

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DIVERSITY OFFICERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

NADOHE COMMUNICATION GUIDE

FALL 2023



Acknowledgements

This communication guide reflects contributions from a number of individuals and groups. NADOHE takes this opportunity to recognize those who so generously gave their time and expertise to inform its development.

To begin with, NADOHE would like to thank the many participants of the 2023 Annual Conference, Special Session who shared their suggestions on strategies and tools that Senior Diversity Officers, Academic Diversity Officers, and diversity professionals would find valuable in responding to the challenges to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging efforts in higher education. We greatly benefited from the opportunity for discussion with the individuals who attended and presented at the special session meeting. NADOHE thanks these individuals for their time and the candid perspectives offered during the special session.

NADOHE could not have done this work without the support, guidance, and drafting of the communication guide provided by: Susan (Sue) Rankin, Associate Professor of Higher Education, Pennsylvania State University (retired); Jeanne Arnold, First Vice President, NADOHE; Mary Keister, Vice President, RW Jones Agency; Jason R. Kirksey, Vice President & Chief Diversity Officer, Oklahoma State University; Ashley Northington, Senior Vice President & Managing Director, RW Jones Agency; and Paulette Granberry Russell, President and CEO, NADOHE; Daryl G. Smith, Senior Research Fellow and Professor Emerita of Education and Psychology (Claremont Graduate University). We also thank Therese Brimmer, Brimmer Family Design for her development of the final guide for distribution to the NADOHE membership.

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How to Use This Communication Guide

This communication guide is designed to equip diversity professionals, institutional leaders, and others in- and outside of higher education with standard messaging, talking points, and other resources to show how diversity work is central to the success of all institutions of higher education in the country and the success of a robust democracy. While this guide provides standard information, we encourage members to expand this messaging and tailor it with localized data and information to support their unique institutional needs.

This document was written to provide a clear, concise, and coherent description of our work and its impact on the overall mission of higher education. It is also intended to debunk the myths and mischaracterizations of the work and facilitate constructive interactions and communications between higher education institutions and state, federal, and local agencies.

This resource is intended to be evergreen, meaning it can be used at any time. NADOHE will work to update the information contained in this resource as necessary.

NADOHE Standard Definitions

It is important to ensure everyone knows what we mean when we say “diversity” or “equity.” We list below NADOHE-recognized descriptions for terms that align with our work. We encourage your institution to consider these terms if none are currently used and welcome you to tailor them to fit your campus communities.

Diversity: Diversity is the various backgrounds, lived experiences, values, and worldviews that stem from differences in culture and circumstance. This includes race, ethnicity, gender and gender expression, age, religion, language, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, geographic region, and more. Some of these identities may be marginalized in the broader society. As our society has grown more diverse, our understanding of how these varied identities face barriers to success also increased. Each of these identities, often in combination with others, requires a complex understanding of the institutional and societal context and distinctive responses to encourage success.

Equity: Equity is the active process of identifying and eliminating or reducing the structural barriers related to race, class, disability and gender and other identities that limit access or prevent full participation in our institutions; it requires understanding the root cause(s) of disparities, identifying the barriers, and redressing, particularly, the exclusion of historically underrepresented groups within our society. Equity works to ensure justice, access, opportunity, and advancement for individuals within the policies, practices, procedures, processes, and distribution of resources by institutions or systems.

Inclusion: Inclusion is the intentional act to include difference and create environments where any individual or group is welcomed, respected, supported, valued, and given the opportunity to fully participate. Inclusion fosters a sense of belonging through centering, valuing, and amplifying the voices and perspectives of all individuals and includes eliminating practices and behaviors that marginalize groups of people or individuals.

Justice: Justice is the outcome of dismantling barriers to resources and opportunities for people who live in marginalized communities. Justice occurs when all individuals can live a full and dignified life and all communities can thrive.

Anti-Racism: Anti-racism is the active process of identifying, challenging, and confronting the longstanding, continuing, and historical roots of racism and the resulting racial inequities that emerge in institutions. This active anti-racism process that can lead to racial equity requires confronting systems, organizational structures, policies, and practices, and the often-invisible barriers that have led to continuing racial inequities in higher education. Inevitably these issues immediately intersect with similar issues concerning other identities such as gender and class. Racial equity is achieved through the intentional design and implementation of strategies that improve outcomes and eliminate racial disparities.

Access: Access is having the unfettered ability to take full advantage of the resources and opportunities available.

Belonging: Belonging is the extent to which people know and feel that they are valued, respected, included, and celebrated for their individual and unique contributions and identities.

Standard Messaging and Talking Points

The purpose of this section is to provide standard messaging, which you are encouraged to use when developing talking points highlighting the importance of our work in higher education and beyond.

This messaging is meant to boost understanding for audiences in- and outside of higher education of the role of senior diversity officers and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at colleges and universities.

Our message must be consistent and concise in order to help those who just want to understand what “DEI” is all about, including legislators, families, guidance counselors and others who are preparing their students for higher education; advocacy groups, and students, faculty, and staff within campus communities. The lack of knowledge and understanding can be remedied by clear articulation of our roles and responsibilities, the mission of our respective offices, clarifying

whether the function and responsibilities are centralized and/or decentralized, and debunking the myths about our work.

