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Inclusive Excellence: Moving Beyond Diversity

CREDITS

Contributors:

Michelle Barkley
Amanda Bylczyński
Armando Burciaga
Michael Couch
Christiaan Desmond
Sean Huddleston
Janice Kinsinger
Tracy Labadie
Ikemefuna Nwosu
Khayree Williams

Co-Editors:

Amanda Bylczyński
Tracy Labadie

Special Thank You To:

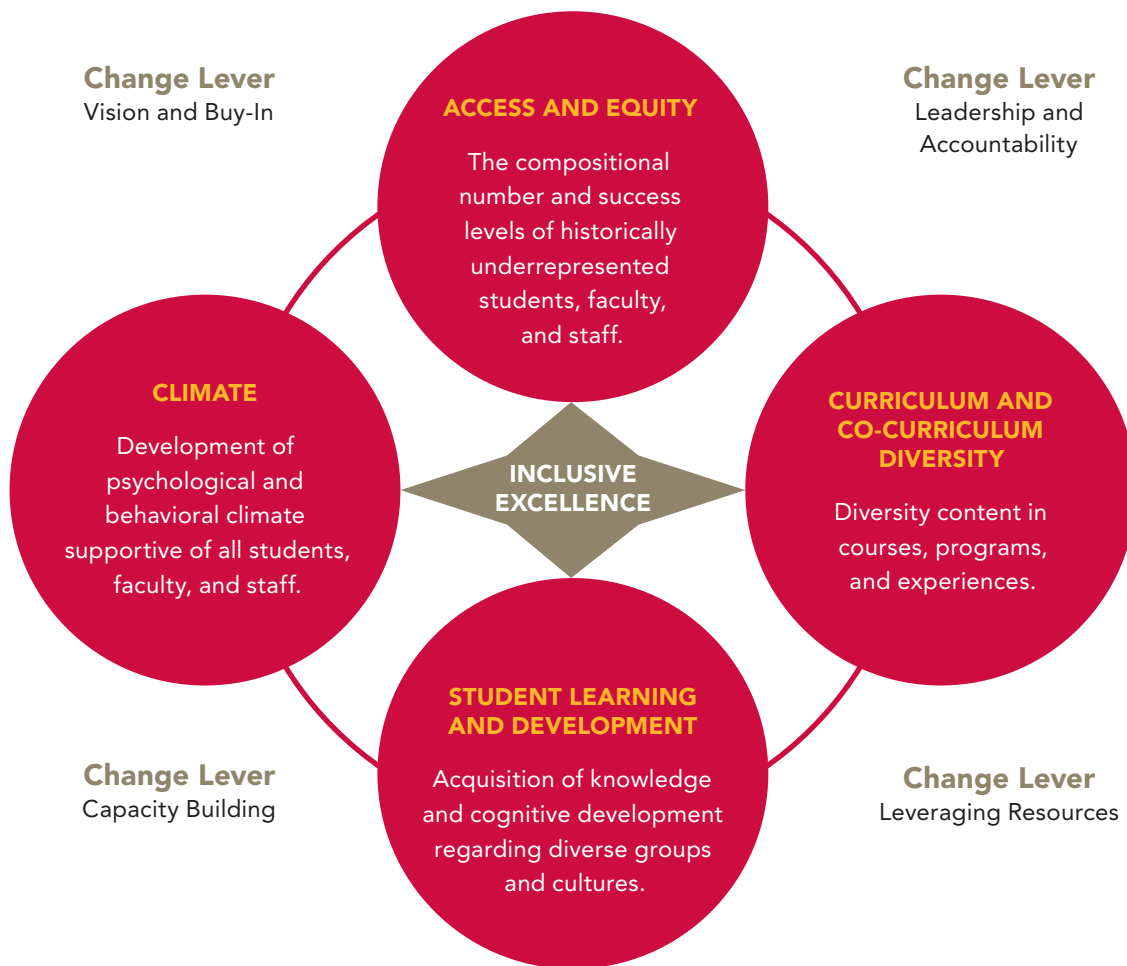
Dr. Sandra Balkema
Dr. Jasmine Dean

Introduction

In higher education, the word Diversity has become an essential and visual component of most college and university's mission and core values. At our own graduate program institution, Ferris State University, Diversity is one of the University's six Core Values, with Collaboration, Ethical Community, Excellence, Learning, and Opportunity. The University affirms its intention to be diverse and inclusive with this statement: "By providing a campus which is supportive, safe, and welcoming, Ferris embraces a diversity of ideas, beliefs, and cultures" (Ferris, 2017). In recent years, however, the focus in many institutions has shifted from recognizing the value of Diversity to emphasizing the importance of Inclusion.

