Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI)
2022 Version

Current research highlights the lack of a singular understanding of EDI and its usage within higher education spaces (Anderson, 2012), and there is significant and persistent rhetoric employed by post-secondary institutions (Archer, 2007) in order to achieve goals that are believed to best address the needs of the organization (Ford & Patterson, 2019). This lack of a singular, accepted definition for the concepts of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion creates notable challenges for the terms as they stand alone but also when bridged together in the form of a single concept, and the notion of a goal attached to it. Despite their emergence into relevant discourses in the 1990s, many notions began as direct successors to previously held beliefs around affirmative action and intervention (byrd, 2019) and remain squarely rooted in these systems, even though much of the discourse has evolved and shifted since that time. While definitions remain more fluid, these interpretations are encoded through policy at various institutions, either at the strategic or operating level, which can create significant variations in the ways EDI is addressed from one post-secondary institution to the next. Institutional efforts aimed at addressing aspects of EDI and creating improvements often focus to heavily on notions of equality without addressing the broader systemic drivers of inequality (Reale & Seeber, 2011). It is important to consider the ability for institutions to adapt and alter their own plans, (Scott, 2020) rather than meeting the needs of various funders in order to address change, while also acknowledging that efforts aimed at simply meeting metrics around EDI (Tamtik, 2022) are likely to face additional challenges.

Key Points from the Literature

- Higher education is a broad term, with a sector that has significant variation in structure and design (Anderson, 2012).
- EDI is often approached as rhetoric within policy spaces, specifically viewed within a business lens that frames it as being compatible with equality (Archer 2007). While also seeing students as a commodity, as customers.
- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion each have different paths of emergence within higher education, and different understandings and traditions associated with them (byrd, 2019). Diversity and Equality are often treated as interchangeable terms.
- Motivations for institutions to incorporate EDI within their organizations are varied, and may be supportive of shorter term goals rather than long term attempts to address systemic injustices (marketing, student retention, etc). This can lead to the reshaping of definitions and conceptions of EDI within post-secondary spaces (Ford & Patterson, 2019).
- Allyship in senior leadership, as well as improvements in performance from other competing institutions, is especially effective at moving forward efforts to address EDI, specifically for the LGBTQ community (Messinger, 2009).
- Different approaches to EDI and incorporating aspects of it into policy has led to differentiated outcomes and understandings (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019), which has also

driven efforts to respond specifically to metrics and institutional goals (Tamtik, 2022) in an effort to present evidence of improved outcomes.

- Institutional intentions, specifically those incorporated into policy, may inadvertently create additional challenges, to achieving meaningful progress on EDI given the nature of those involved and the focus of their attempts (Real & Seeber, 2011), which can place additional pressure on other participants, including students, to try to promote the changes they believe are needed (McEntarfer, 2011).

Recommendations

- Inclusion needs to bring other voices to the table to allow for deeper understandings on specific perspectives, particularly when it comes to including those of students in the university (Cook-Sather, 2018).
- Provide institutions greater levels of flexibility (Scott, 2020) in terms of addressing what they perceive to be the greatest EDI needs, with greater attention paid to efforts and outcomes beyond simple metrics used to measure success (Tamtik, 2022).
- Further research needs to be undertaken to address gaps within the literature focusing on the lives of members of the LGBTQ community within the broader population, and their intersections within various other identity groups (Waite & Denier, 2019). Policy experts need to make space for those with lived experience (Anderson, 2012).
- Future research, regardless of content or context, needs to be inclusive of the LGBT community more broadly (Waite & Denier, 2019).

Recommended Readings

- Anderson, G. M. (2012). Equity and critical policy analysis in higher education: A bridge still too far. *The Review of Higher Education, 36*(1), 133–142. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0051
- Ford, K. S., & Patterson, A. N. (2019). "Cosmetic Diversity": University websites and the transformation of race categories. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 12*(2) 99–114. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000092
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- Tamtik, M. (2022). Mirroring Society? Tracing the Logic of Diversity in the Canadian Journal of Higher Education. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 127–144. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.189125

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byrd, d. (2019). The diversity distraction: A critical comparative analysis of discourse in higher education scholarship. *The Review of Higher Education, 42*, 135–172. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0048

Cook-Sather, A. (2018). Listening to equity-seeking perspectives: How students' experiences of pedagogical partnership can inform wider discussions of student success. *Higher Education Research and Development, 37*(5), 923–936. https://repository.brynmawr.edu/edu_pubs/39

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Reale, E., & Seeber, M. (2011). Drivers of inequalities in higher education and the unexpected consequences of equality policies. *Higher Education Policy, 2011*(24), 185–211. https://doi.org/ 10.1057/hep.2010.31

Scott, C. (2020). Managing and regulating commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education. *Irish Educational Studies, 39*(2), 175–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2020.1754879

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Tamtik, M., & Guenter, M. (2019). Policy analysis of equity, diversity and inclusion strategies in Canadian universities – how far have we come? Canadian Journal of Higher Education / Revue canadienne d'enseignement supérieur, 49(3), 1–16.

Universities Canada. (2019, October). *Equity, diversity, and inclusion at Canadian universities: Report on the 2019 national survey*. Universities Canada.

Waite, S., &. Denier, N. (2019). A research note on Canada's LGBT data landscape: Where we are and what the future holds. *Canadian Review of Sociology, 56*, 193–117.

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