

The Importance of Diversity and Inclusiveness in Academia: Perspectives from University of The Bahamas Faculty

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Abstract

At the recent University of The Bahamas Faculty Seminar (2020), a panel presented on the topic, “The Importance of Diversity and Inclusiveness in Academia.” Their reflections on this critical discourse foreground various facets of the subject as it relates to the Bahamian context and to the University of The Bahamas, more specifically. Over the past several decades in North America and elsewhere, emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness has been driven by the need to address issues of inequity, marginalisation, invisibility, and injustice and has, in significant ways, energized the restructuring of academic programs, shaped new pedagogical approaches, impacted university hiring practices, revised university policies, and transformed campus life.

Introduction

A. Marie Sairsingh

At the recent University of The Bahamas Faculty Seminar (2020), a panel presented on the topic, “The Importance of Diversity and Inclusiveness in Academia.” Their reflections on this critical discourse foreground various facets of the subject as it relates to the Bahamian context and to the University, more specifically. Over the past several decades in North America and elsewhere, emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness has been driven by the need to address issues of inequity, marginalisation, invisibility, and injustice and has, in significant ways, energized the restructuring of academic programs, shaped new pedagogical approaches, impacted university hiring practices, revised university

policies, and transformed campus life.

The Bahamian national discourse on diversity and inclusion has propelled new legislation that has, at the very least, begun to redress previous inaccessibility of public spaces (including at the University) by persons with disabilities, and has engendered greater sensitivity towards the needs and rights of the physically disabled. While this has been a step towards the ultimate goal of full inclusiveness, there is still a great distance to cover before full equity is achieved.

Identifying additional modes of redress is crucial if the University of The Bahamas is to effectively deal with issues of inequality both within the academic curriculum and within the life and function of the University. Toward this

end, defining a vision and designing appropriate strategies and interventions will be crucial. What is immediately evident in the following reflections is that the University is at a critical juncture, and that initiating a dialogue about diversity and inclusion in the University context is imperative. These essays evince the writers' acute awareness of prevalent and/or vestigial practices of exclusion, monologic pedagogies, and the need for the University community to advance a culture of promoting diversity and inclusiveness, enabling transformation of the academic space into one that reflects social equity, one that emphasizes diversity of thought in the realm of scholarship, and provides equal access to all whom the University is mandated to serve.

Varied perspectives are offered by panelists Anne Ulentin, Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of History, Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean, Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Psychology, Christopher Curry, Associate Professor and former Chair of Social Sciences, and Richard Ellefritz, Assistant Professor of Sociology. Their discussion includes considerations of systemic, cultural, and behavioural change to effectively transform the University environment and, ultimately reap the benefits that diversity, inclusion, justice and equity inevitably bring.

In "Perspectives from University of The Bahamas Faculty," Ulentin examines diversity as it relates to faculty composition, which, she asserts, should reflect the full spectrum including race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, etc. She emphasizes the need for inclusiveness within the University curriculum to reflect a wider commitment to full inclusion and representation across the University and within its academic programs. By surveying various constituents of the University, Ulentin garners respondents' views of "diversity" (as an expansive "range of human differences") and "inclusiveness" (as, among other things, "ensuring equity in decision-making/shared

governance"). She stresses taking into consideration all opinions and contributions to this important discourse and integrating them into the ethos of the University.

Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean, in her essay, "Diversity Beyond Appearances," focuses on the idea of a broadened understanding of identity, asserting the need to examine assumptions regarding who is in the classroom (and who is not), admonishing professors to become more attuned to nuances of student identities. She highlights the often-precarious identity – be it sexuality, religion, ethnicity, or gender-related, which hides within the presumed safety of the normative self-representation out of fear of rejection or ostracism. Authentic faculty and student self-representation, she argues, should be a core value. Hall Campbell-Dean also asserts that critical pedagogy demands that we examine traditional disciplinary content through alternative lenses so as to parse vestigial racism, sexism and repressive ideas, interrogate them, and move beyond appearances that may not tell the entire story.

