size of the institution (Arnold & Kowalski-Brown, 2011; Harvey 2014; Leon, 2014; Nixon, 2014; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013).

While the purpose of this paper is not to analyze the value of CDOs in higher education, we strongly reject the notion that CDOs' primary purpose is to correct long-standing discriminatory and exclusive behavior in U.S. colleges and universities. A single administrator cannot resolve these enduring issues. While the appointment of a diversity officer can mean that inherent support for diversity does not exist within the institution's community (Ahmed, 2012), we believe that the establishment of the CDO position, if properly supported with the necessary funding and by leadership, is a positive step forward. The hiring of a diversity officer reflects a greater commitment to addressing "-isms" and "-phobias" across college campuses. However, we recognize that as long as a cosmetic diversity lens provides the description for diversity—the idea that colleges and universities say they are more diverse than they really are (Anbiya, 2016)—the CDO position will be limited in its purpose.

### National Association for Diversity Officers in Higher Education

Created in 2006 by a group of CDOs and the American Council of Education (ACE), the National Association for Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) considers itself the leading authority on CDO scholarship in higher education. NADOHE began with 112 founding institutional members and has since expanded to more than 300 institutional members across the United States. Additionally, NADOHE went on to develop annual conferences in conjunction with the ACE annual meeting. Through its annual meeting, NADOHE members are able to create a space for information and experience sharing that enhances the scholarship on diversity officers. Additionally, NADOHE fosters relationship building among members with similar responsibilities and

pressures at their home institutions, bringing the diversity officer community closer together. Through NADOHE's annual meeting, the organization is able to share empirical evidence, current equitable practices, and professional development; informs and influences policy decisions; and provides networking opportunities to foster a culture of meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013). Furthermore, NADOHE provides CDOs with a set of standards of professional practice to provide some uniformity to the profession and assist institutions with understanding the roles and responsibilities associated with the position.

## Twelve Standards of Professional Practice

Worthington et al. (2014) developed a set of standards for CDOs and higher education institutions to provide more clarity about this position. Their justification for a set of guidelines derived from NADOHE members seeking a professionalization of the field. These guidelines went through a formal review process that included feedback from NADOHE's board of directors, a revision from the initial taskforce that developed the guidelines, and redress from NADOHE's board of directors and taskforce. As a result, the authors published the 12 standards of professional practice (see Table 1) as a "living document" (Worth-

Table 1. The 12 Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers

#	Standard Description
Standard One	Has the ability to envision and conceptualize the diversity mission of an institution through a broad and inclusive definition of diversity
Standard Two	Understands, and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity to the broader educational mission of higher education
Standard Three	Understands the contexts, cultures, and politics within institutions that impact the implementation and management of effective diversity change efforts
Standard Four	Has knowledge and understanding of and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the range of evidence for the educational benefits that accrue to students through diversity, inclusion, and equity in higher education
Standard Five	Has an understanding of how curriculum development efforts may be used to advance the diversity mission of higher education institutions
Standard Six	Has an understanding of how institutional programming can be used to enhance the diversity mission of higher education institutions for faculty, students, staff, and administrators
Standard Seven	Has an understanding of the procedural knowledge for responding to bias incidents when they occur on college or university campus
Standard Eight	Has basic knowledge of how various forms of institutional data can be used to benchmark and promote accountability for the diversity mission of higher education institutions
Standard Nine	Has an understanding of the application of campus climate research in the development and advancement of a positive and inclusive campus climate for diversity
Standard Ten	Broadly understands the potential barriers that faculty face in the promotion and/or tenure process in the context of diversity-related professional activities (e.g., teaching, research, and service)
Standard Eleven	Has current and historical knowledge related to issues of nondiscrimination, access, and equity in higher education institutions
Standard Twelve	Has awareness and understanding of the various laws, regulations, and policies related to equity and diversity in higher education

Note. Adapted from Worthington, R. L., Stanley, C. A., & Lewis, W. T., Sr. (2014). National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education standards of professional practice for chief diversity officers. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7(4), 227–234.

ington et al., 2014, p. 228). That is, the authors fully expected these standards to evolve with changes in the overall educational landscape. Given the rise of student protests on college campuses, invitations of controversial speakers, and increasingly negative campus climates, the language used and the interpretations of the current CDO standards are disconnected and unresponsive to current social challenges. As a result, the authors see aspirations of making higher education institutions more equitable and inclusive for everyone as a challenge for Worthington et al.'s version of the CDO standards that reflects the current needs of marginalized and minoritized communities.

