

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Position Statement for Colleges of Education

There remains an urgent need for institutions of higher education in the United States to take a proactive stance with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This country and its many institutions (schools, universities, the media, the police force, the healthcare industry) have a devastating history with respect to racial oppression, religious persecution, discrimination, and systemic violence. On college campuses, one need only recall the 1950 Supreme Court case, *Sweatt v. Painter*, which ruled in favor of the first black student, Heman Sweatt, to be admitted into the law school at the University of Texas. His presence infuriated many, as evidenced by the burning of a cross inscribed with the letters KKK on the steps of the school's building. Recently, there are a plethora of examples of racist incidences at both private and public universities (<https://www.jbhe.com/incidents/>), from Boston University, Claremont McKenna College, Ithaca College, Princeton University, and Yale University, to The Ohio State University, Towson University, University of Iowa, University of Louisville, University of Missouri, and, among others on a constantly growing list, University of Oklahoma. The reality of horrific, dehumanizing incidences require that we take a critical, public stance against racism and in support of equitable, inclusive, anti-racist educational practices and spaces.

Such a stance must be foundational to the mission and vision of schools and colleges of education in this country. Although we still have a long way to go to effectively implement needed structural changes within historically racist and classist institutions of higher education, truly embodying an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion must take center-stage. This point is echoed in a 2014 statement by the Washington State House Democratic Caucus that reads, the “higher education system is responsible for educating students to face the challenges of our ever-changing global society. A diverse, inclusive student body helps prepare our future leaders to be productive public citizens in the real world—one comprised of people with different national, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds.”<sup>1</sup> This statement encourages us to not only value diversity, equity, and inclusion in all walks of life, but to learn about the lived experiences of people, particularly those who have been historically silenced, marginalized, and killed, and those who are diverse and have been oppressed in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, language, ability, gender identification, sexual orientation, and religion. The questions that really need to be asked are: Can institutions of higher education *really* take responsibility for educating for diversity, equity, and inclusion when they have always been and continue to be steeped in layers of hostility, racism, exclusion, and micro-aggressions? Where is the justice?

Institutions of higher education must become leaders in diversity, equity, and inclusion. To do so, they must recognize their racist and abusive histories and the discourses of white supremacy that have maintained their safety. Simultaneously, they must acknowledge that the stakes of this work are high, especially with respect to shaping the educational experiences of students and dismantling systemic oppression, educational inequity, and racial violence. In so doing, they must commit to both naming and rejecting injustice, racism, violence, inequity, and supremacy, not privately behind closed doors, but publicly in front of dissenting others. They must also create opportunities and spaces (in classrooms, curricula, research, outreach engagements, administrative structures, and in relationships) within, across, and beyond institutions for people to exchange perspectives and take action on issues that influence education and human life

locally and globally. Such issues, for example, include:

- The murders of Black people and other people of color by police officers
- The killing of nine Black church members in Charleston, SC
- The mass shooting of more than 50 people at an LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando, FL, the majority of whom were Latinx
- Understanding that ableism colludes with white supremacist ideologies to justify the shootings of Tamir Rice, Keith Lamont Scott, Alton Sterling, and, among others, Charles Kinsey and his client of color with Autism. White supremacist ideologies allow white people to inflict violence onto (and to kill) Black people and other people of color
- Ongoing hate crimes against Muslims and their Mosques across the world
- Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's refusal of the Dakota Access pipeline and their important emphasis on Indigenous lands, human life, and the sacredness of water
- Hateful anti-race, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-immigration legislation in the United States
- Criminalization and the high rates of mass incarceration of Black and Brown people
- Stop and frisk, Stand Your Ground, zero tolerance, and other racial profiling policies
- Victimization of women whose perpetrators go unpunished or are minimally sentenced
- Suppression of voters' rights, particularly for Black people, the elderly, and people with special rights
- The strategic decline in funding for Black and Brown students in urban public schools

Along with these issues, we also need to critically examine the important role played by contemporary rights movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #NoDAPL, #FlintWaterCrisis, and #EqualPay for women, especially at institutions of higher education that purport to have an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Indeed, for schools and colleges of education to be leaders in diversity, equity, and inclusion, they must heed Audre Lorde's (1984) advice to engage in a visible "transformation of silence into language and action."<sup>2</sup> In this vein, we call upon schools and colleges of education to be leaders in advocating, promoting, engaging in, and sustaining diversity, equity, and inclusion within classrooms and the curricula, in hiring practices, in promotion procedures, and in non-oppressive and non-lethal interactions with racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students, faculty, staff, and other community members. By extension, this same commitment must materialize in how schools and colleges of education engage with, listen to, and honor the historically situated cultural practices and intellectual traditions within diverse local and global communities. We have no other choice but to reject racial injustice, discrimination, prejudice, and hatred. For we know that there are many among us who hate Blackness, who hate how others self-identify, who hate what others believe, and who hate who others love. They hate collective movements toward freedom, justice, and decolonization, and against racism, sexism, and systemic oppression. Yet we stand lovingly and bravely tall against their hatred.

As members of schools and colleges of education, we must stand committed to:

- Recognizing that the lands upon which universities exist are Indigenous lands, and determining specific ways to center Indigenous histories, cultures, and epistemological contributions in discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion

- Rejecting the exclusion of undocumented Latinx students and advocating against the continuing deplorable detention of youth who are seeking refuge in the United States
- Developing and supporting programs grounded in justice and equity, and dedicated to social, civil, and educational rights
- Incorporating, in fact, centering, anti-racist, non-deficit research, outreach, and advocacy efforts within every layer of our institutional infrastructures without apology
- Interrogating whiteness as well as rejecting monolingual and monocultural norms
- Enacting diversity, justice, and equity not only in teaching and research, but also in administrative decisions, leadership positions, governance structures, and hiring practices
- Sustaining equitable educational initiatives for all students, especially those from historically underserved populations
- Fostering practices that link diversity and inclusion to excellence, equity, anti-racism, and humanity
- Building long-term partnerships with communities guided by reciprocity and **not** assault
- Recruiting and retaining diverse students, staff, faculty, and administrators who are supported in dismantling white supremacy, racist capitalism, and other socially unjust practices through critical, socially just, sustaining, and restorative community engaged methods
- Healing our communities and ourselves from violence and trauma (slavery and its aftereffects, racial hostility, linguistic persecution, physical, sexual, and mental abuse, poverty, etc.) in ways that “move us closer to learning deeply about the complexities of our humanity in relation to other peoples’ lived conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

To do otherwise is to remain silent and to side with the oppressors, of which we outright reject.

**Respectfully submitted by:**

Valerie Kinloch

Associate Dean, Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement

Professor, Literacy Studies

College of Education and Human Ecology

The Ohio State University

Click <https://goo.gl/forms/z7l4pjpK63J6kp6r2> to add your name, organization, and email to show support for it.

---

<sup>1</sup> *States News Service*. See <http://housedemocrats.wa.gov/eric-pettigrew/call-for-more-diversity-on-college-campuses-supported/>

<sup>2</sup> Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. New York: Ten Speed Press.

<sup>3</sup> Kinloch, V. (2015). Critically conscious teaching and instructional leadership as Projects in Humanization (PiH). *Educational Studies*, 4(3), 29-35.