Christopher Curry's essay, "Dealing With Student Disabilities" provides a retrospective look at the University's early lack of policies regarding students with disabilities, and examines the current state of disability inclusion at the University, arguing that while several pivotal policies have been implemented, catalysed by the Bahamas becoming a signatory to international protocols and to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the battle for full inclusion is not yet won. Curry foregrounds the progressive plans of the newly appointed Disabilities Compliance Officer, Erin Brown, and the 2017 policy initiatives and "tangible protocols for addressing the needs of disabled students." He argues that synergistic relationships, collaborations, and linkages across constituents of the University, can create a more inviting, more inclusive campus for disabled students.

In the final essay, “Chronicling the Diversity Conversation in Higher Education,” Richard Ellefritz looks at the current discourse on diversity and on diversity statements used by hiring committees across many universities in the world as a critical criterion. He examines various views on this issue, including the concern that without increasing their demographic and ideological diversity, hiring committees are likely to appoint likeminded faculty that perpetuate the status quo. Other commentators view diversity statements as indispensable to the critical work of the academic community. Ellefritz asserts that it is “incumbent upon the departments and organizations calling for diversity statements to define exactly what kind of diversity is sought.” He further emphasizes that students’ needs should be the central concern in any multidimensional discussion toward achieving diversity on the University campus.

Diversity and Inclusion in Academia

Anne Ulentin

Research studies have shown that academia has suffered from a lack of diversity and inclusion over its long history. In particular, underrepresentation among faculty, staff, and students, and lack of diverse perspectives in the curriculum have been of particular concern. It is only in recent years that lack of diversity and inclusion has started to receive attention and remediation. How we can make our classrooms and curriculum more diverse and inclusive? How can we ensure we are getting a diversity of ideas coming from a diversity of approaches? How can we actively represent the range of perspectives held by the communities we serve?

As Head of the Department of History at the University of The Bahamas, I strive to cultivate and foster global awareness among our students and create and drive inclusion. In particular, I have placed an emphasis on

building an inclusive curriculum. There are so many topics and histories that children and young adults are not exposed to until college because the curriculum is traditionally very Eurocentric, whitewashed, sexist, and heteronormative. There has been a long history of erasing or silencing narratives and contributions of marginalized and minority communities, thus decolonizing the History curriculum and teaching programme at UB has been my primary focus. This approach incorporates multiple perspectives to bear on historical questions. Making our students aware of various histories and cultures has been key in promoting the principles of inquiry, critical thinking, diversity, inclusion, and equity.

In addition to building a curriculum that focuses on the experiences of various ethnic, racial, cultural, language, and religious groups, it has also been crucial to consider all identities, which is why an intersectional approach along the lines of race, class, and gender has been incorporated into our programme. In order to properly equip our students with the necessary tools to be socially just and inclusive, I strive to include all identities and backgrounds in our curriculum to ensure that students develop awareness and respect for others. Our students at UB have played a key role in helping us create and maintain such a representative, diverse curriculum. Listening and paying attention to their needs and interests, and incorporating their experiences and perspectives into the curriculum has been essential. Through a representative and inclusive curriculum, we are able to challenge our students to rethink history and understand why certain injustices and inequalities of the past have endured and continued to impact society.

In conjunction with this presentation, I conducted a preliminary survey of students, staff, and faculty at UB to gather various perspectives on diversity and inclusion. Thirty-three participants answered the following three

questions: “What does ‘Diversity and Inclusion in Academia’ mean to you?”, “Do you believe UB is diverse and inclusive?”, and “How can we foster diversity and inclusion at UB?” Students represented 42.42% (14 respondents) of the sample, Staff 6.06% (2 respondents), Faculty 45.45% (15 respondents), and Other 6.06% (2 respondents).

To the question “What does ‘Diversity and Inclusion in Academia’ mean to you?”, participants provided various definitions of diversity and inclusion. They defined *diversity* as the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, social class, physical ability or attributes, and religious or ethical value systems. Regarding inclusion, the participants’ answers were placed in four broad categories: (1) cultivating a diverse student body and faculty; (2) cultivating a fair and safe environment; (3) utilizing a wide range of teaching methods; and (4) ensuring equity in decision making / shared governance. In sum, participants put an emphasis on including a variety of experiences and perspectives in the classroom and involving faculty, administration, staff, and students in decision making.

