

**INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE COMPASS:
A MATRIX FOR INFUSING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INTO THE DECISION-MAKING
PROTOCOLS OF A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY**

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One of the major challenges that colleges and universities continue to face is the conceptualization and practice of diversity and all the dimensions associated with the concept. In the past, diversity has often been approached as a problem to be solved. Additionally, colleges and universities that possess a tremendous amount of diversity rarely take advantage of the benefits associated with diverse groups. Other colleges and universities attempt to increase diversity without thinking about improving the campus climate. Still others are attentive to diversity, but not inclusiveness.

A second barrier to addressing issues of diversity and inclusion is the notion of ingroup members not having to think about the issues that the diversity and inclusion (D&I) concepts engender. The ingroup (e.g., Whites, heterosexuals, males, able-bodied) are, for the most part, not conscious of the issues impacting outgroup members. Whether it is due to privilege or non-salient identities, ingroup members do not have to think about the lived experience of outgroup members, which in many cases leads to the exclusion of those members from the benefits extended to members of the ingroup. That is, outgroup members are excluded from programs, curriculum, initiatives, policies, planning, and many of other aspects of an institution of higher education. Thus, the challenge becomes insuring that ingroup members think about the inclusion of others as they work, live, create, and produce.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has addressed the issues outlined above by introducing the concept of Inclusive Excellence (IE). Serving as a D&I model for colleges and universities, IE conceptualizes campus diversity in a new way, maximizes the inclusion of diverse groups, and focuses on the systemic impact on diversity and inclusion. To that end, one of the goals of IE is to center diversity and inclusion by pressing campus constituents to think about diverse groups and include them in all aspects of an institution of higher learning.

What is Inclusive Excellence?

Inclusive Excellence is a structural, cultural transformation effort that has several tenets. First, IE moves a university away from a simplistic definition of diversity and toward a more inclusive, comprehensive, and omnipresent notion of inclusiveness in which diversity includes (but is not limited to) disability status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, age, religion, race/ethnicity, color, nationality, citizenship status, veteran status, and other important social dimensions. Second, the concept melds inclusiveness and academic excellence into one construct. That is, to be excellent, we must be inclusive. Third, IE shifts the responsibility for diversity and inclusiveness to everyone on campus as opposed to one unit or department shouldering the responsibility. In a sense, Inclusive Excellence mandates that everyone think about D&I and assume responsibility for including a diversity of groups found on campus. Fourth, the framework moves an institution away from conceptualizing diversity only in terms of a numerical goal of diverse constituents and broadens it to include multicultural perspectives, experiences, worldviews, cultures, and other gifts and talents. Finally, IE focuses on the structural, cultural transformation of a university into a community that embeds diversity and inclusiveness throughout the institution, including (but not limited to) demographics, decision-making, facilities, curriculum, policies, enrollment, pedagogies, financial resources, fund raising, leadership, trainings, clubs and organizations, events, retention, student learning, marketing, technology, student advising, athletics, campus climate, communications, administration, recruitment, retention, graduation, hiring, promotion and tenure, assessments, institutional advancement, and evaluations. With respect to the last IE tenet, embedding D&I ubiquitously and systemically is how the framework strives to create a conscious reminder of thinking about diverse groups.

One critical area that has the potential to promote inclusion is the daily decision-making process that is part of any college, university, or unit. Decisions are contemplated and executed regarding new initiatives, programs, curriculum, funding, policies, procedures, marketing, recruitment, enrollment, scholarships, university advancement, educational outcomes, student discipline, graduation, personnel, promotion, tenure, and numerous other dimensions of an institution of higher learning. Moreover, many of these resolutions often fail to be inclusive of diverse communities on campus. Otherwise stated, LatinX, African American, Women, Native American, LGBTQI+, People with Disabilities, Jewish,

Muslim, Asian American, International students, and other diverse groups are not considered in formulating decisions that impact those very same communities. Embedding diversity and inclusion into *decision-making protocols is of the utmost importance in those arenas that have wide-ranging impact on a campus. These include the President’s Executive Team, deans’ councils, departmental meetings, Faculty Senate, Student Affairs, advancement, research, athletics, student government, and Alumni Affairs. Decisions in smaller offices, centers, organizations, and units are also impactful on circumscribed populations.

Keeping the above in mind, it would be helpful to infuse a diversity and inclusion protocol and assessment into the decision-making processes at a university in order to center D&I throughout an institution. Using such a procedure, every decision would be measured against the protocol to evaluate the level of inclusiveness regarding the initiative and concomitant decision. To that end, the Inclusive Excellence Compass (presented in the next section) was conceptualized to guide decision-making bodies in fostering diversity and inclusion.