### Critical Race Theory

The theoretical framework guiding our critique of the CDO Standards is critical race theory (CRT). Scholarship that provides analysis of the transforming relationship among race, racism, and power defines CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Furthermore, CRT employs specific tenets that seek to challenge power, uncover systemic issues, and document the experiences of racial groups who often encounter acts of discrimination and other barriers associated with their being (Bell, Crenshaw, Gotunda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper, 2009). Based on our review of the literature, the following seven tenets of CRT are: 1) racism is a normal part of U.S. culture, 2) interest convergence theory exposes how majority cultures will act with the interest of minorities when it benefits them, 3) race as a product of social thought that is invented, transformed, or retired by society as seen fit, 4) intersectionality explains the multiple identities an individual might associate with that are seemingly marginalized or minoritized by the dominant culture, 5) gives voice to people of color, 6) critique of liberalism, and 7) critique of the meritocratic process, including any biases associated with meritocracy (Bell, Crenshaw, Gotunda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 2000). While CRT is useful for advancing equity and diversity re-

search, not all tenets are needed simultaneously to constitute CRT scholarship. Thus, this critique focuses on only three key tenets to examine all 12 standards of professional practice for CDOs: (a) racism is normal, (b) race as a product of social thought, and (c) the critique of liberalism.

The first tenet—racism is normal—suggests racism is considered common, normalized, and something that has never been elucidated out of U.S. society. The *racism is normal* tenet understands that Whiteness over color prevents the eradication of racism because racism has profound benefits to the dominant or majority culture. When Whiteness is recognized as a top priority, it causes even the most committed allies to reconsider racial progress if progress is a threat to their social standing (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009). Furthermore, color evasive policies, or ideas of equality meant to provide benefits to all individuals, is limited to only combating the most overt forms of racism, but covert racist practices, such as microaggressions, continue to exist within various parts of society (Harper et al., 2009).

The second tenet that is a focal point for this critique is *race as a product of social thought*. Harper (2009) describes those who use race when it benefits them as *racial realists* and defines them as people who “recognize the hierarchy that determines who receives benefits and the context in which those benefits are accrued” (p. 830). Additionally, while individuals from the same racialized group generally share common physical characteristics, it is often pseudo-characteristics that are determinants of race.

The third tenet—a critique of liberalism—addresses color evasive policies that moves at a snail pace, applied with incremental implement, and forces marginalized and minoritized communities progress to be determined by neoliberal ideology (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Often, liberalism weaponizes phrases such as “let the system work” or “we’ve come so far” to pacify affected communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Similarly, those who subscribe to liberalism tend to value the process of the system—no

matter how slow or incremental—over those affected by dealing with slow change.

### **Revising the Twelve Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers**

We began our critique of the 12 standards of professional practice by providing a synopsis of why this critique was necessary. When viewed through a CRT lens, it is difficult to assess how NADOHE's standards of professional practice help move an institution forward in the current racial and political climate due to the embedment of liberal and color evasive language. Therefore, we explain how we used three key CRT tenets to address limitations associated with the original CDO standards—racism is normal, race as a product of social thought, and liberal conceptions of practice. Due to space limitations, we only use three of the CDO standards to show how we use CRT to deconstruct and revise all 12 standards. Table 2 provides a summary description of each of the revisions made to the standards. The authors of this paper recognize the structural critiques (e.g., poor resources, conflicting responsibilities, lack of support) that exist for the CDO position in higher education, but engaging such critiques go beyond the scope of this paper and are not included. However, the standards and our recommended revisions serve to create a baseline for expectations of a CDO at any given institution, and we suggest that institutions create capacity for CDOs to meet these standards.

