Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary

All the most important terms our community should know

Diversity generically refers to the presence of variation in a group. In the COA context, diversifying refers to increasing the number of people with marginalized or minoritized backgrounds and/or identities that have been historically underrepresented in our institution.It is important to note, however, that the identity categories used to analyze diversity can be limiting and ignore intersectionality and nuance and a focus solely on diversity can also lead to tokenization.

Inclusion refers to the experiences of members of a group or organization. Improving inclusion refers to working towards practices and policies that build equal access for all, in order to make COA a community in which all people feel welcome, seen, and valued, regardless of background or identity.

Equity is concerned with transforming procedures and practices in order to be fair and impartial towards everyone. It recognizes historical and present injustices and inequalities and seeks to account for these, which is what differentiates it from the term "equality". Equity is a process, while inclusion and diversity are outcomes.

Anti-racism is an approach that recognizes that, given the prevalence of anti-Black unconscious bias in individuals and systemic racism in almost all US institutions, anything short of active anti-racism serves to perpetuate the harmful status quo. It recognizes that it is not possible to be neutral in the struggle against racism. A passive color-blindness is not sufficient to dismantle racism and white supremacy.

Decolonization focuses on bringing to light past colonial and present neo-colonial practices and assumptions, and seeks to undo these practices and repair the harms they have caused. A key element of decolonization is decentering whiteness and the "developed" north as norms. Colonization and neo-colonialism take many forms, and so decolonization must as well.

Intersectionality is a framework, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, that recognizes that different identities and categories intersect and interact. For example, a Black woman may experience both racism and sexism, but her experience can not be explained by simply adding racism and sexism together. Racism and sexism interact and compound each other.

Microaggressions are slights, insults, and indignities endured, often repeatedly, by someone because of their association with a marginalized group, the accumulation of which results in the conveyance of the target's belittlement, objectification, or otherness. Examples abound: mistaking a female doctor for a nurse, asking a US person of color where they are "really from,"" expressing surprise that someone speaks without an accent. Microaggressions can be non-verbal as well as verbal. Many think that the term microaggression is misleading, because although perhaps seemingly minor by the perpetrator, microaggressions have a major cumulative impact on those who experience them.

Tokenization refers to an action, such as featuring a student in a college publication or hiring someone from a minority group, that is or feels superficial—the actions give the impression that people of certain groups are fully seen and valued, when that might not be the case.

Implicit Bias refers to unconscious negative associations people hold toward members of a group. The existence of implicit bias is a well-established fact. People of all backgrounds hold implicit biases.

Asset Based stands in contrast to deficit-based approaches to education which view individuals as lacking or incomplete. For example a student may be identified as having deficiencies in some areas such as math or writing, which then need to be remedied. The notion of deficits attaches to groups as well as individuals. In the field of education there have been decades of deficit-based approaches towards specific groups of people, especially marginalized and minoritized communities in the US. The culture, language, genetics, and family structures of such groups are often identified as inherently deficient and in need of repair. Such deficit-based approaches thus align with White supremacy, nativism, and other forms of oppression. A deficit-based approach also ignores the strengths and resilience of those who have found ways to survive and thrive in an other than majority cultural context. Asset-based approaches to education resist ordering groups and cultures into a hierarchy, and see and celebrate the worth and strength of all

cultures and all people. Asset-based approaches also focus on the strengths and skills that a student already possesses, and uses these strengths as a basis from which to develop additional skills and knowledge.