Sections include introductory, explanatory language and examples of talking points that you may use, tailor to your institution and role, and/or add to based on your experience. Like the other portions of this guide, this language is meant to be a starting point. We encourage you to adapt this messaging to fit your specific needs.

The Role of the Senior Diversity Officer

Our society is increasingly diverse¹, and that diversity reflects a complexity of identities among students, faculty, and staff. The role of the Senior Diversity Officer (SDO) is to assist institutions in building their capacity to ensure that barriers to success among students (at all levels: undergraduate, professional, and graduate), faculty, and staff are mitigated, and that all members of the community continue to engage the needs of an increasingly diverse society.

- The work of a SDO and diversity professionals is vital to every institution, regardless of mission, and to postsecondary education's mandate to:
 - 1) Ensure academic excellence;
 - 2) Provide leadership for a diverse society (workforce readiness, advanced knowledge);
 - 3) Respond to the urgent needs in areas of science and technology, health care, and national security;
 - 4) Help secure research grant funding; and
 - 5) Comply with federal mandates such as Titles VI², VII³, and IX⁴, Americans with Disabilities Act⁵, and the Forever GI Bill⁶.
- These functions, though increasingly mischaracterized as ideological, are core to the academic role of higher education in society.
- Just as chief information officers were established to help institutions build capacity as technology became increasingly central to academic excellence and institutional viability, so too is the role of diversity officers in bringing a strategic and inclusive lens to the pursuit of educational excellence.
- SDOs also provide outreach to local communities and pathway programs and bring the resources of diverse communities to campus.

¹ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>

² <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964>

³ <https://www.justice.gov/crt/laws-we-enforce>

⁴ https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html

⁵ <https://www.usa.gov/disability-rights>

⁶ <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/forevergibill.asp>

Supporting academic excellence is a key function of a Senior Diversity Office. Focusing on both access for and success of students from diverse backgrounds will continue to be urgent given the increasing diversity of youth in the United States and the demographic decline of the youth⁷ population in many parts of the country. As a result, the success, attractiveness, and viability of any academic institution will rest on its capacity to successfully educate for the diversity that is profoundly transforming all areas of the nation.

- Senior Diversity Officers are uniquely equipped with the tools to assist their institutions in attending to these changing demographics and addressing embedded barriers to success that impact students from many backgrounds, including those who have been historically underrepresented, are first generation, and are from rural backgrounds.
- Their role also calls for helping institutions create communities where students (at all academic levels), faculty, and staff from all backgrounds can thrive.

Excellence Imperative

At the core of diversity, equity, and inclusion work is a profound commitment to excellence.

TALKING POINTS

- Institutions that embrace inclusive excellence:
 - Prepare every student for participation in our increasingly diverse society through inclusive and culturally appropriate curricula;
 - Demonstrate student success at all levels and in all fields; especially STEM;
 - Provide students with opportunities for engagement and dialogue, which is foundational to a well-equipped workforce and a healthy democracy;
 - Support academic freedom as a foundational element for faculty to meaningfully engage in research and teaching;
 - Build capacity to recruit, retain, and promote diverse talent from diverse communities;
 - Ensure that research and teaching address the knowledge required for success in a global society;
 - Ensure all people, regardless of their backgrounds, feel a sense of belonging and find success; and
 - Address the economic, social, political, and other core issues of the area in which the institution is located.
- Institutions committed to academic excellence and cultivating pathways to student participation ultimately cultivate student success at all levels (undergraduate, professional, and graduate) and among students of all backgrounds.
- Equity and belonging work does not diminish excellence; rather, it bolsters excellence and ensures that more people have opportunities to contribute to our society in meaningful ways.

⁷ <https://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/population/qa01101.asp?qaDate=2020&text=yes&print=yes&maplink=link2>

Economic Imperative

Multiple studies have shown that diversity is essential for business success.

TALKING POINTS

- When businesses thrive, they become engines of economic development by hiring more people, spending more on goods and services, and contributing to their local communities in ways that are ultimately beneficial for their local, regional, and national economies. As such, it is imperative for institutions of higher education to produce diverse talent that is ready for the workforce.
- Companies with more diverse workforces—including all aspects of diversity—are stronger financially and experience more positive corporate cultures. According to the U.S. Department of Education⁸, 93% of employers value employees who can work effectively with customers, clients, and businesses from a range of different cultures and countries.
- Recent research supported by the National Institutes of Health⁹ indicates that teams composed of people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences produce better and more innovative products and ideas than a homogeneous team. They concluded that deriving “the full benefits of diversity among learners, faculty, and researchers” requires an appreciation of differences, understanding bias and assumptions, and creating a climate of mutual respect.
- The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine¹⁰ recently reported that without actively dismantling policies and practices that disadvantage people from minoritized groups, STEM organizations will likely lose much-needed talent and innovation, as well as the ideas that come from a diverse workforce.
- Employers demand globally proficient candidates who demonstrate cultural knowledge, cultural humility, and a broad worldview to maintain their competitive advantage. They want candidates who are both representative of markets (global society) and who can operate effectively within diverse groups. There are eight specific competencies that make students attractive hires in this environment:
 1. Career and self-development;
 2. Leadership;
 3. Professionalism;
 4. Teamwork;
 5. Critical thinking;
 6. Communication;
 7. Technology; and
 8. Equity and inclusion

