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## Embracing Diversity in Higher Education: Teaching a Driven and Determined Approach

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## **Embracing Diversity in Higher Education: Teaching a Driven and Determined Approach**

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### **Keywords**

diversity, driven, determined, higher education



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### **Abstract**

Diversity and inclusivity are two must-teach components that the academy needs to incorporate into its curriculum to enrich student experiences. Due to globalization, technological advances, and norms, societies are becoming more homogenous. Institutions of higher learning should prioritize teaching diversity and inclusion with a driven and determined approach to prepare students better personally and professionally.

*Keywords:* Diversity, driven, determined, higher education

### **Introduction**

In the dynamic tapestry of higher education, diversity and inclusivity emerge as imperatives defining the essence of academic enrichment. The evolving landscape of globalization, marked by unprecedented technological advances, has ushered in an era where societies are increasingly interconnected, yet the risk of homogeneity looms. Against this backdrop, institutions of higher learning find themselves at a crossroads, presented with the profound responsibility to prioritize diversity. However, this commitment extends beyond mere rhetoric; it necessitates a *driven* and *determined* approach.

The contemporary higher education environment demands a recalibration of traditional norms and practices. No longer can diversity be considered a peripheral endeavor; instead, it must be ingrained in the very fabric of educational institutions. The word "driven" signifies an active pursuit, recognizing that diversity is not a passive outcome but a deliberate effort that requires consistent dedication and intentionality. Likewise, "determined" underscores the resolve to navigate the complexities of fostering an inclusive academic environment.

In essence, the objective is not merely to assemble a diverse student body but to cultivate an ecosystem that values and celebrates differences. The driving force behind this pursuit is the

understanding that diversity is not a challenge to overcome but a wellspring of strength that enhances the educational experience. This article aims to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of diversity in higher education, exploring how an unwavering commitment to inclusivity can shape a new narrative for student development that transcends the conventional boundaries of academia. By examining the challenges, triumphs, and transformative potential embedded in a determined approach to diversity, we seek to unravel the intricate interplay between diversity and educational excellence. Teaching diversity and inclusion is not just an initiative but an essential cornerstone in preparing students for the intricacies of an ever-evolving global landscape.

### **Diversity**

Diversity is the presence of difference; it cannot be defined solely by one's race or the color of one's skin. In the academy, the definition of diversity includes an array of categories ranging from age, color, disability, familial status, height, marital state, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex/gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, and weight. Diversity encompasses all and any identities within humanity that may make us different from one another and the root cause of discrimination or segregation. Inclusion is an essential component when discussing diversity in the academy. Diversity without inclusion is essentially meaningless because students need to feel welcomed, supported, and validated to be successful among their fellow students, faculty, and staff.

Verna Myers (2012), a well-known diversity consultant, said best, "Diversity is receiving an invitation to the party; inclusivity is receiving a request to dance." Teaching inclusion requires higher education professionals to make a genuine and concerted effort, through actions and policies, to achieve intercultural fairness, sensitivity, and tolerance in campus communities so students can live and learn in a racism-free environment. Being inclusive prepares students to function appropriately in an increasingly global society upon graduation.

Globalization is changing the world faster every day and causing society to become more homogeneous. In the past, countries and civilizations were unique to each other because it was the only way of life they knew. We are collectively plugged in and connected with the advancement of technology and mediums, such as the internet, cell phones, television, movies, social media, and web videos. Today, the world shares everyday cultural experiences daily. Despite sharing cultural backgrounds, we cannot diminish the fact that we still have widely

differing living standards, cultures, values, legal systems, and expectations. Add in potential discriminatory factors, such as age, color, disability, familial status, height, marital status, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sex/gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, and weight, and we have the epitome of diversity. The following section will discuss the importance of higher education assuming leadership in teaching inclusion and diversity issues, seizing the initiative being driven.

### **Driven**

In higher education, it is, first and foremost, the responsibility of practitioners to be driven when it comes to diversity. To be driven is to enthusiastically set or press in motion incisively an activity, course of action, or idea. A diverse learning environment, encompassing a rich tapestry of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives, is a catalyst for unlocking the boundless creativity within students (Fry et al., 2003). In such settings, students are exposed to many ideas, cultural nuances, and varying approaches to problem-solving, fostering a dynamic ecosystem that nurtures innovation and original thinking (Fry et al., 2003). Diverse learning environments challenge students to adapt and think flexibly. Exposure to various perspectives helps students understand multiple approaches to a problem or concept (Hurtado, 2012). This cognitive flexibility is a cornerstone of creativity, as it encourages individuals to explore unconventional solutions and embrace complexity (Strange & Banning, 2015).