To the question “Do you believe UB is diverse and inclusive?”, 6.06% (2 respondents) strongly agreed with the question, 36.36% (12 respondents) agreed, 54.55% (18 respondents) disagreed, and 3.03% (1 respondent) strongly disagreed. Thus, the survey showed that close to six participants out of ten believed that UB is not diverse and inclusive. In an effort to seek ideas and thoughts on diversity and inclusion from our participants, the last question, “How can we foster diversity and inclusion at UB?,” offered several important answers. The participants’ answers were placed in four broad categories: (1) build inclusivity into the teaching curriculum; (2) hire / recruit diverse members; (3) engage diverse members / create a dialogue; and (4) institutional commitment to

diversity and inclusion. Participants clearly indicated that building inclusivity into the teaching curriculum must be a priority at UB. For example, they explained that “course(s) which teach about cross-cultural experiences as a part of the general elective requirement” should be mandatory as students would “learn about a wide variety of cultures [and] their history, and gain a better understanding of the world around them (Survey, 2020). Moreover, participants placed an emphasis on “actively seek[ing] diversity” in the student body, staff, and faculty, especially in terms of their race, nationality, and diversity of thought. Engaging these diverse members and creating a “dialogue” through conducting surveys and establishing group discussions, committees, and informational sessions were also seen as crucial steps to building a diverse and inclusive community. Finally, in addition to creating such spaces, participants highlighted the need for crafting diversity and inclusion policies, enforcing existing policies, and shared governance to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion.

To conclude, although the sample of participants was a small one, participants clearly showed an awareness and the need for creating and sustaining a diverse and inclusive environment at UB. Ultimately, their ideas for improving and benefiting from a more diverse and inclusive community at UB are worth taking into consideration and incorporating into our ethos.

Diversity Beyond Appearances

Niambi Hall Campbell-Dean

The majority of my time in academia was spent in the United States where conversation regarding diversity and inclusion were primarily centred around the differences between racial groups rather than the diversity within them. As a young, Black, Bahamian woman I was made acutely aware of these differences both in and out of the classroom

setting and became deeply involved in these issues on campus by joining various groups, leading workshops, conducting research on the topic, and eventually and becoming a certified Diversity Trainer. By the time I completed my doctorate program, I was well versed in the racial dynamics in America and was ready to share what I had learned with Bahamian students. I thought that being in more racially homogenous spaces would make the conversation easier to have, and while talking about race in a Bahamian environment, is more comfortable for me, I quickly realized that there were still a number of lessons to be learned regarding diversity and inclusivity in the Bahamian academic space.

One of the first lessons that I learned in the classrooms at the then, College of The Bahamas was to question my assumptions. As a Bahamian, I was more than excited to finally teach in a space in which the majority of the students not only looked like me racially, but they shared my ethnicity, nationality, and religion. I assumed that these similarities would align our perspectives in multiple ways and while these shared identities did make it easier to pull from the culture for references and examples, I realized that I had overestimated how similar the students and I were. I had gone from teaching in spaces in which many led with their racial identity to one in which racial identity, while just as important, is less salient.

This caused me to question what other identities I was bringing into the classroom and the assumptions was I making about the students because of them. I had already resigned to the fact that the age gap between the students and I was increasing (How dare they not know who Clarise from *Silence of The Lambs* was?) It was a humbling realization, but it led to my first lessons regarding diversity and inclusiveness at the then College of The Bahamas which was that was that diversity is more than skin deep. As such, one must become aware of the pronounced and subtle

identities that they bring into the classroom and understand how these identities and privileges may play out in their interpersonal interactions with students as well as in their pedagogy.

The second lesson that I learned about diversity and inclusion in The Bahamas was also connected to assumptions and while it was not a new lesson, new context requires new understandings. In the UB classroom identifying the diversity, present can be a bit more challenging, but it is no less important to know who is in the room? Where do your students come from? Are they first-generation college students or even first-generation Bahamians? In this Covid-19 environment, online teaching can expose us to more of a students' background by virtue of perceiving them in their own context but it is good to know who is in the room because it also gives rise to the question of who is not in the classroom. Why aren't they there and what does their absence indicate about our learning space?