⁸ <https://sites.ed.gov/international/global-and-cultural-competency/>

⁹ <https://extramural-diversity.nih.gov/diversity-matters>

¹⁰ <https://doi.org/10.17226/26803>

- As noted above, proficiency in equity and inclusion is only superseded by communication, critical thinking, and teamwork in importance of being career ready. Job seekers who are college graduates will risk not being equipped with these skills if diversity is not an institutional priority¹¹.
- Despite this pressing workforce need, industry will continue to be challenged in sourcing world-ready talent that is not only racially and ethnically diverse but also diverse in lived experience, skillset, and perspective. Thus, colleges and universities should embrace diversity to provide access to higher learning, embrace equity to ensure students have the specific tools necessary for individual success, and embrace inclusion to ensure they have the opportunity to participate in higher learning and achieve success¹².
- Removing support for diversity, equity, and inclusion work on college campuses will result in an unmitigated loss, not only for the campus but also for the local, regional, and national economy that depend on thriving businesses, whose success hinges on access to a diverse and culturally skilled workforce.
- Eliminating these efforts will deprive students of opportunities to engage with and learn from a broad range of perspectives, which helps build the skills necessary to compete in the global marketplace.
- Students graduating from universities and colleges that lack substantial, intentional programs that advance diversity will be less attractive to employers who look to institutions that graduate diverse groups of students and that prepare all their students with the skills to succeed in a diverse economy.

STEM Imperative

Institutions of higher education play a significant role in preparing students to develop into competitive and successful workers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)¹³ and Artificial Intelligence (AI)¹⁴. Technological and scientific advancement is critical in all industries and professions. It is also imperative for national security.

TALKING POINTS

- The United States continues to falter in its responsibility to grow advanced leadership in STEM – a national security¹⁵ requirement, and a key to our economic security.¹⁶
- The U.S. has to cultivate talent that is well-trained and innovative. It also needs to produce significantly more STEM and AI talent at every level of postsecondary education.

¹¹ Engberg, M. E. (2007). Educating the workforce for the 21st century: A cross-disciplinary analysis of the impact of the undergraduate experience on students' development of a pluralistic orientation. *Research in Higher Education*, 48, 283-317.

¹² Gill, P. (1996). Managing workforce diversity-a response to skill shortages?. *Health Manpower Management*, 22(6), 34-37.

¹³ <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Summary-of-2018-STEM-Ed-Strategic-Plan-Release-Event.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp/news-updates/2021/06/10/the-biden-administration-launches-the-national-artificial-intelligence-research-resource-task-force/>

¹⁵ <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/09/16/remarks-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-at-the-special-competitive-studies-project-global-emerging-technologies-summit/>

- While there are several federal initiatives¹⁷ targeted to ensure the existing talent pool is well-trained and innovative, the nation continues to encounter a paucity of graduates within these fields.
- People who represent historically marginalized communities such as women, people of color, tribal communities, people in rural and urban centers, and others, are underrepresented in these fields.
 - For example, while women¹⁸ account for 60 percent of college graduates, they only make up 40 percent of STEM graduates, and 25 percent of graduates in AI fields.
 - Black college students earn about 10 percent of bachelor’s degrees across all fields, but only 6.5 percent of STEM bachelor’s degrees. Furthermore, despite making up 14 percent of the U.S. population, Black students account for only five percent of STEM graduates at the master’s level, and less than three percent at the doctoral level.¹⁹
 - Similarly, rural²⁰ students are 60 percent less likely to pursue STEM majors.
- It is imperative that higher education cultivates and strengthens strategies to enrich and expand its underserved pools of talent for STEM and AI fields.
- Education that incorporates principles of American diversity produces graduates with the core competencies necessary to build resilience within marginalized communities.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts provide the tools and opportunities underrepresented communities need to pursue STEM education and compete globally.
- Higher education has a responsibility to prepare students for success – whether they decide to pursue a career in STEM or AI or equipping them with the necessary skills to navigate this technological landscape. Their individual futures, along with our economy and national security, depend on it.

Research and Funding Imperative

Research is a vital function for all institutions of higher education.

TALKING POINTS

- Federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health²¹, National Science Foundation (Broader Impacts²²; Advance Grants²³), the Department of Education (Pier Plans²⁴), and

¹⁷ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/01/21/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-actions-to-attract-stem-talent-and-strengthen-our-economy-and-competitiveness/>

¹⁸ <https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/the-glass-classroom-womens-representation-in-ai-related-post-secondary-programs/>

¹⁹ CSET, 2023

²⁰ <https://kappanonline.org/stem-talent-rural-lakin-stambaugh-ihrig-mahatmya-assouline/>

²¹ <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-20-031.html>

²² <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/learn/broader-impacts>

²³ <https://new.nsf.gov/funding/opportunities/advance-organizational-change-gender-equity-stem>

²⁴ <https://science.osti.gov/grants/Applicant-and-Awardee-Resources/PIER-Plans>

NASA²⁵ require diversity impact statements or diversity plans as part of grant submissions and/or contracting work.