Inclusive Excellence was first introduced by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in 2005 as a methodology for helping colleges and universities realize the benefits of diversity and inclusion and their positive impact on institutional quality. The intention was to end the debate surrounding the value of diversity and inclusion on college campuses. As a guiding principle, Inclusive Excellence is meant to include and engage the rich diversity of students, staff, faculty, administrators, alumni, and community constituents in the overall success of the university.

Accordingly, the AAC&U sought to provide guidance that would demonstrate that inclusive campuses and institutional excellence are not mutually exclusive. In fact, diversity and inclusion should be viewed, nurtured, and preserved as important assets in higher education. To assist campuses, the AAC&U advanced an operational model of Inclusive Excellence that "is intended to be flexible enough to be 'localized' by a campus while also retaining basic principles to guide a national movement and to connect campuses in these efforts" (Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005, p.vi). The model consists of four levers for change, as illustrated in the following graphic.



Inclusive Excellence can be looked at two ways. In one regard, Inclusive Excellence can be viewed as practicing and striving for excellence in institutional inclusion efforts. This view suggests a high quality, comprehensive approach for achieving an inclusive and welcoming campus and community. It means attending to both the demographic diversity of the institution and also to the need to foster climates and cultures that provide every member of the campus community with the opportunity to thrive and succeed. Essentially, the focus is on being excellent at inclusion.

Another way to view Inclusive Excellence is to focus on making excellence inclusive. For campuses, this means ensuring that academic and social success on campus is not reserved for a few. It requires the integration of diversity, inclusion, and educational quality, and to make sure that they are recognized as interdependent. In this regard, the focus is on being inclusive about excellence. Recognizing both views of Inclusive Excellence is essential for engaging, supporting, and celebrating our faculty, staff, and students, and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive campus community that values and respects the identities, insights, and contributions of everyone. Consequently, Inclusive Excellence can be experienced as a journey of discovery and transformation for every aspect and level of higher education institutions.

History of Diversity and Inclusion

The history of Diversity in the community college can be traced to 1960s and 1970s as the Civil Rights Movement and second feminist movement took hold of America. Prior to this, most community college students were not typically as interested in degrees as they were certificate programs or job training courses. However, after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was created, enrollment by underrepresented students began to rise. In the 1960s, only roughly 26% of students were women, while “students of color were specifically not enrolled in many colleges or universities ... due to segregation” (Robinson-Neal, 2009, p. 3). Overall, the student population of colleges remained white. However, over the next 35 years, diversity in colleges rose. Women made up roughly 48% of the student population by 1995, while 12.3% were African Americans, and Hispanics represented 14.4% by 2001.

After *Brown v. the Board of Education* landmark case in the 1950s, efforts against discrimination in higher education began, citing the protection of the 14th Amendment. The result was the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination in housing, education, and employment. The education amendments of the Act focused on reducing discrimination based on race, sex, and religion. Two major components first created under the Civil Rights Act of

1964 were the Title IV and VI laws. Title IV made discrimination in public institutions based on the physical attributes and religion of the student illegal, while Title VI ensured that financial aid would be provided to students regardless of their race to combat discrimination African Americans and Hispanics had faced previously. These initiatives led to the creation of Affirmative Action in 1965 in order to help further establish and extend the benefits to the underrepresented students.

As the feminist movement gained momentum, the concept of Title VI was extended to women in 1972 under Title IX. In 1974, the government continued with its legislation issuing the Educational Opportunities Act, which aimed to assist students whose first language wasn't English and which led to the Americans with Disabilities Act to assist students with various disabilities. In connection with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act was passed, ensuring that financial aid would be provided to those with disabilities.