### **Racism is Normalized in Society but Unaddressed in the Standards**

One of the first issues we wish to address is that none of the CDO standards of practice explicitly associate the CDO position with the essential responsibility to counter racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and xenophobia. Racism has been and still is a normalized occurrence in U.S. society, and by default, it is ever-present on college and university campuses throughout the United States along with other phobias and -isms. As such, the frequency of hate acts

perpetuated on university campuses across the United States has led to minoritized and marginalized populations rejecting the idea of a post-racial society (Lee & Hopson, 2019). Authors of diversity documents counter the lived experience of marginalized and minoritized groups when they subscribe to the ideology that a post-racial society exists by limited acknowledgment and direct protection for disadvantaged groups in writing of diversity policies. While each of the standards sought to address diversity, inclusion, and equity broadly, by not directly naming core constructs, such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, gender bias, ableism, and xenophobia, these standards inadvertently dilute the importance and responsibility the CDO position can (and should) have in countering the root causes of discrimination. This is not to say that Worthington et al. were unaware of racism and other social ills; however, when institutions fail to be explicit in their protections for marginalized and minoritized groups, institutions essentially render invisible the specific realities and negative experiences marginalized and minoritized groups encounter in everyday life.

For example, the CDO Standard 2 states the CDO “understands, and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity to the broader educational mission of higher education” (Worthington et al., 2014, p. 231). This broadly defined standard fails to explicitly provide guidance on what constitutes inclusion, equity, and diversity and could be misused to promote a diluted and superficial approach to diversity (e.g., diversity of thought, experiences, or political affiliations). Furthermore, there is no mention of “isms” produced by White supremacist, patriarchal, xenophobic, ableist, homophobic, and transphobic practices. In contrast, we redefine the CDO Standard 2 as follows: The CDO understands, and is committed to continuously educate, articulate verbally and through scholarship the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity as tools for combating the root causes of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and xenophobia in society.



*Table 2.* A Redefining of the 12 Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers from a Critical Race Theory Perspective

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Original Version</b>	<b>CRT Version</b>	<b>Description of Changes</b>
Standard One	Has the ability to envision and conceptualize the diversity mission of an institution through a broad and inclusive definition of diversity	Has the ability to co-construct, co-envision, and co-conceptualize with internal and external stakeholders the inclusion and diversity mission of an institution that represents all social groups (including racial/ethnic, gender, sexual orientation/expression, disabled and other social groups)	Producing an action plan with a team of stakeholders from various cultural groups is essential to ensuring a richer understanding of how the various forms of diversity can be addressed. Furthermore, the original standard fails to mention identity/social groups.
Standard Two	Understands, and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity to the broader educational mission of higher education	Understands and is committed to continuously educate and articulate verbally and through scholarship the importance of equity, inclusion, and diversity as tools for combating the root causes of racism, sexism, gender bias, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and xenophobia in society	The CRT version explicitly positions the CDO to go beyond a simplistic understanding of diversity and inclusion and provide scholarly products behind the position. Furthermore, the CRT version explicitly mentions common “isms” and phobias experienced by minoritized communities.
Standard Three	Understands the contexts, cultures, and politics within institutions that impact the implementation and management of effective diversity change efforts	Understands different contexts, cultures, and local politics that impact the implementation and management of effective inclusion and diversity efforts	The CRT version allows CDOs to directly address issues affecting minoritized communities, including room to adjust policies to better reflect a progressive society of inclusion.
Standard Four	Has knowledge and understanding of and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the range of evidence for the educational benefits that accrue to students through diversity, inclusion, and equity in higher education	Is informed by current research, has the ability to conduct research, and has the ability to articulate through verbal and written communication the range of evidence of educational benefits and challenges marginalized and minoritized students encounter in higher education	The original version instructed CDOs to have a very surface-level idea of the benefits and evidence of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The CRT version places more responsibility on CDOs in that they must have the ability to conduct and produce research that is responsive to the needs of marginalized and minoritized groups and that benefits all members of the higher education community.
Standard Five	Has an understanding of how curriculum development efforts may be used to advance the diversity mission of higher education institutions	Has an understanding and provides guidance on how curriculum development efforts may be used to advance the diversity and inclusion mission of higher education institutions to ensure the representation of minoritized and marginalized students is achieved and that cultural bias is reduced	The CRT version includes direct language about supporting marginalized and minoritized groups in curriculum development.
Standard Six	Has an understanding of how institutional programming can be used to enhance the diversity mission of higher education institutions for faculty, students, staff, and administrators	Institutes, evaluates, and understands institutional programming for the benefit of enhancing the diversity and inclusion mission of higher education institutions with special attention to the needs of marginalized and minoritized faculty, students, staff, and administrators	The CRT version implements direct language that supports marginalized and minoritized communities.