- For example, broadening participation in STEM is included in NSF’s merit review criteria, and NASA Research Opportunities in Space and Earth Sciences (ROSES) programs are piloting the addition of a required inclusion plan. Each agency has a mission statement articulating their firm commitment to broadening participation in STEM and supporting inclusion. Researchers are expected to explain how they aim to build inclusive teams and identify and/or develop diverse talent.
- In many institutions, SDOs and other diversity professionals partner with faculty members to provide resources and subject matter expertise to assist these researchers seeking to submit competitive proposals.
- Researchers rely on the university’s skilled professionals to partner with them to carry out their inclusion plans.
- As another example, the NSF requires that the institution engage in outreach to diverse high school populations to increase participation in STEM. These programs are often connected to diversity offices and programs on campus to provide outreach, education, and support. Without institutionally supported diversity offices and outreach programs, a campus will not be viewed as a competitive application for NSF funding.
- Higher education’s ability to secure federal funding will be hindered without a robust diversity, equity, and inclusion apparatus to support the programs as required in the calls for proposals.
- Research offices at institutions of higher education will be significantly impacted by the absence of facilities and administrative funds regularly used to support positions and establish attractive STEM faculty start-up packages.

Academic Freedom, Social Discourse, and Civic Engagement

At its core, higher education is critical for ensuring that academic freedom, social discourse, and civic engagement can foster an environment that addresses the major issues facing society.

TALKING POINTS

- Campuses must uphold the principles of free speech.
- SDOs and other diversity professionals engage in practices aligned with institutional values of academic freedom and free speech. They are often called upon to support, respond to, and address the impact of the wide range of perspectives represented in the campus community, in- and outside the classroom.
- SDOs and diversity professionals are often called upon to host programs, serve as speakers, and support and advance other campus activities that require balancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, including free speech.
- The values of diversity, equity, and inclusion and free speech are complementary.

²⁵ [https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/nasa - equity_report - v8.pdf](https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/nasa_-_equity_report_-_v8.pdf)

- Given the range of perspectives represented on campuses, the role of SDOs includes providing students, faculty, and staff with opportunities, through education and professional development, to understand both the perspectives of others and the harm and impact that can occur as a result of hate and bias incidents.
 - Intergroup dialogues are a proven and effective tool for addressing challenging topics and providing students with opportunities for engagement and dialogue, which is foundational to a healthy democracy. These discussions must adhere to the principles of free speech.
- Our institutions prepare students for professional careers in an increasingly diverse nation and globally competitive world by:
 - Using inclusive and culturally relevant curricula and ensuring that research, clinical trials, and knowledge development, in general, takes into account the growing diversity of society;
 - Supporting academic freedom for faculty and adhering to the principles of free speech/expression;
 - Addressing the economic, social, and policy issues of the community in which the institution is located; and
 - Fostering community-engaged learning and partnerships that benefit students, the college and university community and beyond.
- Through these experiences, students build active listening skills, the ability to converse effectively across cultures, critical thinking, and empathy – all essential tools for building thriving workplaces, communities, and families.

Legal and Regulatory Imperative

Institutions must comply with existing state and federal laws. Compliance with state and federal regulations has been acknowledged as essential work, even as some politicians have sought to attack diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

TALKING POINTS

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)²⁶, the Forever GI Bill²⁷, and civil rights laws and regulations, including Titles VI²⁸, VII²⁹, and IX³⁰, are the foundation of inclusive excellence efforts. To ensure compliance with federal mandates, public institutions recognized and acted on the need for diversity professionals, offices, and programs.
- Under Title VII³¹ of the Civil Rights Act, employers are obligated to remove artificial barriers that might result in discriminatory hiring outcomes regardless of intent.

²⁶ <https://www.usa.gov/disability-rights>

²⁷ <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/forevergibill.asp>

²⁸ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/regulatory/statutes/title-vi-civil-rights-act-of-1964>

²⁹ <https://www.justice.gov/crt/laws-we-enforce>

³⁰ https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html

³¹ <https://www.justice.gov/crt/laws-we-enforce>

- Colleges and universities sought to leverage institutional diversity offices and college-level diversity officers to provide faculty and staff with the skills to recruit, hire, and retain employees not only in compliance with Title VII, but also to ensure the university identified and hired the best candidates for the job and broadened access to opportunity.
- SDOs and other diversity professionals, in partnership with an institution’s general counsel and colleagues in human resources, support best practices to proactively identify potential issues related to fair hiring practices and provide tools to address them.
- SDOs and other diversity professionals also assist with ensuring that laws are interpreted and applied fairly and accurately. Using the ADA³² as an example, universities have aimed to move beyond compliance with requested accommodations and accessibility on campus to predicting and preventing obstacles that may hinder disabled employees’ and students’ ability to thrive.
- Along with responding to complaints of alleged violations of nondiscrimination policies, and state, and federal law, institutions must engage in prevention efforts and strategies to minimize risks and liabilities, including lawsuits, as well as reduce the likelihood of harm to individuals and communities that may be the targets of discrimination and harassment.
 - The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights’ stated mission is “... to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence through vigorous enforcement of civil rights in our nation’s schools.”
- SDOs and other student support services are responsible for making sure that campuses avoid incidents and have policies and practices in place that prepare the campus for every student, faculty, and staff member to thrive and achieve their respective goals.
- These activities and more require dedicated staff with expertise in the laws and the best proactive strategies to move beyond regulatory compliance to comprehensive prevention and risk management.