Over the course of the next several decades, these laws have been modified, based on the needs of the students and the schools in order to serve the students. These legislative changes did not occur without challenges, as court cases against Affirmative Action have risen throughout the decades. Major cases, such as *The University of California v. Bakke* in 1978, challenged the holding of "slots" for underrepresented students and challenged the efforts of colleges to further diversify within their college populations. Similar court cases heard by the Supreme Court over Affirmative Action include *Farmer v. Ramsay* and *Pollard v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education* in 1998 and *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger* in 2003.

The challenge of Diversity is a continuing issue educational leaders struggle with. Community colleges' open door policies help to deter issues and grievances some universities face as it pertains to Affirmative Action; however, the work towards full inclusion is still underway.

Group Struggles for Diversity and Inclusion

With local, state, and federal governments pushing to increase the number of Americans with higher education, leaders of community colleges have expanded to close achievement gaps and open new opportunities. For this reason, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are three words becoming increasingly important to community colleges. Diversity typically measures those who attend, aiming to increase the underrepresented community members based on gender, race, ethnicity, and age. Equity pushes access and success for underrepresented students, including low income students and ethnic minorities. Inclusion opens the opportunity for these students to ensure their needs are met so they can be successful. All three of these terms are needed to ensure that the populations within America who previously believed higher education was not a possibility have the chance to reach their dreams and goals.

Many colleges are increasing their students' ability to reach new heights with well created diversity programs. Hyman and Jacobs (2009) spoke with Professor A. Thompson of Eastern Kentucky University about eight reasons diversity matters. According to Professor Thompson, diversity programs expand worldliness, introducing students to new cultures from diverse groups, enhancing social development through these interactions, and preparing students to be successful in their careers. In fact, it is believed that 55% of minority groups will have successful careers by 2050. Diversity awareness promotes students' ability to think creatively about different viewpoints, enhance their self-awareness, and increase knowledge. With all this, students are enriched to be able to look at multiple perspectives, which will also prepare them to operate in the global society (Hyman & Jacobs, 2009).

Although all colleges want these goals for their students, obtaining them can be a struggle. Colleges across the country are tackling this effort through institutionalization of DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) offices and initiatives. From race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, to veterans and students with disabilities, community colleges are working to reach Inclusive Excellence.

"From race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation, to veterans and students with disabilities, community colleges are working to reach Inclusive Excellence."



RACE

It is reasonable to assume that the climate within higher education has remained somewhat unwelcoming to students of color because race and its impacts within the system have not been fully addressed: “Racism runs rampant in the educational system, while America, in a pseudo humanitarian stance, proudly proclaims that it is the key to equal opportunity for all” (Biondi, 2012). Many predominantly white institutions have either not made this matter a priority, or haven’t been forced to take steps to solidify that campus climate, resources, and academic support services are in place to ensure the success of all students equally.

Government agencies have been aware of the issue for decades as a result of survey data. The total number of students pursuing higher education has risen for years. In 1965, 5.9 million people were enrolled in a degree-granting postsecondary institution, while in 2014 the number had ballooned to 20.2 million (NCES, 2016). The racial and ethnic diversity of the nation’s higher education makeup has changed drastically during this period and at every level. However, the disparate achievement gaps of students of color versus white students persist. Now with college enrollment on the decline and every student lost equaling negative revenue, completion has become a hotly debated topic. The success, retention, and matriculation of all ethnic and racially diverse students is now becoming a dilemma that colleges and universities have more of a vested interest in solving, either out of necessity, or as a result of pressure from students and stakeholders.

Research has shown that financial access, the readiness and ability to succeed in college coursework, and a negative campus climate are significant contributors to the success of students of color: “Research shows graduation rates fall for all students of color when forced to pursue their collegiate education in a hostile environment” (Perry, 2015). For example, in 2015 at the University of Missouri, in a case that received national recognition, students marched, protested, and galvanized the school football team that refused to play until action was taken to address numerous racially motivated campus issues. This protest resulted in bad press for the institution and a swift resignation from their college president.

