



Communities of Practice: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT DEI AND CAMPUS OPERATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed every sector of our global community. One of the many consequences of COVID-19 is an unveiling of the degree to which there are pervasive, structural racial inequities in all sectors of the United States, including in higher education, where students and communities of color continue to face issues with equal access to post-secondary education. If higher education is to make good on its promise of intergenerational mobility and opportunity, we must address these racial equity gaps.

In May 2020, the American Council on Education (ACE) pioneered a community of practice around diversity, equity, and inclusion in the era of COVID-19. This community of practice, led by ACE and Taffye Benson Clayton, associate provost and vice president for inclusion and diversity at Auburn University, brings together leaders from the higher education community across the country to work together to explore and document how institutions can ensure issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are front and center as our country moves forward. This checklist is part of a series created by members of the community of practice. The content, themes, and resources that are included in this piece stem from work the community carried out over the course of several months following the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

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We are amid a reckoning in higher education. There is a loud call to action to achieve racial equity and close the decades-long persistence and achievement gaps between racialized and otherwise minoritized groups and others when it comes to access, success, completion, and post-graduate outcomes. At the same time, colleges and universities are facing unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, no two campuses are the same. Every institution is at a different point in its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) journey, and every state has changing public health challenges. The commonality lies in the questions that must be asked.

The following questions are a starting point to ensure that DEI issues are front of mind at this critical time. The questions are based on two guiding principles. First, all decision-making in the next year must place diversity, equity, and inclusion issues front and center. Second, these decisions must be followed up with real budgetary commitments.

FIVE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. Do key stakeholders and decision-makers understand that DEI remains a priority, especially amidst a pandemic? If no, how can that perception be addressed? This pandemic disproportionately hurts diverse and marginalized populations, so institutions must ensure that DEI is central to decision-making as the fall and spring semesters unfold. (This [toolkit](#) provides information on leading through a campus crisis. For incorporating DEI into a COVID-19 response, find citations and resources listed below.)
2. Are key stakeholders and decision-makers committed to tracking and interpreting disaggregated data on how under-represented students and employees are impacted by reopening plans? If no, what is the rationale in not including this component? If yes, what metrics are being considered and how will data be disaggregated? (For data on race and ethnicity in higher education and sample metrics, find resources listed below.)
3. Does funding reflect a commitment to DEI as the institution modifies operations? What kinds of funding, and where are those dollars located in the budget? (This [self-assessment](#) includes finance; the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education has [resources](#) for crisis management.)
4. What equity-focused principles, tools, or models is your campus using to inform your decisions? (This is [an example of one university's approach](#).)
5. Will planning for 2020–2021 advance DEI on your campus, or further widen equity gaps and missed opportunities? The pandemic has changed the landscape for most institutions, and it will be tempting to deprioritize DEI. Instead, encourage decision-makers to consider the following indicators: (a) level of prioritization of DEI in strategic planning, especially given COVID-19's outsized impact on minoritized groups, (b) resources committed to DEI priorities and institutional capacity development, and (c) use of disaggregated data and equity tools to inform decision-making.

RELATED RESOURCES

The Disproportionate Effect of COVID-19 on Diverse and Marginalized Populations

- *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “Students of Color Are Not OK. Here’s How Colleges Can Support Them.”
- *Inside Higher Ed*: “COVID-19 Has Hurt College Students”
- McKinsey: “COVID-19: Investing in Black Lives and Livelihoods”
- *New York Times*: “The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequity of Coronavirus”

Incorporating DEI into COVID-19 Response

- Appalachian State University: “Inclusive Leadership During COVID-19”
- Association of American Colleges and Universities: “Thinking Boldly About Scarce Resources”
- National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education: “Leading Change: Collaborative Tools for Reimagining Our Future in Fall 2020 and Beyond”
- National Inclusive Excellence Academy: *The COVID-19 DEI Crisis Action Strategy Guide*

Using Metrics in a COVID-19 Response

- ACE: Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education project

General Leadership Regarding COVID-19 and DEI

- ACE: “Leaders Respond: COVID-19 on Campus”
- The National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education’s website