³² <https://www.usa.gov/disability-rights>

A Day In the Life of a Senior Diversity Officer

Diversity professionals have many responsibilities, including those tied to strategy, programming, advising, and compliance efforts. The focus of our work can be on diversity or equity or inclusion, or a combination of all three, or on other initiatives such as access or belonging. As a result, what diversity professionals do on campus is complex and varies. The purpose of this section is to provide examples that describe our typical roles and responsibilities.

Responsibilities may include:

- Provide strategic institutional leadership and guidance to the chancellors or presidents, as well as other senior administrative leaders on campus.
- Manage unit and staff responsible for the day-to-day operations of the office, including managing office resources, budget, and planning.
- Lead diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic planning process.
- Develop key performance indicators/metrics to measure the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives by the unit and the campus.
- Work with general counsel on policy audit to identify missing or out-of-date policies from an equity perspective.
- Work with senior administrators to assess the impact of institutional policies, procedures, and practices that result in differential barriers to the success of students, faculty, staff, and other college/university constituents, including those who belong to marginalized/minoritized groups.
- Lead climate/culture study process and implementation meetings.
- Respond to bias incidents that impact the campus community, including consultation on senior leadership's institutional response to such issues.
- Develop and present inclusive excellence workshops.
- Oversee or conduct reporting or compliance efforts related to alleged violations of discrimination, harassment, and Title IX policies, including systems that track such incidents, status, outcomes, and reporting out to the campus community.
- Mentor individual students, faculty, and staff.
- Chair campus committees on disabilities, religious accommodations, bias awareness and response teams, veterans' issues, meeting criteria for designations such as military-friendly or LGBTQ+ friendly campus, and for events and commemorations such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and heritage month celebrations.
- Assist schools/centers/departments in developing pipeline/pathway programs with K-12 institutions and community-based organizations in support of more diverse future incoming classes.
- Consult with marketing and communications staff on development of protocols regarding the use of inclusive language and accurate representation of diversity on campus.
- Develop specific diversity, equity, and inclusion communications reflecting campus-wide initiatives for on-campus constituents and alumni.

- Consult with the research and grants office to assist in securing funding for competitive STEM and other research-focused grants.
- Collaborate with human resources to develop learning modules focused on mitigating bias in the hiring process.
- Partner with academic affairs and faculty to develop and improve recruiting, hiring, and retention strategies, including anti-bias professional development workshops for faculty search committees, to advance faculty diversity.
- Coordinate/organize faculty and staff affinity groups to facilitate welcomeness and a sense of belonging.
- Present workshops for administrators, faculty, staff, and students that enhance cultural awareness and build capacity to engage effectively across differences on campus and beyond.
- Brief board of trustees and campus shared governance structures on diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies, initiatives, and programs.
- Work with faculty teaching-learning centers to develop diversity, equity, and inclusion programs for students, including creating inclusive learning environments (curriculum and teaching).

Frequently Asked Questions

The questions and answers below are meant to provide senior diversity officers and others championing this work with standard answers to common questions that are posed by members of the media, policymakers, and others.

What is DEI?

As higher education began to open its doors to historically underrepresented individuals, particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became clear that institutions were not fully prepared to support and educate students from diverse backgrounds, and often from first-generation low-income families. Diversity offices emerged as a way to facilitate the success of these students. Subsequently, SDOs emerged with a primary focus of serving as an institutional support structure to help facilitate the success of these students. Today, as our society becomes increasingly diverse, the question is whether and how institutions can become better equipped to fulfill their missions in education, research, leadership preparation, and innovation. Much as institutions have needed information technology offices in the last decades to help develop the knowledge and tools to serve and change for a technologically advancing society, so too are diversity, equity, and inclusion offices needed to serve diverse populations, help identify and reduce barriers to success, and provide the tools to build inclusive campuses among faculty, staff, and students aligned with the institution's core mission and central to academic excellence.

Why do we need DEI on campuses?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion offices are dedicated to student success and addressing student needs, including those that may be tied to their various identities. Frequently these offices provide strategic support to institutional leaders as they identify barriers and support faculty and staff as they seek to address social issues, which often require awareness and understanding of diverse communities. These offices also provide connections to communities and resources off campus and, often, help in providing pathways to college for underrepresented and underserved communities, which can be urban, rural, racial, cultural, religious and others. These connections are vital to the growth and success of higher education, particularly as campuses face enrollment challenges.

What do senior diversity officers do?

Senior diversity officers provide strategic leadership for the institution. Inevitably, every senior leader on campus has diversity issues in their portfolio. Senior diversity officers partner with these other senior leaders to achieve excellence in fulfilling the strategic imperatives and missions of higher education institutions.