Wallace Community College (WCCD) in Dothan, Alabama, is an example of an institution that is thriving by addressing many of the issues that contribute to the achievement gap for students of color and other minorities. WCCD received national recognition as a finalist for the 2015 Bellwether Awards for their I-CAN (Improvement, Constant, and Never-ending) initiative. The college, by focusing on professional development to improve instructional effectiveness through more active and nurturing classroom learning, closed the achievement gap by 96% between low income and higher income students in developmental courses from 2011 to 2013. One strategy credited for this success was the implementation of instructor-made video-lectures, which also increased tutorial assistance, improved remediation efforts, and added more hands-on classroom activities.

GENDER

The passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920 gave women the right to vote and was a huge step forward in women’s rights. While the past hundred years have seen much progress, the unfortunate reality is that today’s women are still unable to achieve the same levels of earning potential or positions as men in corporate America or on college campuses. A major hurdle that has been associated with this is gender stereotyping.

A study conducted by Bosner (2008) examined the beliefs and stereotypes of 338 undergraduate business students and their perceived attributes associated with a successful manager. He states that there are aspects of gender bias that still exist, such as stereotypes beginning at an early age and younger people tending to ignore experiences that challenge these stereotypes. Results of the study show that both men and women display some levels of gender stereotyping. Additionally, both men and women still accept common stereotypes, such as men being more assertive and emotionally stable than women, and women being more helpful than men (Bosner, 2008).

Gender continues to be an important organizing principle in education. Previous efforts to achieve gender equity in higher education have been driven primarily by regulations under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX prohibits institutions that receive federal funding from practicing gender discrimination. Gender equity is achieved when both men and women are given equitable opportunities and there is a decrease, and eventual elimination, of gender stereotyping.

The Department of Education released guidance on gender equity in career and technical education (CTE) programs in June 2016. This letter supports the Education Department’s commitment to ensuring that all students have access to high-quality CTE programs. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act require that states meet a negotiated target participation and completion rate of students in programs that are nontraditional for their gender. Institutions receiving funds under the Perkins Act are obligated to meet these designated participation and completion rates or risk losing access to the funding.

College students are faced with making important life-changing decisions, such as choosing an academic major, career, and the possibility of future advancements. An important part of a college’s role in supporting diversity efforts must focus on ways to mitigate the effects of these long-lasting gender stereotypes. Institutions may accomplish this by reviewing their educational practices as they relate to gender. This process should include a review of curriculum and all related documentation, such as syllabi and course materials, to ensure they are free of gender bias. Institutions should also be reflective of their own staffing practices to encourage gender intersections within positions. College leaders cannot underestimate the value of educating all faculty and staff. Gender sensitivity training is integral to developing a welcoming culture on campus.

Washington County Community College (WCCC) in Calais, Maine, exemplifies gender equity efforts. They encourage student participation in fields that are non-traditional career paths for their gender by providing additional support services for this student population and by creating a welcoming environment to make all students feel safe and comfortable (WCCC, 2017). Their focus is on treating all students the same by emphasizing professionalism in the classroom.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Institutions of higher education still have a long way to go in providing a more inclusive environment for students and employees based on sexual orientation and/or specific gender identification. Despite recent decades of greater awareness for these groups, the reality is that individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) are still largely marginalized on college campuses: "Sexual minority students on college campuses encounter unique challenges because of how they are perceived and treated as a result of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression" (Rankin, 2005). The overall climate for individuals on college campuses of non-heterosexual identification is reported as being a place that is generally fearful and intimidating (Rankin, 2005).

Campuses around the country vary in their approach to Inclusive Excellence with regards to sexuality. Some colleges, such as Oakton Community College in Des Plaines, Illinois, are recognized for being LGBTQ inclusive. Oakton can be credited for offering an Introduction to LGBTQ Studies program on campus and for offering many other onsite resources that are LGBTQ friendly. Other colleges, however, have been criticized for fostering an environment described as hostile for individuals of sexual or gender minority. Nationally, over 70% of all students, faculty, and administrators consider their campus to be homophobic in nature (Rankin, 2005). The culture of the college influences the climate of support for these individuals and continues to be a topic of challenge for leaders in higher education.

Students in the LGBTQ community have reported negative experiences that range from feelings of isolation, fearing for safety, serving as the target of offensive jokes and/or remarks, and negative attitudes from other students and faculty as just some of the hostile experiences that they have encountered on their college campus (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998). In a 2005 study, it was found that over 40% of LGBTQ students did not feel that their college was doing enough to support their sexual orientation or gender identity while on campus (Rankin, 2005).