Inclusive Excellence Compass

The Inclusive Excellence Compass (IEC) is designed to keep an institution, agency, or unit on track in practicing Inclusive Excellence. At a fundamental level, the Compass strives to maintain D&I on the radar of those making all types of decisions that impact an institution or a unit. Stated differently, the instrument infuses diversity and inclusion into the decision-making process of a unit. It is intended for use by executive committees, councils, advisory boards, chairs, and department meetings to review decisions involving a new initiative, project, policy, or any other leadership decision for the presence of inclusion. The overarching questions the IEC considers are: 1) Have diverse groups been considered in the development of the proposed program or policy? 2) Why was the group included or excluded? 3) Are the groups included at the center, periphery, or outside the program or action? and 4) Was the social identity group consulted in the process? How were they consulted? The final part of the IEC allows decision-making bodies to generate an inclusiveness score based on the number of social identities included in the final product.

Think of a compass as one that moves as new “coordinates” or information emerges. As new information is acquired, the action might need to be modified to add social identities or better serve those groups included in the decision. In addition, the social identities included might have an impact on the measurable outcomes of the action, particularly on the diversity and inclusion results of the project or initiative. It is important to follow up on the results of including diverse communities.

The ideal implementation strategy for the I.E. Compass is for the President, Chancellor, or Provost to encourage (via accountability) all decision-making bodies on campus to utilize the instrument, thus promoting diversity and inclusiveness system-wide.

How to Use the I.E. Compass

Step 1: Type of Action

In the following section, please identify the type of action or initiative that is under review using the Inclusive Excellence Compass. Please check one (or more):

Policy
 Process/Procedure
 Project/Initiative
 Research
 Program
 Other _____

Step 2: Inclusion of Social Identities

This next section involves the: 1) identification of diverse groups (i.e., social identities); 2) whether or not they have been included; 3) the rationale for inclusion or exclusion; 4) the location of the group within the action; 5) and determining whether and how the social identities were consulted during the process.

Please indicate with a check (✓) whether each group was Included (I) or Excluded (E). Also, please provide a rationale for an I or E response. Indicate for each social identity if the group is included at the center, periphery, or outside the project. Finally, indicate if the social identity was consulted in the process as well as how they were involved in the course of being included.

| Social Identity | Decision: Included (I) | Decision: Excluded (E) | If I or E, what is the rationale? | Is the group included at the center, periphery, or on the outside? | Was the Social Identity consulted in the process? How? |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| African American/Black | | | | | |
| Native American | | | | | |
| Asian American | | | | | |
| LatinX | | | | | |
| White/Caucasian | | | | | |
| LGBTQI+ | | | | | |
| Disability | | | | | |
| Gender | | | | | |
| Gender Identity | | | | | |
| Age | | | | | |
| DACA | | | | | |
| Religion | | | | | |
| Socio-economic Status | | | | | |
| Vulnerable Students (food insecure, homeless) | | | | | |
| Students | | | | | |
| Single Parents | | | | | |
| Neurodiversity | | | | | |
| Veterans | | | | | |
| Other: _____ | | | | | |

Step 3: Inclusion Score: _____

Add up the number of check marks under the “Decision: Included (I)” column to determine the strength of inclusiveness related to the decision (i.e., Inclusion Score) using the following scale:

- 2 social identities = Moderate Inclusion (e.g., A program that engages and includes African Americans and Jewish students, staff, or faculty.)
- 3 social identities = Full Intersectional Inclusion (e.g., A fundraising effort designed to benefit Low SES, DACA Students with Disabilities or a curriculum that addresses race/ethnicity, gender identity, and religion.)
- 4 or more social identities = Inclusive Excellence (e.g., A student retreat that includes topics regarding LGBTQI++, ethnic/racial, disability, Muslim, Jewish, gender identity, and international student issues.)

The I.E. Score is totally arbitrary and can be altered to increase or decrease the criteria for and strength of the inclusion number.

*The genesis for the IE Compass emerged from the consultant’s experience at Wright State University. Shari Mickey-Boggs, Associate Vice-President and Chief Human Resources Officer, suggested that a protocol could be developed to assess the inclusiveness of decisions undertaken at the President’s Executive Council. Special thanks for her feedback to Dr. Kris Ewing, Associate Clinical Professor, Department of Educational Leadership Administration, Northern Arizona University in Phoenix, AZ.