

Working Definitions Council of Deans

The underpinnings of what it means for higher education to support diversity, equity and inclusion is often problematized by different interpretations of key terms necessary to work systematically. Inspired by efforts in both the office of Diversity Equity and Inclusion and Academic Affairs, we will use the following working definitions in its efforts to increase awareness, understanding and collective action as we work toward our vision and mission.

Core Terms

Diversity - Diversity refers to the degree to which a group exhibits the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, and national origin. Diversity is generally measured quantitatively and relates simply to the degree of representation among each subgroup. A university committed to diversity includes representing the full range of viewpoints and experiences across society.

Equity – Equity refers to the proportional distribution or parity of desirable outcomes across groups. Sometimes confused with equality, equity is a quantitative measure of outcomes, while equality connotes equal treatment. Where individuals or groups are dissimilarly situated, equal treatment may be insufficient for or even detrimental to equitable outcomes. An example of equity is individualized educational accommodations for students with disabilities, which treat some students differently in order to ensure the equitable access to education.

Inclusion - Inclusion refers to the degree to which all members of a group experience involvement and empowerment, where the inherent worth and dignity of all people are recognized. Inclusion is generally measured qualitatively. An inclusive university promotes and sustains a sense of belonging; it values and practices respect for the talents, beliefs, backgrounds, and ways of living of its members.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion – The compound term Diversity, Equity and Inclusion refers to the framework that connects supports to achieve high diversity, an inclusive environment, and equitable outcomes. A university committed to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion seeks to achieve these goals applied to each disaggregated group characteristics as well as within the intersectionality of such identities.

Race— A social construct used to group people according to physical characteristics, for example, skin color. Biological study shows there is as much variation within presumed racial groups as across groups.

Racial Equity — The disaggregated application of equity specific to racial identity and that to produce equal outcomes by race. This commitment foregrounds race to interrupt hierarchies of oppression and exploitation. This commitment foregrounds race to interrupt hierarchies of oppression and exploitation. Engages differentiation in order to redress ongoing racial inequities

shaped by histories of exclusion from socioeconomic resources, civic engagement, institutional and political power.

Culture - The ways groups of people socialize and implicitly agree to interact in a given society. The ways groups of people socialize and implicitly agree to interact in a given society. These ways involve commonly valued beliefs, traditions, policies, practices, behaviors, and rules. Such beliefs, practices, etc., cross a range of contexts such as religion, geography, language, and natural resources.

Culturally Relevant/Responsible – Recognizing, understanding, and applying attitudes and practices that are sensitive to and appropriate for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Social Justice — Reorienting and structuring society in anti-oppressive ways according to principles of critical consciousness, equity, and inclusion. Social justice means eliminating injustices created when differences among people are ranked in hierarchies that unequally assign economic advantage, power, and institutional and cultural validity to certain social groups.

Intersectionality — Interrelated aspects of identity (e.g. religion, sexual orientation, etc.) that interact to produce oppressive social hierarchies. An intersectional approach is necessary for understanding how social power works and how oppressive social hierarchies can be resisted and undone.

Other Terms

Racism — Ongoing, violent systems of exclusion based on the socially constructed category of race, handed down through histories of oppression and reproduced daily through conscious and unconscious interactions. Racism can be enacted on multiple levels simultaneously: institutional, cultural, interpersonal, and individual. Foundational histories of oppression include slavery, segregation, land dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and various contexts of civic exclusion.

Anti-racism (COE) — Working actively to identify, resist, and eliminate racism, both formally and informally, and in everyday social interactions. Such work may include resistance within one's affinity groups and within historically white institutions in order to change racist systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes so that resources and social power can be redistributed and shared equitably.

White Supremacy (COE) — Conscious and unconscious beliefs and practices that reproduce white advantage across sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts. Unconscious white-supremacist beliefs and practices often serve to make white centrality seem normal or natural for society.

Privilege (COE) — A set of social advantages that are accessible to and counted on by individuals and groups who have, often unwittingly, benefitted from ongoing histories of

oppression. Such advantages are often “inherited,” or handed down through histories of oppression that include slavery, segregation, land dispossession, ethnic cleansing, and other forms of civic exclusion.

Academic Success –The demonstration of student achievement in higher education through a series of indicators including, but not limited to: grade point average, rigorous coursework, acceptance to program major, persistence towards graduation, and graduation.

Access(ible) – Refers to a student’s opportunity to participate in all of the education-related offerings provided by an educational Institution. Traditional access-related initiatives in higher education seek to remove barriers and provide support for historically underserved or underrepresented students.

Affinity Groups – Groups or programs that connect individuals based on interests, identities, and circumstances. Such programs can be especially helpful to first-year students and students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Brave Space - A community space where different points on a journey of learning and growing are acknowledged.

Campus Climate – The cumulative and continuing perception of the context in which the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential are felt.

Co-curricular Learning – Learning that takes place outside of a traditional classroom model (or curriculum) that directly relates to or enhances one’s understanding of the targeted content area. Examples of co-curricular programs include study abroad, internships, symposia, conferences, and lectures.

Domestic/local multicultural experiences - Off-campus engagement opportunities with diverse communities (racially, culturally, socioeconomically, religiously, etc.) within the state of Minnesota or within the United States. This distinction was made in response to traditional immersion activities outside of the United States or what is more commonly referred to as study abroad.

Early Alert – A system in which faculty can log student behaviors that have been deemed strong indicators for dropping out or stopping out from college. Such systems have become more popular in higher education as institutions seek to improve their abilities to identify high-risk behavior.

Ethnicity – The shared sense of common heritage, ancestry, or historical past among an ethnic group. Ethnicity is a distinct concept of race, as Illustrated by the fact that Hispanics, designated an ethnic group In the United States may nevertheless be of any race. In accordance with the Office of Management and Budget definition of ethnicity, the U.S. Census Bureau defines ethnicity or origin as “the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States.”

First Generation Student – (Minn State Definition) A student whose parent(s)/legal guardian(s) have not completed a bachelor's degree at a four-year college or university. (Federal Definition) Undergraduates whose parents never enrolled in postsecondary education (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/98082.pdf>)

(Inter) Cultural Competence - An ability to learn about and interact effectively with people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This competence comprises four components: (1) awareness of one's own cultural worldview, (2) attitude towards cultural differences, (3) knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (4) cross-cultural skills.

Intercultural Engagement – Refers to educational opportunities, events, and programs that invite individuals to step into new cultural contexts with the intent of developing greater cultural competence.

Intergroup Dialogue – A facilitated, face-to-face discussion with the objective of creating new levels of understanding, relating, action between two or more social identity groups.

Interreligious Engagement – Events, projects, and curriculum designed to support activities related to the study and practice of religion in comparative and cross-cultural contexts.

Learning Communities - A group of people actively engaged in learning together, from each other, and by habituation. Learning Communities often consist of two courses linked together to explore common themes and encourage partnerships with professors and peers.

Multicultural - Refers to a collective variety of cultures that can be defined along racial, sex, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, language, religious, and education lines. Goals for multicultural education vary along a continuum that includes demographic inclusion, student empowerment, intergroup understanding, educational equity, and social transformation.

Personal Safety – A person's sense of safety as it relates to social, intellectual, physical, and cultural interactions, and spaces.

Safe Spaces – Spaces where students, community members, and employees feel socially and physically safe to represent their full identities and share their unique perspectives.

Underrepresented – Any individuals who are historically underrepresented in American higher education in terms of: race/ethnicity/nationality, gender, parental education level, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, or spirituality/religiosity/philosophy.