Efforts to change a campus climate toward inclusivity for students and employees of the LGBTQ community requires a slow and steady approach. Each sub-population deserves thoughtful and decisive attention to ensure that proper supports are in place to meet their individual needs. For instance, bisexuals have reported feeling targeted by both heterosexuals from a homophobic viewpoint, as well as members of lesbian and gay groups for not fully identifying with one particular orientation (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998). Similarly, "issues confronting transgendered and transsexual people need specific attention in order to fully understand the nature of their experiences on campus" (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998, p. 59). In terms of academic curriculum, the LGBTQ perspective and voice are still largely missing or underrepresented in academia (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998). Intentional supports such as creating resource centers, supporting LGBTQ safe groups, offering sensitivity trainings, and incorporating non-discriminatory policies on campus are recommended strategies for increasing Inclusive Excellence centered on sexual orientation and gender identity issues (Rankin, 2005).



RELIGION

In the realm of religious diversity or inclusion, it is expected that Inclusive Excellence is not just about the number of represented religions among staff and students within any organization, but more of an active awareness of religious diversity in the implementation of processes across the various structures of an institution.

However, western educational institutions face a major cultural challenge in adopting this organizational cultural aspiration. Religion is considered deeply personal and is one of the conversational taboos. Unlike racial diversity, religious diversity is often not immediately obvious and not discussed in public (Beaman & Beyer, 2008). In a recent study of incoming college freshmen, 85% believe that, “it is ‘important’ for their campuses to provide a welcoming environment for individuals of diverse religious and nonreligious perspectives” (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 4). However, within that same group, over the previous 12 months, just 19% had participated in an interfaith conversation.

In the classroom, faculty have reported that they are not adequately trained to facilitate positive and informative dialogue when the issue of religion arises (Lelwica, 2008). Surprisingly, this sentiment was echoed by some faculty who teach courses with religious components.

So how do organizations achieve progress in this religious sub arena of Inclusive Excellence? How does an organization in its planning phase include actions that are religiously sensitive? The answer may lie in lowering the perceived stakes in having open conversations and dialogue on religious plurality on campuses. It will also involve promoting opportunities to have these conversations similar to the Safe Zones created for sexual diversity.

LaGuardia Community College in Queens, New York, serves one of the most diverse areas in the nation, and yet they recognized the existing barriers to addressing religious diversity in the daily dialogue of inclusivity. Through the Ford Foundation’s Difficult Dialogues initiative, they provided a year-long training seminar for faculty and staff on conversations on religion and faith. This was extended to the surrounding community involving over “50

churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques” in interfaith dialogue breakfasts facilitated by trained members of the college (Bing & Talmadge, 2008). Reflecting upon their early progress, they summarize their aspirations as follows: “...but trust that by creating opportunities for inquiry, exchange, and self-reflection, we are laying the foundation for transforming our academic spaces — creating institutions where academic freedom and religious expression can stand side by side” (Bing & Talmadge, 2008).

The Interfaith Youth Core based in Chicago recognizes the benefits of Inclusive Excellence in terms of religion in this statement: “A deep-seated component of U.S. society, religion is sometimes seen as divisive; yet, it has great power to catalyze individuals toward positive aims” (Mayhew et al., 2016, p. 2). The organization recommends the following practices to minimize the dissonance between intentions and actions on campuses:

1. Assess campus preparedness to support worldview diversity.
2. Integrate worldview diversity as a valued lens in multicultural education.
3. Provide new interfaith opportunities and/or an interfaith lens on existing programs.
4. Highlight the positive contributions of diverse community members.

These are strong and common strategies to developing an active awareness to imbuing religious plurality into the organizational culture of a college.

VETERANS

In the past, student veterans have been categorized simply as “non-traditional students” by community colleges. It has become increasingly clear that veteran students have unique needs that were largely ignored in the past. Community college leaders are now recognizing that they are in a position to recruit and support veterans and their unique needs and, in more recent years, have increased efforts to distinguish their veteran students from the non-traditional students.