Their work includes providing direct support work for diverse communities on campus, ensuring they have access to resources necessary to successfully navigate the overall experience of earning a post secondary degree. It involves building institutional capacity and knowledge in line with a campus mission related to societal issues, such as research funding for health care innovations, urban planning, and environmental challenges. It also includes exposing all students to leadership opportunities in preparation for success in an increasingly diverse society and workforce.

Isn't equity about being fair?

Fair does not mean the same. Just as we understand that financial aid requires paying attention to need and that crossing the street requires the ADA implementation of curb cuts.

Acknowledging and understanding the challenges different groups encounter on our campuses is the epitome of being fair.

Why should we forget about merit; and why should we risk quality for the sake of diversity?

Diversity is central to excellence. The core issue is how we assess excellence and the extent to which traditional measures have included barriers to success for many. Great education includes high expectations. It also eliminates the intentional and unintentional barriers to success for underrepresented and underserved backgrounds. These efforts are at the heart of the work of diversity offices. Indeed, with an increasingly diverse society, to be excellent in whatever sector of society requires knowledge of that diversity, and higher education must help its students develop that understanding.

Why should we take resources from some students and give them to others?

Institutions allocate limited resources in alignment with their missions, values, and commitments to excellence. As student populations become increasingly diverse, student success is elevated to an increasingly important indicator for institutional reputation and financial viability. Providing resources for faculty, staff and students to succeed and thrive strengthens institutional health.

Isn't DEI a form of reverse discrimination?

The continued paucity of underrepresented and underserved higher education graduates across the nation, coupled with the significant disparities in employment rates of these groups compared to their white peers, provides contradictory evidence to support this assertion. Given the slow progress in many forms of hiring and student admissions, this is a false claim. There is no one best candidate or one perfect student. People bring many qualities to the table, and in any decision process, especially in competitive environments, a multitude of factors are considered, depending on specific needs of employers or institutions. For example, an institution may desire someone who can play a certain instrument in the orchestra, or fill a position on an athletic team. The need for more students from a particular demographic group given the community the institution serves may also result in the need to increase their representation. The absence of significant diversity in many institutional contexts, in fact, continues to suggest the presence of continuing real or implicit bias in hiring.

How do we ensure people with different viewpoints are supported on campus?

Higher education has long held a value of free speech and open inquiry. Different viewpoints must be expressed and applied when solving problems, especially in higher education. Diverse views around a table are more likely to lead to innovative solutions. We can, however, respond to the impact of hateful expressions that denigrate individuals or groups based on social identities, such as race, religion, gender/gender identity, political views, or ethnicity, and be clear to take a stand against it, without shutting down protected speech under the First Amendment. It is essential for higher education institutions to become more effective in cultivating and strengthening campus cultures that advocate and promote listening, learning, and thoughtfully engaging in the characteristics and skills necessary for a healthy and vibrant democracy. These have to be intentional and collectively agreed upon.

Are diversity statements in the context of employment necessary?

The intent of diversity statements in the context of employment is to determine whether potential candidates have experience and success in working with diverse groups of students, or other skills relevant to the job description. This is about competence for the position, not about attitudes or values. Campuses need to be clear about the purposes of these statements. They may prefer to develop and use a set of questions that directly addresses the candidates'

qualifications and experiences that would support the mission and values of the institution, including relevant elements of diversity.

Institutional statements in support of diversity simply identify values and expectations for campus community members. This is separate from the use of diversity statements in the employment context.

Debunking the Myths

We recognize there are many myths, mischaracterizations and disinformation that seek to invalidate diversity, equity, and inclusion work. In this section, we aim to debunk those myths and provide you with strategic responses that clarify and define our work. In the following, we provide common mischaracterizations and responses to those statements.

Statement: Employees should spend time supporting students' academic achievement, not DEI.

Response: The entire focus of every higher education employee, including senior diversity officers and other diversity professionals, centers around facilitating student success and academic achievement. The individual identities and lived experiences of our students certainly contribute to their overall experience at our institutions, including academic success. As a result of our increasingly diverse populations, it is important for institutions to develop and offer various forms of wrap-around student support services.

Statement: DEI makes people feel bad.

Response: It is not the purpose or intent of college or university diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts to make people feel bad. Individuals may experience sadness, regret or anger about any number of past injustices. However, that is not the aim of diversity equity and inclusion work, nor is the work aimed at promoting any one group over another. A primary goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion work is to simply recognize and thoughtfully articulate the importance and potential impact that the differences among our students may have on their overall quality of life and educational success.

Statement: DEI work is about indoctrination.

Response: The U.S. Constitution clearly established the right to free speech and freedom of expression. These are bedrock principles for higher education and must be protected. Campuses must continue to establish practices that facilitate more dialogue, not less. This does not ignore that speech can harm, and institutions must be willing to speak out when statements do not align with the institutional mission.

Statement: DEI work is about ideology.