Standard	Original Version	CRT Version	Description of Changes
Standard Seven	Has an understanding of the procedural knowledge for responding to bias incidents when they occur on college or university campus	Has significant knowledge of literature on responding to bias incidents and has a clear action plan to respond and implement changes to issues of bias incidents when they occur on a college or university campus with a focus on protecting and supporting marginalized and minoritized affected groups	The CRT version is clearer about the continuous education for the CDO to stay up to date on diversity and inclusion scholarship with a focus on marginalized and minoritized groups.
Standard Eight	Has basic knowledge of how various forms of institutional data can be used to benchmark and promote accountability for the diversity mission of higher education institutions	Has significant knowledge of the various forms of institutional data, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these databases in order to effectively identify benchmarks, areas of concern, and promote accountability for the diversity mission of higher education institutions	The CRT version is meant to ensure that CDOs understand what data are available, how to produce data, and how to use data to identify benchmarks and goals. The previous standards allowed for more of a slow- moving, liberal process.
Standard Nine	Has an understanding of the application of campus climate research in the development and advancement of a positive and inclusive campus climate for diversity	Has significant knowledge of the literature on campus climate, prepares and widely distributes campus climate reports, and facilitates the development and advancement of a positive and inclusive campus climate	The CRT version ensures that CDOs are constantly aware of the literature on campus climate and the ability to produce and widely distribute campus climate reports.
Standard Ten	Broadly understands the potential barriers that faculty face in the promotion and/ or tenure process in the context of diversity-related professional activities (e.g., teaching, research, and service)	Has significant knowledge of the literature on barriers that women and minority faculty encounter in the promotion and/or tenure process, and collects data in order to allocate resources to minimize identified barriers	The original version simply instructed the CDO to have a broad understanding of the well-documented barriers that women and underrepresented faculty often encounter in the tenure and promotion process.
Standard Eleven	Has current and historical knowledge related to issues of nondiscrimination, access, and equity in higher education institutions	Has significant knowledge of the literature on the historical and current issues of nondiscrimination, access, and equity in higher education, and develops programming to address or improve these areas in higher education institutions	The CRT version instructs CDOs to have an understanding of their institutions' histories and current issues related to discrimination in order to address their own problems. This was done to ensure that administrators address their own challenges instead of focusing on other institutions' challenges.
Standard Twelve	Has awareness and understanding of the various laws, regulations, and policies related to equity and diversity in higher education	Is up to date on the various laws, regulations, and policies related to equity and diversity and is able to inform and articulate these to the internal and external constituents, while ensuring that women and marginalized and minoritized members of the institution receive appropriate support from the institution	The CRT version intends to ensure that CDOs stay up to date policies, laws, and regulations with the added responsibility for ensuring that CDOs inform stakeholders and the broader university community of any new guidance.

*Note.* Adapted from Worthington, R. L., Stanley, C. A., & Lewis, W. T., Sr. (2014). National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education standards of professional practice for chief diversity officers. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 7(4), 227–234.