In 2012, more than 5% of all postsecondary students were United States military veterans, with 43% of those veterans attending community college. However, their enrollment represents only a third of all eligible veterans. Veterans face unique challenges and barriers to college success. Many veterans have been deployed to a combat zone and are more likely to be injured than killed, resulting in students who have physical and mental challenges to overcome. Of those deployed to combat zones, 14% to 19% will develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or depression. Often these students require additional support for depression and PTSD to be successful in a college setting.

Veterans who have been in combat situations often struggle to adapt to civilian life. In addition to physical and mental challenges, veterans face an extreme change in environment when they transition from active service to civilian life. It is challenging for some to adjust to the non-structured life of a college student after living in a highly structured environment. These students are used to being held accountable and respecting their superiors. Thus, it may be challenging for them to connect with students who do not share the same level of respect for their instructors. Additionally, veterans struggle to make connections with fellow students who have no sense of the dangers they experienced during military service.

To assist higher education institutions in their support of veterans on their campuses, the U.S. Department of Education published the eight keys to success in 2013:

1. Create a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans.
2. Ensure consistent and sustained support from campus leadership.
3. Implement an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming.
4. Coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space (even if the space is limited in size).
5. Collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans.
6. Utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention and degree completion.
7. Provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans.
8. Develop systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans (Heineman, 2016, p. 221).

When asked what the greatest challenge was in transitioning to civilian life, 69% of the veterans interviewed responded that finding a job was their biggest challenge. Community colleges are positioned to address this need as they already support workforce development needs for their communities. Coupling this mission with additional support services needed for veteran students makes community colleges a valuable source for the student veteran's transition to civilian life.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It is conservatively estimated that anywhere from 35 million to 110 million individuals experience some sort of disability that is physical, mental, emotional, learning, or developmental in nature (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998). According to Cashwell (2014), the National Center for Education Statistics reported that community colleges enrolled over half of the total number of students in higher education with disabilities in 2014. Community colleges continue to strategize ways to provide both transitional support at the K-12 level, as well as support at the two-year college level to students with special needs (p. 19).

The college climate for students with disabilities continues to be wrought with challenges. Students with disabilities face challenges in their physical environment in the areas of space planning and layout as well as access to equipment, resources, and necessary technologies. Individuals with disabilities also encounter challenges within their attitudinal environment. Students with disabilities often report feeling isolated, fearful, stereotyped, and aware of general feelings of hatred from others at the college including faculty and staff (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal mandate that requires all colleges that receive federal funds to provide reasonable accommodations to students who live and learn on a college campus (Barger, 2016). Some best practice guidelines associated with this policy include providing mandatory annual training to students, faculty, and staff about the protections governed under ADA, recognizing that cost cannot be an excuse used to deny access to an individual based on a reasonable accommodation associated with a disability, and that it is discriminatory to make comparisons of students with disabilities to those without (p. 42).

As technology continues to advance, so does the presence of distance learning on college campuses. Students with disabilities have the right to accessibility in the virtual world of learning, just as they do in the face-to-face classroom environment. All online classes, videos, discussion forums, and campus websites must be made accessible to students with special needs (Barger, 2016, p. 42). "Universal design" elements seek to minimize this disruption for students. All syllabi, websites, and electronic resources must be made accessible to students who use screen readers and other adaptive technology devices (p. 42). Any accommodation made under the universal design philosophy for all students will not just provide benefit to the student(s) with a disability but will ultimately support and increase access to education for all.

Organizational Diversity

Colleges and universities are increasingly focused on cultivating a culture of inclusivity on their campuses. However, efforts are focused on the student population. To truly achieve success in providing a culturally diverse experience, colleges should also focus their energy on recruiting, training, and cultivating a diverse population of faculty and staff. A great deal of attention is placed on the changing face of college students and how we recruit and retain these students, but at times that same level of energy is not focused on recruiting and retaining a diverse faculty and staff. For college campuses to truly remain effective long term,

diversity in faculty and staff needs to be just as important to our future success. Without the technical, professional, and clerical staff, community colleges would not be able to perform the vital function of educating students. With the great diversity of community college students, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the staff is essential.