Sometimes it is easy to confine issues of diversity and inclusivity to the classroom but exposing students to a diversity of thought requires embracing diverse perspectives and gendering inclusivity amongst faculty and staff. In the Bahamas, we, for example, take for granted that everyone in the room is Christian and it is not uncommon to automatically start meetings, workshops, and convocations with a Christian prayer without making space for those in the room who do not identify as Christian. One might say when in Rome do as the Romans but the University of the Bahamas is not religiously affiliated therefore our faculty and staff are not required to subscribe to any religious doctrine. How can we, therefore, foster inclusivity for all minority perspectives, even the ones with which we might disagree?

While being aware of the identities both present and missing from the classroom can provide particular insight, as faculty we have

to also take into account that there may be students and even faculty whose identities, by choice or by force, are hidden. Learning disabilities, sexual orientation, and mental health challenges are a few examples of the identities that we have to assume are present on our campuses and include in our analysis whether we are consciously aware of their presence or not. A student may never feel comfortable disclosing a non-normative sexual orientation but they should be comfortable in the fact that issues regarding sexual orientation in the classroom will be handled with the same dignity and respect of any other majority group. Regrettably, this is not always the case but creating a diverse and inclusive University means that no matter what the issue students should never leave the classroom feeling more isolated than when they entered and faculty should never feel the need to be inauthentic in their presentations of self.

Sometimes this inclusion can and should be provided through pedagogical techniques. I, for example, begin all of my Introduction to Psychology courses by breaking down the etymology of the word psychology and revealing its African roots. We take the time to question whether the scientific method is the only way to know something and question who is in the textbooks and who is not. These activities add a bit more time and effort to the instruction but ultimately allows the students to recognize that they must place themselves at the centre of the analysis even if their textbook traditionally do not. We question the vestiges of racism, sexism and oppression in general with the field even in courses in which those topics are not a part of the course outline. Moving beyond appearances in regard to diversity and inclusion requires that we do so. This work requires making space for things that we may not have traditionally been aware of being courageous enough to do so.

Dealing with Student Disabilities

Christopher Curry

Serendipitously, this summer I had the wonderful opportunity to meet Erin Brown, UB's Disabilities Compliance Officer and Disability Consultant. The meeting was facilitated by radio talk show personality, Howard Grant, who at the time was working on a series of interviews for the Bahamas Kind Campaign, a programme launched during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to encourage community solidarity and social cohesion. In the short time spent with Ms. Brown, I became intrigued and excited about her work at UB, particularly her detailed plans for transforming the University into a more inclusive and equitable campus for students with disabilities. As was obvious from the conversation with Erin Brown, UB's journey to greater inclusivity for disabled students was a mixture of mistakes and miscalculations in the past while also offering the potential for transformative change in the future.

The Beginning. For a long time, no systematic effort or institutionalized policy existed as it relates to students with disabilities. There were a few individual lecturers or faculty members who had specialized training in teaching students with special needs and disabilities, but on the whole UB had not adopted a comprehensive policy on disabilities. Moreover, most buildings on campus had no ramps or accessible structures for disabled students.

However, a number of events in the last decade would change UB's neglect in this important area of inclusivity. The first important shift occurred when the government of The Bahamas became a signatory to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September 2014. The Convention was established "to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote

respect for their inherent dignity.”

UB's Policy (2017). As important as this landmark convention was for The Bahamas in international circles, little to no tangible results were seen on the ground at the national and institutional level. All of this would change with UB's adoption of a Disability Policy in March 2017. The policy was progressive and far reaching in its framework and details, including language that not only supported and adhered to the UN convention of 2014, but that provided institutional resources and tangible protocols for addressing the needs of disabled students. UB's commitment to change was evident in the policy's creation of a Disabilities Compliance Officer, a staff member who would preside over the case management of applications for assistance and various legal documents as well as *laissez* between students with disabilities and faculty members.

Beyond the adoption of a historic Disabilities Policy, later that year on October 4, 2017, UB's Department of Law and the Law Society, in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Services and Urban Development, the Ministry of Transport and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities held a successful Equal Rights: Persons with Disabilities Conference at the Harry C. Moore Library and Information Centre.

The conference created a timely platform for discussions concerning persons with disabilities. The Hon. Mr. Justice Bernard Turner, Justice of The Supreme Court of The Bahamas, delivered the keynote address. Justice Turner suggested amendments that are needed in the legal system and the infrastructure of the courts which would better serve disabled persons to make the judicial process more effective and efficient.

