


Chapter 22


Assessing Students' Attitudes Toward Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion via Class Evaluations

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ABSTRACT

Issues associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been at the forefront of current events for many years. Despite efforts to assess campus climate, there is a lack of studies exploring student perceptions of DEI as part of their educational experiences in higher education. As the institution strives to foster DEI, it is valuable to examine the views of students in their courses. In this chapter, we explain the findings from a class evaluation of undergraduate and graduate students' views and knowledge of DEI in their classes, as well as patterns of non-response or indications of students' confusion in their understanding of the DEI-related item. Further, we provide recommendations for colleges and universities, highlighting the critical role

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of faculty and staff members in enhancing DEI in the classroom and the necessity to combine DEI efforts with teaching excellence to create learning environments that apply culturally responsive teaching and value DEI.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), a conceptual framework that promotes equal and fair treatment of all individuals regardless of individual characteristics including race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation, as well as equal opportunities for success (Duarte et al., 2023; Williams, 2013), has been dominating educational and political discourse in higher education. Originating in the civil rights movements of the 1960s, DEI was preceded by the codification of affirmative action policies and laws to prevent racial discrimination in the workplace and ensure equal employment opportunities for all (Barak, 1999; Dong, 2021; Herring & Henderson, 2011). The tenets of DEI in the workplace seek to not only foster a welcoming environment for employees of all backgrounds, but to assimilate its principles into the hiring process as well (Singleton et al., 2021). As such, diversity training programs have become commonplace in a wide range of sectors to encourage workplace diversity and familiarize employees with concepts such as cultural competency and unconscious bias (Chang et al., 2019; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

More recently, DEI awareness has become increasingly present in educational institutions that wish to create an environment that nurtures the academic success and overall well-being of students from diverse backgrounds. This has become particularly critical in light of the multiple tragic and highly publicized shootings and deaths of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement, and particularly the death of George Floyd in May 2020, which garnered worldwide awareness and support for the Black Lives Matter movement (Cullors, 2018; Garza et al., 2016; LeBron, 2023). The viral nature of these incidents, which may involve graphic footage being shared and viewed on social media networks, has been shown to result in psychological symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress syndrome (Carmassi et al., 2020; Liyanage et al., 2022). Further, the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred at the same time, disproportionately affected the physical and mental health of people of color (Kohn-Wood et al., 2023; Millet et al., 2020; Rossen et al., 2020). People of color were affected by infections and deaths at a disproportionate rate overall (Figueroa, 2021; Hill & Artiga, 2022). Due to various theories of the origin of the virus and outbreak, a surge in hate crimes against Asian Americans and Pacific Islander university students in the U.S. took place, leading to deleterious effects on campus climate (Zhou et al., 2021). This accumulation of disparate levels of fear,

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