Vacancies created from retirements may give colleges a chance to increase diversity in leaders and faculty and to be more reflective of the communities these colleges serve. According to AACC, community colleges are seeing an increase in women and members of minority groups in leadership positions as a result of the turnover created by retirements. According to AACC data, minorities comprise 24% of all instructional staff at community colleges, compared to 27% at four-year institutions — even though nearly half of all community college students are minorities. Of community college instructional staff, 65% serve part time, while approximately 60% of instructional staff at four-year institutions work full time. At community colleges, 70% of Hispanic and African American instructional staffers work part time. Data shows similar trends at four-year institutions. Many community colleges are looking to fill faculty retirements in the coming years, providing them with an opportunity to diversify their faculty pool to more closely mirror the students they serve.

Challenges Community Colleges Face with Inclusive Excellence Initiatives

Higher education is entrenched in inequitable practices that contradict inclusiveness and further expand gaps in student success. Changing institutional cultures to be more open and welcoming to all races, cultures, genders, and economic backgrounds challenges higher educational routines and common educational practices (WISELI, 2010). Community colleges are comprised of highly educated individuals who pride themselves in being objective and fair. Yet controlled research studies show unique life experiences, cultural history, and economic backgrounds shape perspectives and attitudes, causing the formation of unconscious assumptions and biases, resulting in judgments of others (Project Implicit, 2011; WISELI, 2010). These unconscious biases, if not acknowledged and reflected upon, conflict with initiatives aimed at promoting inclusiveness on college campuses.

Institutions must develop a common institutional language to effectively hold challenging discussions: differentiating between Diversity and Inclusive Excellence, recognizing the difference between equity and equality, defining race, culture, ethnicity, geographic, and economic backgrounds, interpreting differences between equal opportunity and affirmative action, and more (AAC&U, 2015). Much like working with the assessment of student learning, all college personnel and students need to understand and practice a common language when discussing Diversity and Inclusive Excellence in order to make progress. Programs and efforts to educate the college community, such as diversity study

circles and expert panels, are only successful when offered on an ongoing basis and changes recommended from participants are shared with the college community. The energy, effort, supportive leadership, and funding to offer these educational ventures over time can be challenging for community colleges to sustain.

Institutional organizational structures and frameworks must be redesigned to improve the coordination of inclusive efforts. Disconnect between Inclusive Excellence, Diversity initiatives, and strengthening the quality of the student experience is often caused by siloed divisions. Even grant-funded programs may unintentionally cause disconnects and confusion for students needing college student support services, such as tutoring services. Communication and marketing is critical to bringing all initiatives together for one cohesive college effort and an organizational restructure may be necessary.

Research studies demonstrate females and minorities indicate dissatisfaction with tenure decisions, salary, class assignments, involvement in institutional decisions, committee appointments, and overall job satisfaction as compared to majority male faculty members in higher education institutions (Sheridan & Winchell, 2006; Turner, 2002). A study in eight Midwestern states showed faculty of color experience exclusion, loneliness, hostility, and racism in predominantly white higher educational institutions (Turner & Myers, 2000). Anxiety in mixed groups is still real and may result in discriminatory practices that keep minorities from feeling included, resulting in not returning to meetings, work groups, or the institution overall.

Numerous research studies reveal that students feel similar inequitable treatment and discrimination in the classroom (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Suarez-Balcazar, 2003). The gaps in student persistence continue to become wider and more complicated as higher education institutions intentionally move to grow more diverse. Yet, the work to grow a more inclusive culture and learning environment for both minority employees and disadvantaged student populations concurrently strengthens the experience and learning for all.

Towards the Future

While institutions are changing with their student population, they must keep in mind the importance of student success especially as enrollment has increased. In addressing diverse backgrounds, Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker, (2014) point out the occurrence of “spectacular” growth in student population (p. 45). This component helps build the necessity of Inclusive Excellence framework as community colleges continue to grow and evolve. Further, the AAC&U’s initiative on Inclusive Excellence ties in, “educational quality in the undergraduate curriculum, in diversity and civic engagement, and in preparing faculty to deepen student’s learning” (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005, p. vi).

Colleges need to be inclusive in their quest to begin implementation of diversity plans. In their guide, *Empowering Community Colleges to Build the Nation’s Future: An Implementation Guide*, the AACC (2014) produced a framework of seven recommendations. The seventh recommendation focuses on implementation of policies and practices that promote rigor and accountability, which improve community college results. Specifically, the seventh recommendation discusses the implementation of the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA) to help improve the measurement of student learning and employment-related outcomes (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014).