The collegiate campus functions as a microcosm of society, mirroring the intricate fabric of our contemporary global society (Qureshi et al., 2023). Acknowledging this, institutions of higher learning bear the responsibility not only to reflect the diversity inherent in the world but also to cultivate an environment that fosters inclusivity actively. This multifaceted approach extends beyond the classroom, permeating various aspects of campus life. Coexisting residential living halls lay the groundwork for students to engage in meaningful interactions outside formal academic settings (McNair et al., 2022). The seamless integration of classes and extracurricular activities encourages diverse groups of students to come together, fostering organic interactions and breaking down barriers. Integrated clubs and organizations provide platforms for students to collaborate on shared interests, creating spaces where commonalities and differences are recognized and appreciated (McNair et al., 2022; Qureshi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, recognizing the importance of effective communication in the face of cultural differences becomes paramount, preparing students for the complexities of an interconnected world. Importantly, this process is not unidirectional; it involves a reciprocal exchange where learning about and from one another becomes an integral part of the educational experience. In this way, higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping a generation of students who navigate diverse environments and actively contribute to cultivating inclusive communities within and beyond the campus.

It is innate to find fellowship among those with similarities or those with whom we closely resemble. It could be one or more characteristics: the color of one's skin, athleticism vs. studiousness, religious affiliation, how one might dress due to culture, or with whom one identifies or has the most in common. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) statistics, by the year 2043, it is predicted that a historic shift in American demographics will take place. By 2043, the White race will no longer be the majority in the United States. This demographic shift will reshape American schools, workforces, and the electorate.

The change in a demographic shift has already begun. President Barack Obama was reelected to a second term because he had support from 78% of non-White voters (Yen, 2012). "Intermarriage for first and second-generation Hispanics and Asians is on the rise, blurring racial and ethnic lines and lifting the numbers of individuals who identify as multiracial" (Yen, 2012).

In unpublished 2010 census data, millions of Americans shunned standard race categories such as Black or White on government forms (Yen, 2012). According to Yen (2012), many preferred to write in their own cultural or individual identities. Experts project that 2060 multicultural people will have more than tripled, from 7.5 million to 26.7 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). This prediction alone could make the current race categories even more irrelevant.

Higher education officials should strive to have diverse campuses and teach inclusiveness because it improves society socially, professionally, and academically. Socially and professionally, students develop a keener awareness of social norms and issues, resulting in being able to relate better to people of different races, nationalities, and religions. Academically, students are better at formulating creative or original ideas (Jackson et al., 2006). In addition, students also have elevated levels of development in appreciating the arts, better skills at

identifying moral and ethical issues, elevated leadership skills, and overall intelligence, resulting in overall satisfaction and a significantly better college experience.

A perfect real-life example of how exposure to diversity not only influences but can also alter one's thought process on how to get along with individuals of differing social, ethnic, and cultural makeups is Luke Visconti. Visconti, who is White, is a 1982 graduate of Rutgers University, earning a degree in biology and, after graduation, joined the U.S. Navy, becoming a commissioned officer. Visconti attributes his cultural awareness and consciousness to his friend and fellow naval aviator, Tony Cato. Visconti and Cato shared stories while working as Minority Officer Recruiters in the Naval Recruiting District of New Jersey. Cato gave countless accounts of being denied fair treatment because he is Black. It took time for Cato's stories to resonate with Visconti, but it eventually led him to realize the damage that discrimination had on Cato and our country.

Visconti became very empathetic, which prompted him to learn more about diversity and other people's differences. He began to read and study discrimination to gain a better perspective, which, in turn, caused him to become involved in organizations that did not serve him directly, such as becoming a trustee at Bennett College for Women, a historically Black college, and becoming a member of the foundation's board at New Jersey City University, a Hispanic-serving institution. His studies and life experiences from serving at these institutions became invaluable. They aided him in advocating diversity and inclusion and ultimately founding his award-winning corporation called Fair360, formerly known as DiversityInc.

As CEO of Fair360, Visconti speaks at dozens of venues each year. All fees earned from his speaking engagements are donated to the Fair360 Foundation, and 100% of this donated money goes to funding endowed scholarships. Visconti also gives career advice and the latest news on diversity-related topics and legal issues on the Fair360 website. However, the most popular area of his website is the section called *Ask the White Guy*.

*Ask the White Guy* (2011) answers readers' questions. It addresses topics related to diversity, such as privilege and whether the term "illegal immigrant" is offensive—which is the most common retort for White people defending their racism. Ironically, the most poignant question directed to Visconti is, what does a White guy know about diversity, and how could you possibly speak with authority on the topic?

By embracing diversity in all its forms, as Visconti did, educational institutions can empower students to become academically adept and creatively resilient individuals ready to tackle the challenges of an ever-evolving world. The synergy of diverse minds fosters a learning environment where creativity is encouraged and becomes an integral part of the educational journey. The following section will discuss ways that being determined about inclusion, and diversity helps with the progressiveness of the academic community.

### **Determined**

Being determined reinforces the university's commitment to inclusion and equity through knowledgeable staff, well-written policies and practices, and having dedicated facilities and other resources available to the entire university community and community at large. Being open-minded about diversity and inclusion and being involved on campus must be promoted. Talking to peers allows students to learn from one another, and having faculty and staff attend diversity events shows their concern for different students on campus. Interacting with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds enriches the learning experience. Collaborating with individuals who bring different world views and traditions to the table broadens students' horizons, breaks down cultural stereotypes, and fosters an appreciation for the richness of global perspectives (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). This cross-cultural collaboration is a wellspring of inspiration, offering students a broader palette for creative expression (Gopal, 2011). Diverse learning environments mirror the complexity of the real world. As students engage with various perspectives, they are better prepared for the multifaceted challenges they will encounter in their future careers (Fry et al., 2003). This real-world relevance cultivates a sense of purpose and urgency in their creative endeavors, motivating them to apply their skills meaningfully.