Often, acceptance of policy has needed to include broad protections for majority populations, which encompasses the experiences of minority populations (Rodriguez & Morrison, 2019). Our CRT version of the CDO standards of professional practice specifically addresses the struggles and unique experiences of women, the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and all other sexualities, sexes, and genders not described) community, people with varying abilities and disabilities, and people of color by explicitly naming “isms” that often obstruct marginalized and minoritized communities’ advancement in higher education. Women, LGBTQIA+, racial minorities and other marginalized and minoritized groups are often the primary targets of attacks (e.g., sexism, gender bias, homophobia and transphobia, racism, ableism, and xenophobia) within higher education resulting in poor campus climates, sense of belonging, and social adjustment (Cabrera, 2014). Equity and diversity policies should be more direct and explicit about protecting vulnerable groups whose experiences create the need for such policies in the first place. Thus, there is no other role that demands such clarity of purpose than that of a CDO in an institution of higher education.

### **Race as a Product of Social Thought in the 12 Standards of Practice**

A second criticism of the CDO standards of professional practice is the retirement of one’s identity when there is no tangible benefit for the institution, which is often troubling for a position that should be based on protecting oppressed, marginalized, or minoritized identity groups regardless of benefits to an institution. For example, one way the original standards accomplish the retirement of ethnicity/race is by using color evasive language. Take, for instance, CDO Standard 4; the CDO “has knowledge and understanding of and is able to articulate in verbal and written form, the range of evidence for the educational benefits that accrue to students through diversity, inclusion, and equity in higher education” (Worth-

ington et al., 2014, p. 231).

The use of this color evasive language also contradicts Williams’ (2013) multicultural and inclusion diversity model, which attempts to support varying identities and cultural values and help institutional members engage and feel included in everyday functions (Ogbar, 2005). It is difficult to envision authenticity in protecting vulnerable identity groups when failing to directly address these identities in policies. We argue that the removal of color evasive language is essential to ensuring that the CDO position, as well as the institutions they serve, are in the best position to appropriately address the needs of marginalized and minoritized groups. To this end, it is critical to make guiding the production and introducing education, outreach, skills, and tools of inclusivity for the overall campus as a key responsibility of CDOs. As a result, we propose the following revision to Standard 4: the CDO is informed of the literature, has the ability to conduct research, and has the ability to articulate through verbal and written communication the range of evidence of the educational benefits and challenges for marginalized and minoritized racial/ethnic and gender identity dynamics through inclusion, equity, and diversity efforts in higher education.

As written, the original standards allow institutions to distort the meaning of diversity with the potential of centralizing, not the needs of minoritized students and the growth of the university community, but the neoliberal and superficial image-related benefits of the university. For example, institutions highlight increasing numeric representation of underrepresented groups on campus and claiming growth in diversity without providing on-going support (Rodriguez & Morrison, 2019). Thus, the educational impact of a diverse environment that occurs in multicultural settings might become secondary to the success that superficial diversity might present for the majority. Furthermore, much of what has been written on diversity tends to address how diversity benefits all stakeholders; however, this type of analysis suggests that there is only a marketplace for diversity

if the majority also benefits. However, it remains to be seen if the commitment to diversity would remain should the minority achievement gap rise with consistency and White student achievement rates remained stagnant or even dropped significantly. For example, affirmative action policies are often criticized due to their assumed benefits for racial minorities at the expense of the White majority, even though these policies have largely shown to reflect a benefit for White women over any other demographic (Taylor, 2000). However, the purpose of diversity and inclusion is to ensure that marginalized and minoritized groups are both represented by and have a sense of belonging and value within their institutions (Williams, 2013).

The refusal to understand the unique experiences of minoritized groups, especially individuals with intersecting identities, by those who identify as White, heterosexual, and/or male and the use of color evasive language minimizes the struggles of people of color, women, and other marginalized and minoritized groups. Furthermore, color evasive language does not alleviate or minimize the “isms” that often plague higher education institutions. On the contrary, refusing to see and name these “isms” for what they are only makes the root causes that produce them more challenging to address.