At the institution level, several steps must be taken into consideration. Williams (2013) provides several planning cycle templates that are built on either a three-, five-, or ten-year cycle. Each of the cycles aligns with the type of diversity plan. For example, a three-year cycle is typically aligned with decentralized diversity planning model as it can fit various schools, divisions, and departments. A five-year cycle allows for a thoughtful plan in a manageable period of time, while a ten-year cycle “demonstrates a greater commitment to change” (Williams, 2013, p. 322). Table 1 introduces the three types of diversity plans: integrated, centralized, and decentralized. Table 2 demonstrates an action timeline of a three-year cycle in a decentralized diversity implementation model.

TABLE 1: THREE TYPES OF DIVERSITY PLANS	
DIVERSITY PLAN	DESCRIPTION
Integrated	Campus diversity goals are infused into the institution’s broader academic or strategic plan.
Centralized	Dedicated diversity plan features goals, assignments of responsibility, indicators of progress, and implementation timelines across one or multiple diverse groups.
Decentralized	Plans guided by a central overarching framework and strategic diversity goals, but are developed and implemented by the various schools, colleges, divisions, and departments of the institution. Features assignments of responsibility, indicators of progress, and implementation timelines across one or multiple diverse groups.

Source: Table adapted from Williams, 2013, p. 308.

TABLE 2: THREE YEAR CYCLE		
YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
Phase 1 Launching Phase	Phase 7 Implementation	Phase 9 Evolving the Implementation
Phase 2 Selecting the Diversity Planning and Implementation Team	Phase 8 Quality Review	Phase 10 Accountability Review and Celebration of Successes
Phase 3 Establishing Readiness		
Phase 4 Leveraging Your Strategic Diversity Leadership Scorecard Framework		
Phase 5 Writing the Diversity Plan		
Phase 6 Diversity Plan Review		

Source: Adapted from the decentralized diversity implementation model timeline, Williams, 2013, p. 340.



Conclusion

Inclusive Excellence is a guiding principle for community colleges to assist underrepresented populations as a practice to foster Diversity and a driving force for equity. The journey to Inclusive Excellence, which began with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, has been built on by legislation from Congress to enforce the rights of education for diverse groups and to create accountability for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Reasons for the push for Inclusive Excellence include diversity programs expanding worldliness, introducing students to new cultures from diverse groups, enhancing social development through these interactions, and preparing students to be successful in careers.

Areas that programs and legislation affected are race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, as well as legislation and programs for veterans and persons with disabilities. In these areas, gaps exist due to tensions, traditions, and resources, which colleges are working to close. Due to efforts of community colleges, the number of African Americans, women, and LGBTQ students has risen and are more readily accepted. Campuses are creating more programs such as Safe Zones to promote diversity for sexual orientation as well as religion. The work is still in process as colleges still find cultural and social prejudices on their campus, which are often more subtle than racial prejudices. These efforts are also working to bring veterans and people with disabilities to campus. As two groups largely ignored in the past, new programs

and legislation are breaching the gap to bring equity to these students. Along with policies like the Americans with Disabilities Act and workforce development programs, colleges are working to provide the support veterans and persons with disabilities the resources they need to be successful.

The work to diversify isn't just aimed at students, but also at the organization itself. Creating a welcoming environment includes diversifying the staff at a college by introducing more minorities as faculty and staff. With the number of retirements currently happening as the "baby boom" generation reaches retirement, more colleges are working to diversify the college environment to more closely mirror the students they serve.

Changing institutional cultures, however, goes against the norm of many higher education practices. Institutions must be willing to discuss difficult topics and decipher what the needs of their students are to ensure equity is obtainable. Funding, leadership, siloed divisions, and energy to undertake these projects will continue to be a barrier for community colleges going forth. However, these projects will only help the college grow. Colleges across the country are implementing diversity plans and frameworks to try and meet these challenges. As plans are implemented to fit each school, the college culture will begin to change. In the end, the goal of an engaging diversity of students, faculty, staff, and administrators will enrich the community and its members.

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