A Case Study. Despite the recent policy and conference, it is clear that UB still has not gone far enough to address disabilities. Recently, Gregory Cash, a wheelchair-bound student had been assigned a class on the fourth floor of the

Michael Eldon Building—a location that presented a significant challenge to his educational goals. Indeed, the frequent power outages and subsequent malfunctioning of the elevator in the Michael Eldon Building forced Gregory to be lifted up four flights of stairs, a task that required the assistance of at least three other male students. Cash's experience is not an isolated case. In an interview with Erin Brown it was evident that there remains a number of institutional barriers to achieving the goal of a more inclusive campus for disabled students including:

access to common and social spaces; inadequate accessible bathroom facilities such as entry ways, stalls, layout and placement of bathroom equipment; incomplete access ramps or malfunctioning automatic doors; inadequate disability parking spots and signage; access to classes on upper level floors with in consistent elevator support; computer labs and staff not adequately trained or no accessible devices designated or available for students with disabilities; limited student support and accommodations by professors. (personal communication, July 18, 2020)

Apart from the issues with physical space, design and structures of buildings on campus, Brown also noted that there were additional pedagogical barriers that disabled students faced as part of their overall educational experience at UB. Such barriers included a need for greater direct contact and instructional assistance from lecturers; additional adaptive material including text books and software programmes such as CART, audio books and image descriptions. Beyond adaptive aids, Brown noted that there was no access to devices with the needed programmes such as JAWS (text to speech programs), touch screens, printers and other basic software components needed to assist disabled students. More generally, Ms. Brown also highlighted the lack of awareness or even sensitivity

among faculty regarding the needs of disabled students and the current platforms available to deliver appropriate instruction for disabled students (personal communication, July 18, 2020).

Future Considerations. Although the current situation appears troublesome, there is sufficient optimism that transformation will eventually occur as it relates to creating a more inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities. Indeed, Brown herself confesses that her appointment as UB's Disability and Compliance Officer was only recently established in November of 2019. Since then she has worked assiduously worked to create a more inclusive culture at UB. Working out of the Office of Disabilities and Compliance within the Student Affairs Division in the Keva Bethel Block, Brown has begun to raise awareness on campus via direct interaction with administration, faculty and students, particularly providing accessible support and resources during orientation, procedures, accommodations and events. The Office of Disabilities and Compliance also held UB's first Inclusive HIV Testing, where we provided disability training for the Ministry of Health AIDS Secretariat staff which provides reproductive and sexual health information each fall semester on campus. According to Brown, "this event brought attention to the gaps that exist for youth and adults with disabilities, access to such programs and inclusive procedures to ensure support and services were made available. i.e. braille condoms for our blind, low vision and or visually impaired users" (personal communication, July 18, 2020).

Beyond the HIV testing, the Office of Disabilities and Compliance provided two additional initiatives worth noting. The first was the Student Showcase where the Office of Disabilities and Compliance provided support for Campus Life and students with disabilities were made aware of the importance of securing accessible placement and inclusion. Secondly,

the Office also provided tangible support to the Academic Counselling and Career Advisory Committee during UB's annual Career Fair. In this regard the Office provided guidance for disabled students that needed resume and interview assistance as well as providing Disability Inclusion guidelines for companies to encourage inclusive hiring practices and opportunities.

It is also worth noting that the Office of Disabilities and Compliance had partnered with the organizers of UBFIT fun run, walk, bike, skate 5k/10k race to include a "push" component to the event. As such, the push component would have allowed for everyone to participate including wheelchair users who could propel themselves or have support in being pushed. Adaptive athletes with physical disabilities could have participated with accompanied guides or support staff. Push also would include family and friends who would enjoy a push in the strollers or sitting on tandem bikes. Unfortunately, this year's UBFIT event with the inaugural push component was cancelled due to the surge in COVID 19 cases in The Bahamas.