Implementing practical strategies for promoting student success through diversity and inclusion involves a comprehensive and intentional approach. First, fostering a campus culture that values diversity requires establishing support structures and resources that cater to the diverse needs of students (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020). This may include creating dedicated offices, or departments focused on diversity and inclusion, staffed by individuals trained to address the unique challenges faced by students from various backgrounds (Alyahyan & Düştegör, 2020). Offering mentorship programs, where students can connect with mentors who



share similar experiences or backgrounds, can provide valuable guidance and support (Pownall, 2020).

Another practical strategy involves integrating diversity and inclusion into the curriculum. This can be achieved by incorporating diverse perspectives, authors, and case studies into course materials, ensuring students are exposed to various voices and experiences (Pownall, 2020). Faculty development programs can facilitate this process by providing instructors with the tools and knowledge to create inclusive learning environments. Additionally, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration can enhance students' exposure to diverse ideas and perspectives, preparing them for the complexity of real-world challenges (Bowden, 2021).

Creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and engagement is crucial for student success. Establishing safe spaces for open conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion allows students to express their thoughts, share experiences, and gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives. This can be facilitated through events, workshops, and discussion forums encouraging active participation and reflection. Moreover, promoting diversity in leadership and decision-making roles within the institution contributes to an inclusive environment (Bowden, 2021). When students see diverse individuals in positions of authority, it sends a powerful message about the value placed on representation and diverse contributions (Morton et al., 2020). This can be achieved through intentional recruitment practices, leadership training programs, and policies prioritizing diversity in hiring and promotion decisions.

Lastly, continuous assessment and evaluation of diversity and inclusion initiatives are essential for ensuring their effectiveness. Gathering feedback from students, faculty, and staff can provide valuable insights into the impact of implemented strategies and identify improvement areas. This feedback loop allows institutions to adapt and refine their approaches better to meet the evolving needs of their diverse student body, contributing to sustained success in fostering diversity and inclusion.

Knowledge about diversity and inclusiveness can only be achieved when one desires to learn and tries to learn about other people's rich life experiences, whether through research or personal exposure (Jackson, 2014). Take advantage of the diversity afforded to you on your college campus. Learning about diversity allows one to be better prepared, both personally and

professionally, to live and work in a global society. The time for a diverse international community is now; it is our future, and there will be no turning back.

Making diversity a priority on our campuses is important, but we must not forget the most crucial factor in the equation—inclusion. Remember Myers's perception, "Diversity is being asked to the party; inclusivity is being asked to dance" (Myers, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

In the mosaic of higher education, the triad of—*diversity, driven commitment, and determined resolve*—emerges as the cornerstone for shaping a progressive academic community. As we navigate the complexities of an ever-globalizing world, the necessity to enrich student experiences through diversity and inclusivity becomes non-negotiable. This article has explored the profound impact of these elements on the educational landscape, offering insights into their significance and interconnectedness.

Diversity, as illuminated in our discussion, extends far beyond superficial categorizations. It encapsulates a myriad of identities and experiences that collectively contribute to the richness of the academic environment. However, more than mere diversity is needed; a driven commitment must support it. The word *driven* underscores the active pursuit required to integrate diversity into the very fabric of educational institutions. This pursuit demands consistent dedication and intentionality, ensuring that diversity is not a passive outcome but a deliberate and ongoing effort. Simultaneously, *determination* emerges as the catalyst that propels the academic community towards a future where inclusivity is not just an initiative but an ingrained value. It requires knowledge, open-mindedness, and active involvement to create an environment where diversity is welcomed and celebrated. *Determination* reinforces the commitment to equity through policies, practices, and resources that empower the university community and the broader society.

In the narrative of our academic journey, the commitment to diversity and inclusion becomes a transformative force. It challenges preconceived notions, breaks down cultural stereotypes, and fosters an appreciation for the richness of global perspectives. As we embrace diversity in all its forms, we empower students to become academically adept and creatively resilient individuals ready to confront the challenges of an interconnected world. The synergy of diverse minds fosters an environment where creativity is encouraged and becomes integral to the

educational journey. This creativity, fueled by the determination to embrace differences, is a potent tool that equips students to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving global landscape. By transcending the conventional boundaries of academia, we pave the way for a future where diversity is not a challenge to be overcome but a huge source of strength that enhances the educational experience.

In conclusion, diversity, driven commitment, and determined resolve are not isolated efforts but interwoven threads that, when embraced collectively, weave a tapestry of an inclusive and transformative higher education experience. As we stand at the nexus of tradition and progress, let us forge ahead with an unwavering commitment to diversity, driven by a determination to foster an inclusive academic community that reflects the complexities and possibilities of our interconnected world.

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