

***To Include is To Excel* Primer**

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms

This glossary presents definitions of key terms for efforts in diversity, inclusion, and equity. It represents the emergent consensus of practitioners in the higher education and non-profit sectors, and is informed by broad currents of research in the social sciences and related disciplines.

The main premise of such efforts is that institutions need reform to become more diverse, inclusive, and equitable. It is assumed that these are desirable goals — none of the key terms presents a justification for, e.g., greater diversity — and that, given the current status quo, most (if not all) institutions must strive to realize more of these qualities. Other assumptions in play here include:

- that treating individuals *equitably* — in addition to treating them equally (see below) — is among the most valued ideals that an institution of higher learning should pursue;
- that processes of social stratification inexorably distribute resources, skills, and opportunities unequally, a skewed distribution with profound impact on educational access and achievement;
- that an institution's practices and policies are *culturally embedded*: While much about them is readily recognized, much is also implicit and sedimented in taken-for-granted routines and rationales. Dynamics that inhibit inclusion and equity often lie imbricated in this unacknowledged “common sense.” Thus, addressing them requires collective work that is reflective and transformative.

This glossary begins to provide a shared language for students, staff, and faculty as we pursue the inclusive mission of the College more ambitiously. In particular, the implications of the principal key terms — *diversity*, *inclusion*, and *equity* — for institutional practice are already the subject of reflection in many segments of the campus. In defining them substantively, these iterations are intended to stimulate further thought and debate. Likewise, in light of *To Include Is to Excel's* focus on pedagogy and curriculum, the definition of *inclusive excellence* is proposed as a lofty yet crucial goal to guide our efforts. This list is provisional and partial — it does not attempt to be comprehensive — and will likely grow with time.

DEI is the acronym for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, used by practitioners to evoke the broad range of practical reforms necessary to dismantle engrained discriminatory patterns and achieve equitable relationships. Significantly, most recognize that there exists a hierarchy of engagement and impact in DEI efforts, with “Diversity” naming the least assiduous level of effort

and “Equity” the most (see individual definitions below).

Diversity The wide variety of different personal and group characteristics among human beings. As a matter of institutional practice, the term also refers to the presence of historically underrepresented groups (HUGS) and to policies enabling their access to educational opportunities. The College’s commitment to an annual increase in the student body’s racial and ethnic diversity is an example of such initiatives. In higher education and non-profit organizations, a clear trend exists to distinguish policies and procedures related to diversity from other dimensions of practice, such as those of inclusion and equity. This is because it is possible for an institution with a diverse membership to lack measures to foster the inclusion, or full acceptance and participation, of all its members. The broad consensus is that to achieve inclusion and equity, institutions need to make efforts distinct from those that ensure diversity.

Inclusion refers to acts of creating opportunities for involvement and empowerment for underrepresented groups, through which they feel respected, supported, valued, and enabled to fully participate in campus life. Beyond offering access, inclusion involves an active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity — in the curriculum, in staffing, in procedures and policies, and across all institutional units with which individuals might connect — in ways that enable them to communicate their views and share in decision making. By extension, inclusion also implies majority-group members taking the initiative to access non-majority voices in the latter’s own settings and through their own informational channels, such that they expand their understanding of relevant issues in their relationships. Consequently, and in contrast to the “additive” character of diversity, inclusive initiatives often entail a need for cultural transformation, which includes changing existing institutional practices.

Equity In education, the pursuit of equity focuses on creating the conditions for all — including those from HUGs — to achieve the same learning outcomes as members of dominant groups. Equitable practices are designed to accommodate differences in students’ learning — and not to treat all students the same. Equity differs from equality, which refers to an evenly distributed access to educational resources and opportunities. The uniform distribution of access may not address the greater needs that students of color, low income students, etc. may have, and may not compensate for the root causes of the achievement gap, so it may or may not result in equitable outcomes.

From this perspective, cultural, social, and economic barriers may hamper high levels of attainment by students from HUGs; accordingly, the goal is to provide them with the resources they need to overcome those obstacles. Thus, reforms focused on improving educational equity seek to identify disparities in educational performance, and then introduce modifications intended to address or compensate for those inequities — e.g., by increasing funding levels, redesigning school programs, teaching students in different ways, or providing comparatively more educational services and academic support to students with greater needs.