### Critique of the Liberal Processes Associated with the Standards of Practice

Finally, the language used in the CDO standards of professional practice suggests a more liberal approach than intended by “informing and assisting individual administrators and institutions in aligning the work of the CDO on their campuses with the evolving characteristics of the profession” (Worthington et al., 2014, p. 227) often completed within a slow-moving process of change (Winkle-Wagner, Sule, & Maramba, 2019). For example, CDO Standard 7 states that the CDO “has an understanding of the procedural knowledge for responding to bias incidents when they occur on college or university campus” (Worthington et al., 2014 p. 232).

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argue that “our system applauds affording everyone equality of opportunity, but resists programs that assure equality of results” (p. 23). As it reads in its original form, Standard 7 suggests very little direct action to support marginalized and minoritized groups who are often on the receiving end of bias incidents. Additionally, the limitations of the original Standard 7 could allow superficial or non-existent bias claims to be made by the White majority, who seeks to make a mockery of the position and limit its effectiveness. Often, through liberal processes, well-meaning policies are often narrowly interpreted, obstructed, and delayed as well as unequally applied to marginalized and minoritized communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Through our interpretation of the liberal processes, we propose a revised Standard 7 to reflect a more dynamic and responsive approach to addressing bias, suggesting that it read as follows: The CDO has significant knowledge of literature on responding to bias incidents and has a clear action plan to respond and implement changes to issues of bias incidents when they occur on college or university campuses with a focus on protecting and supporting marginalized and minoritized affected groups.

As written in the original version, CDOs are only responsible for having surface-level knowledge of diversity and inclusion, which, if by design, is perceived as purposefully supporting higher education systems that are resistant to substantial and lasting change (Rodriguez & Morrison, 2019; Rodriguez, 2015). The CDO position is expanding and growing both in terms of the frequency of the position on college campuses and its responsibilities. Being up-to-date on the scholarship and equitable practices is key to ensuring that CDOs are able to carry out their duties in a responsive and effective manner (Williams 2013; Williams & Wade- Golden, 2013; Worthington et al., 2014).

### Summary

The original 12 standards of professional practice

for CDOs served as an initial step in providing consistency and clarity for such an underdeveloped position in higher education. As studies have shown, the complicated CDO position results from conflicting roles and poorly defined expectations of the position (Nixon, 2014). While the 12 standards of professional practice are the first of their kind to exist for CDOs, they have various limitations, which we have deconstructed using CRT as a guiding framework. To this end, we employed three of CRT's tenets—*racism is normalized in society*, *race as a product of social thought*, and *critique of liberalism*. While we used these three CRT tenets to deconstruct and revise all 12 CDO standards (see Table 2), due to space limitations, we provided specific examples of how we used CRT to adapt three of the 12 CD standards.

It is evident through our critique that the original standards use of color evasive approaches, ignored the realities of marginalized and minoritized communities, and disregarded identities when convenient. Our proposed revised CDO standards of professional practice offer an opportunity to promote dialogue in order to enhance this important set of standards and effectively address the challenges and opportunities of establishing equitable and socially just academic communities. While CRT has its limitations, it provides an example of how critical scholarship enhances diversity policy documents and opens the door for other forms of critical scholarship (e.g., LatCrit and DisCrit) utility in framing policy and guidance. As a result, when institutions are considering enhancing diversity efforts, employing critical scholarship to go beyond cosmetic changes and enable transformative and systemic changes is needed. If institutions are serious about providing a more inclusive and diverse campus that enrich educational opportunities available to everyone, it is important for all of us to explore how to rearticulate the role of CDOs. Given the current political and social climate, the next decade will most likely demand that CDOs be better prepared to meet the diversity and equity missions of higher education institutions. A new perspective on diversity,

equity, and inclusion involves responsibly and meaningfully addressing the struggles as well as celebrating the successes that will lead to better representation and agency, a sense of shared belonging, and academic success for everyone.

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