Response: At higher education institutions across the nation, diversity, equity, and inclusion work is based on theoretically sound and empirically validated research. The work on diversity,

the complexity of identity, and how one addresses disparities in society all require study and analysis. Best practices in this field have been informed by empirical data and studies grounded in long-neglected work on the status of diverse populations, the ability to dialogue across differences, and to critically think and evaluate for the larger good. Fundamentally, diversity, equity, and inclusion work is about the task of effectively recognizing the importance of consistently applying the basic principles of the American democratic system in a manner that is beneficial to all members of our respective higher education communities.

Statement: DEI work is exclusionary.

Response: As higher education began to address the barriers for historically underrepresented racial groups along with issues of gender, and class, the efforts have evolved to address the multiple identities of people and communities. For example, the ADA evolved in response to the need to address accessibility broadly, and facilities and technology specifically. Institutions are uncovering barriers to success based on other identities such as family status, veteran status, and geographic location (e.g., rural vs urban).

Statement: DEI limits hiring practices.

Response: We should aim to bring the broadest perspectives to solve society's complex problems. Including people who reflect the diversity of the country helps achieve that goal. Traditional hiring practices in every industry have involved hiring people we know, hiring people from our past institution, hiring people like us, etc. The efforts to reform hiring practices have been precisely to open up hiring practices, not to limit them.

Statement: DEI has nothing to do with the educational mission.

Response: Diversity, equity, and inclusion work is not only imperative for underrepresented students but also increasingly necessary to provide skills and knowledge for leaders and students from all backgrounds to assume leadership roles in a diverse society. Diversity, equity, and inclusion work helps ensure people of all backgrounds have an equitable opportunity to access and succeed in higher learning and for future leaders from all backgrounds to be equipped to build diverse teams that can thrive in their environment or industry.

Statement: DEI work is focused on helping people feel they belong.

Response: This is not just about belonging-though feeling like you belong and matter in an institution is critical for all students, faculty, and staff in order to contribute to an institution's academic mission. As stated before DEI work is about helping institutions to increase access and success of diverse populations, evaluate the academic core of the institution with respect to its mission, assist in identifying talent from diverse communities, and, necessarily, to help the institution create a climate in which people matter and can thrive.

Statement: There is too much focus on the past.

Response: Discriminatory practices and resulting inequitable outcomes persist in our society despite the fact that such practices are illegal. We see this in housing through the refusal to sell,

rent, or lease rooms, apartments, or houses; the environment and associated diseases expressed differentially by income, race, and geography; healthcare and inequitable health outcomes based on race and gender, and banking industries through discriminatory banking services in Black majority communities. Diversity, equity, and inclusion work examines embedded practices that perpetuate advantages for some and disadvantages for others. It does not focus on individual characteristics or past wrongs.

Statement: The focus on equity ensures less quality and eliminates achievement based on merit.

Response: Equity is about removing structural barriers to success. It is about ensuring that people in different circumstances have access to different tools and resources to ensure their success. Think about providing a person who is vision impaired with assistive technology to better read a computer screen or a person who has a physical impairment with a closer parking spot.

Statement: This work is not essential for the primary purposes of higher education to prepare leaders, be innovative, and solve societal issues.

Response: Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts directly help us solve societal issues. When we invite more people into the conversation and help them to understand that we value their unique contributions, we set the stage for innovation to occur. We need different people with different perspectives and backgrounds working together to solve our greatest challenges. Moreover, since many of the societal issues we face involve necessarily diverse populations, solutions cannot be generic if they are to be effective. Knowing about that diversity and having more diversity around the table studying the issues increases the likelihood that solutions will reflect the complexity of the society and lead to real change.

Statement: Diversity is encouraging “tribalism.”

Response: Diversity is about recognizing and appreciating the differences each person brings to the table as part of their identities. When campuses do this well, they encourage students to affirm multiple identities. It is through their many identities (scientist, chorale singer, woman, African American etc.) that people come together across differences. To create that community, institutions must recognize, respect, and celebrate those identities so that everyone knows they belong. Indeed, healthy communities come from sharing a common goal, honoring the multiple identities that people bring, and creating an environment in which individuals feel they matter.

Additional Considerations

We encourage you to work with your communications offices to decide when to issue a response, use talking points, or make public statements.

Obviously, when a public official or government entity requests information, you must respond to the inquiry. But there are times when responding to members of the media, students, faculty, staff, parents and others might become tricky – especially in this politically and socially charged environment.

We have provided the following questions to use as a starting point for thinking about how you will respond to the public, media, and other stakeholders. These questions are to be used as a tool to help you and/or your communications colleagues consider how best to communicate with your various audiences.

The questions are outlined below:

Questions to consider before issuing a statement:

- Is the topic relevant to higher education?
- Is the topic relevant to inclusive excellence?
- Is the topic relevant to our institution?
- Is the topic in alignment with our messaging priorities?
- Why would we want to communicate about the event? (To advance our mission and values? To show sympathy? For political purposes?)
- Does the statement help further cement our authority on the specific topic?
- Who is affected by this issue? What is its reach?
- Does the event directly affect any of our stakeholder groups?
- Are we taking any action to support the affected community?
- Would a statement by our institution meaningfully add to the conversation?
- Are we positioned to affect change at the level of influence around the topic - local, regional, national or international?
- Will the statement be perceived as discriminating against another group?
- How will we respond to criticism if we issue a statement?
- What are other higher education and DEI leaders doing?
- Is there an alternative method of response (i.e. responding as an expert in the media, sending a supportive email to the affected stakeholder group or engaging on social media on the topic, etc.)?