Ableism This can refer to either individual or institutional actions and language that disadvantage or disempower people with disabilities, people experiencing disabilities, or

disabled people. Ableism includes mental, physical, and emotional disabilities.

Achievement gap refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and students of color, or students from higher-income and lower-income households. Many suggest that this challenge also be conceptualized as an **opportunity gap**, which refers to disparities in access to quality schools and resources needed for all to be academically successful. In other words, while achievement refers to outputs — the unequal distribution of educational results and benefits, opportunity refers to inputs — the inequitable distribution of access, resources, and occasions for enrichment. To improve student performance, both angles on the issue are necessary.

Cisgender refers to individuals in whom there is a match between the gender they were assigned at birth, their bodies, and their personal identity. Often referred to as a cis-male or cis-female, these terms describe the antonym to transgender.

Classism Prejudicial thoughts and discriminatory actions based on difference in socio-economic status and income, usually referred to as class. As with other systemic forms of social privilege, classism involves the assignment of characteristics of worth and ability based on stereotypical notions of their distribution among classes, as part of justifying differential treatment for class groups and individuals within them. Thus, it can also be expressed through the use of public policies and institutional practices that prevent people from breaking out of poverty rather than ensuring equitable economic, social, and educational opportunity.

Gender identity refers to all people's internal, deeply felt sense of being a man, woman, both, in between, or outside of the gender binary, which may or may not correspond with sex assigned at birth. Because gender identity is internal and personally defined, it is not visible to others, which differentiates it from gender expression.

Heterosexism The individual, societal, cultural, and institutional beliefs and practices that favor heterosexuality and assume that heterosexuality is the only natural, normal, or acceptable sexual orientation. This creates an imbalance in power, which leads to systemic, institutional, pervasive, and routine mistreatment of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

Historically Underrepresented Group (HUG) refers to groups that, relative to their demographic presence in the population, have lower than average rates of participation in a given social sphere (such as higher education). In many instances, this involves past limits to access and/or discriminatory practices. For a given institution, historically underrepresented is often measured as a trend of a decade or longer (e.g., if women are under-enrolled by a large percentage for ten years or more relative to their numbers in the overall population, their underrepresentation is historically significant).

Inclusive Excellence Conventionally, excellence refers to the highest levels of academic achievement and performance, as discerned through distinct measures (e.g., GPA, Honors,

extensive engagement in high impact practices, etc.). With the adjective “inclusive,” an emergent approach in academic institutions retains this premise, adding to it a focus on DEI concerns elevated to the level of core operating principle. Its proponents hold that excellence in education should be measured by how well campus systems, structures, and processes promote high academic achievement by all students, regardless of racial, gender, socioeconomic, or other characteristics. It implies a step beyond diversity toward intentionally integrating inclusion and equity efforts into key aspects of campus institutions — such as academic priorities, leadership, quality improvement initiatives, decision-making, day-to-day operations, and organizational cultures. It presumes that such efforts become central to the pursuit of its mission, a fundamental value that decisions consistently seek to materialize.

Inclusive excellence is also an expanding focus of academic research. In a study commissioned by the AAC&U, Bauman et al (2005) propose that, with respect to its ultimate aim:

“Inclusive excellence” is achieved when . . . historically underrepresented students exhibit traditional academic characteristics of high achievers, such as high grade point averages, honors, high class rankings, and so on. We emphasize traditional measures of academic excellence because for too long, institutions of higher education have approached the college participation of historically underrepresented students as a matter of producing “survivors” — students who persist and graduate — largely disregarding the institution’s responsibility and effectiveness in producing “leaders.” Most institutions evaluate their effectiveness in serving historically underrepresented students in terms of access, to a lesser extent in terms of persistence and completion, and rarely ever in terms of high achievement among specific groups.

Thus, an institution pursuing inclusive excellence embraces “the responsibility for producing equitable educational outcomes for students from historically underrepresented groups,” by creating “practices that monitor the development of high achievement among [such] students.” At the same time, research bears out that pursuing inclusive excellence supports all students. For example, teaching methods that more effectively include underserved students are often approaches that enable all students’ learning.

Institutional racism involves discriminatory, unfair, or inequitable treatment occurring within and between institutions. In using this notion, scholars and practitioners emphasize a lack of intentionality, since the privileging of whites over peoples of color is often embedded in taken-for-granted policies and routines. Likewise, racial categories can be assumed and unspecified in practice. In this light, and because “racism” widely connotes intention and personal animus, it is perhaps more useful to think of this phenomenon as the institutional reproduction of unequally distributed privileges according to race. Consider this example:

A public-sector arts council has distinct, well-endowed grant funding categories in its budget for classical music, opera, visual arts exhibits (e.g., paintings in museums), and similar cultural forms. Consequently, it routinely makes large grants to organizations that sponsor these performances and spectacles. Meanwhile, in a residual budget category, a small allocation of

money funds all other arts activities (including jazz, salsa, ethnic cultural festivals, etc.).

This typifies the racial dynamic in question: Such policies are often long-standing and unquestioned, the budget categories are not racially marked, and the entire process does not require that individuals possess racist attitudes to unfold as it does. Yet the outcome is racially skewed access to resources and opportunities for enrichment, insofar as conventionally white art forms are funded at much higher rates than those of peoples of color.

LGBT/LGBTQ/LGBTQIA, etc These acronyms are umbrella terms used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer or questioning people. Another common acronym used is LGBTQIA, which encompasses intersex and asexual identities.

Microaggression Often unconscious and automatic, microaggressions are brief, subtle, and everyday verbal or non-verbal exchanges that insult or convey demeaning messages to the recipient because of his or her group membership (such as race, gender, age or socio-economic status). The initiator of the message may be unaware that she has engaged in a cumulative behavior — one in a lifetime of derogatory messages that can erode its victim's confidence.

Person/People of Color Used primarily in the United States to describe any person who is not white; the term is meant to be inclusive among non-white groups, emphasizing common experiences of racism. Sometimes POC, which includes indigenous populations explicitly.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI) is a term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. But the expression often connotes more than numerical percentages. It is also used to evoke the history of racial exclusion at some colleges and universities (when the alternate “traditionally white institutions” is sometimes employed). It evokes as well the existence of ongoing practices whereby white cultural preferences and decision-making prerogatives remain entrenched in institutional life.

Prejudice A pre-judgment or unjustifiable and usually negative attitude of an individual or group toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny individual members of certain groups the benefit of being recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.

Privilege The unquestioned and unearned advantages and benefits that only some can access because of their social group memberships (e.g., whites with respect to people of color, heterosexuals with respect to homosexuals, etc.). In the broadest sense, the privilege that whites experience in their everyday lives can be cast as the absence of the consequences of racism. In Peggy McIntosh's well-known litany of examples, this translates into whites' ability to, e.g., walk around a department store without being followed; turn on the television and see members of their race represented as positive models; or take a job without having co-workers suspect that one got it because of one's race. Generally, those who enjoy privilege do so

without being aware of it. For our purposes, the significance of privilege lies in an increased awareness that it fosters the achievement of those who have it, and impedes that of those who do not.

Racism In this context, the term refers to individual, cultural, and institutional ways by which divergent consequences are created for groups: advantages for those historically or currently defined as white, detriments for those historically or currently defined as non-white (African, Asian, Latinx, Native American, etc.). False notions of a biologically fixed racial hierarchy, of superior and inferior physical, moral, and intellectual traits linked to different races, have been central to such practices. While “racist” widely connotes attitudes of personal animus toward racial others, this definition aligns with the common shorthand designation of racism as “prejudice plus power.” Combining the concepts of prejudice and power stresses that racism is present when social practices, whether intentional, structural, or both, produce divergent consequences for different groups.

Sexism Prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory actions based on difference in sex/gender, usually those targeting women. Flawed characterizations of sexual difference, of naturally occurring variations in the physical, moral, and intellectual capacities of men and women, have abetted the stereotypes and unequal social roles of which sexism consists. As with racism, many definitions of sexism stress the interdependent elements of attitude and practice, giving sexism an embedded, impersonal character. From this perspective, institutions can perpetuate sexual inequalities without sexist actors explicitly promoting sexual differences in opportunities and outcomes.

Transgender A person whose gender identity (and sometimes expression) is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans* is an umbrella term that refers to various ways that people identify differently than their biological sex. Transgender people may or may not choose to alter their bodies through the use of hormones and/or gender affirmation surgery. Transgender people may identify with any sexual orientation, and their sexual orientation may or may not change before, during, or after transition.

Bibliography is under development - check back here

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