Questions to consider before responding to a media inquiry:

- Is the inquiry in alignment with our messaging topics?
- Does the inquiry allow us to provide new insight or be a part of a desired conversation?

- Does the inquiry allow us to effectively advocate for our institution or our stakeholders?
- Does the inquiry allow us to elevate our voice as an authority on the specific matter?
- Does the inquiry allow us to advance an important trend on the specific matter?
- If we respond, will it negatively impact the institution?
- If we respond, who should represent the institution?
- How will each of our multiple stakeholder groups react to seeing our comments?

Questions to consider before sending an email to stakeholders:

- What are we hoping to achieve with an email?
- Is this information urgent, pressing, or a priority?
- Is this information a benefit to a majority of the stakeholder group to which we are sending?
- Is there a segment of our stakeholders who would be best served by receiving this information?
- Can this information be shared in another way on another platform?
- Can this information be shared via a newsletter?
- Will this information cause members to take a desired action?
- Are we prepared for this information to be shared widely?

Questions to consider before posting on social media:

- Is this particular piece of content in alignment with our strategy and/or our editorial calendar?
- What is the job of this piece of content:
 - Educate or inform stakeholders?
 - Engage existing stakeholders?
 - Attract new stakeholders?
 - Acknowledge an important event or happening?
 - Share important news or information?
 - Humanize the institution?
- Will our campus community benefit from this posting?
- Is this information urgent, pressing, or a priority?
- Can this information be shared in another way on another platform?
- Can this information be shared via a newsletter?
- Will this information cause stakeholders to take a desired action?
- If there is pushback to this post, how will we respond?
- Are we prepared to engage with those who engage with the post?

Questions to consider before participating in a partnership activity or event, agreeing to send information on behalf of another organization, or any other partnership:

- Does this opportunity allow us to better serve our existing stakeholders?
- Does this opportunity allow us to reach new stakeholders?

- Does this opportunity allow us to develop a relationship with a potential sponsor or valuable partner?
- Is the opportunity in alignment with our strategic goals?
- Is the opportunity in alignment with our messaging themes or other areas of focus?
- Does this opportunity put us in conflict with our existing partners?
- Will the opportunity cause us to be viewed negatively?
- Will we receive any benefit from this opportunity?

Resources

Standards of the Professions

1. NADOHE Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers in Higher Education 2.0. March 2020
https://nadohe.memberclicks.net/assets/2020SPPI/__NADOHE%20SPP2.0_200131_FinalFormatted.pdf
2. Worthington, R. L., Stanley, C.A., Smith, D.G. (2020). Advancing the Professionalization of Diversity Officers in Higher Education: Report of the Presidential Task Force on the Revision of the NADOHE Standards of Professional Practice, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 13(1), 1-22.
3. Diversity as central to health care. Delgado, J.L, Abrahams, E. (2019). Diversity in clinical trials defines good science and better medicine.
4. Kaiser Family Foundation Social Determinants of Health. (May 2018)
<https://files.kff.org/attachment/issue-brief-beyond-health-care>
5. Smith, D.G. (2012) "Building Institutional Capacity for Diversity and Inclusion in Medical Education," *Academic Medicine* Vol. 87, No. 11 / November 2012

Federal Compliance

1. ADA Standards for Accessible Design. (n.d.). ADA.gov.
<https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/>
2. Miller C. Affirmative Action and Its Persistent Effects: A New Perspective. *California Management Review*. 2019;61(3):19-33. doi:10.1177/0008125619849443 Samuel Leiter, William M. Leiter. *Affirmative Action in Antidiscrimination Law and Policy: An Overview and Synthesis*. SUNY Press; 2002. Accessed January 20, 2023.
3. Sheperd L. EEO-1 Reporting Will Begin in July. SHRM: Employment Law. February 13, 2023.
<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/eo-1-reporting-deadline.aspx>
4. Title IX. (2021, August 12). <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix>

Grant Funding

1. <https://diversity.nih.gov/about-us/diversity-statement>
2. <https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/broadening-participation>
3. <https://science.nasa.gov/researchers/inclusion>

Industry Needs and Workforce Readiness

1. <https://www.lever.co/recruiting-resources/research/dei-report-2021/>
2. <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>
3. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-diversity-equity-and-inclusion#:~:text=Diversity%2C%20equity%2C%20and%20inclusion%20are,%2C%20gender%2C%20and%20sexual%20orientations>

NADOHE Framework for Advancing Anti-Racism on Campus

<https://nadohe.memberclicks.net/assets/2023/NADOHE%20Anti-Racism%20Framework%20-%20Accessible.pdf>

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2023. *Advancing Antiracism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in STEM Organizations: Beyond Broadening Participation*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/26803>.

PEN America

Campus Free Speech <https://pen.org/issue/campus-free-speech/>