Despite the cancelation of this year's UBFIT event, the future appears promising for the development of a more inclusive campus for students with disabilities. The transformation that is required will begin with a strong commitment to the goal. As Brown reiterates:

The future of academia as it relates to students with disabilities would be steeped in "diversity" which requires we take into the consideration the basic fabric of a human being: race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion, economic status etc in providing Inclusive Education. (personal communication, July 18, 2020)

As part of the aspirational goal outlined above, the Office of Disabilities and Compliance is also committed to raising awareness about the importance of institutional access

for disabled students. The vision is simple, as Brown states, “to increase access and inclusion to all administration, faculty, staff and students with disabilities with opportunities to obtain higher education in desired studies and professional development beyond undergraduate studies” (personal communication, July 18, 2020).

In sum, while the university has made significant inroads to developing a more inclusive learning environment for disabled students, there is still much work to be done. Some initiatives that are pressing is the need for a more visible link on UB’s web page for disabled students attempting to find assistance or the requisite applications needed by the Office of Disabilities and Compliance. Greater attention and awareness must continue with the hosting of regular seminars and forums for faculty, staff and students. According to Erin Brown, Administration, faculty and staff need disability inclusion training and support; from devices to in house and continuing diversity training which would ensure the ability to pivot and request accommodations for inclusive solutions and adaptation of current teaching models. Finally, as we shift to remote learning as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, academics need to lead the charge to dismantle old systems of domination and exclusion, and thereby create an inviting and inclusive educational system, including students with disabilities.

Chronicling the Diversity Conversation in Higher Education

Richard G. Ellefritz

This preliminary report is based upon a search for “diversity” on the website for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the format was designed for a brief presentation via Zoom. An example of a diversity statement is given to highlight the first story cited, and the following three stories cited, “Against Diversity Statements,” “In Defense of

Diversity Statements,” and “The Legal Problem with Diversity Statements,” highlight the recent and ongoing debate over institutional policies of requiring faculty in the hiring process to identify how they contribute to diversity, inclusion, and equity. Some of these issues are teased out in the fourth article with attention placed on the how inclusion of diversity statements might dissuade some scholars from applying for positions as well as other scholars being viewed as being less rigorous than others due to their research on topics inherently associated with diversity and equity. The hiring process itself is structured around the demographic and ideological characteristics of hiring committees and their chairs and can lead to further substantiating a like-mindedness and demographically homogenous faculty. Efforts have been made to increase demographic diversity of faculty, but this process can lead to wariness of applicants that they are treated with lower standards, as well as to a pool of elite minority candidates who are given preferential treatment. Alongside that, increasing demographic diversity by way of hiring presidents, provosts, deans, chairs, etc. can detract from the diversity of thought necessary to help challenge students’ thoughts and present to them persons with different racial, ethnic, gender, and religious backgrounds than their own. It is questionable whether or not there is a university-wide ideological bias of faculty, as there are departments that lean left in their politics (perhaps inherently to their field of study), but individual faculty can take it upon themselves to ensure that students’ ideas are challenged and nurtured in ways that help the students approach the world with diverse perspectives. Some students, especially international students, might be unfamiliar with the customs, manners, and other norms of their host country, and so efforts should be made to help better instill a sense of the host countries norms with incoming students. Due to the COVID-19

pandemic lockdowns, marginalized and disempowered students no longer enjoy the ability to group together for live demonstrations of their grievances with university policies, faculty behaviours, and guest speakers, and so efforts should be made to include students in administrative meetings in order to ensure their voices continue to be heard when policies are formed at the institutional level.

It is common practice for academic departments to include in their application requirements a call for teaching philosophies, reflective teaching statements, both peer and student teaching evaluations, and statements about how inclusiveness and diversity factor into one's research and pedagogy. For example, along with philosophy and reflexivity statements, writing samples, evaluations, and peer recommendations, the sociology department at the University of California–Irving requests “a separate statement that addresses past and/or potential contributions to diversity, equity and inclusion” for potential candidates to their part-time hiring pool beginning August 2020 (<https://employment.nativeamericanjobs.com/jobs/13823233/sociology-department-temporary-part-time-lecturer-s-2020-2021>).

The question entertained in this paper is not whether the requirement of diversity statements is needed or not, but rather about what the existing discourse is on diversity statements. In order to uncover this conversation, I simply searched for “diversity” in The Chronicle of Higher Education's website, and then I selected recent stories that hinged on similar topical areas with respect to both faculty and student bodies. As an example of one perspective on this issue, Charlotte Canning and Richard Reddick put out a clarion call for the necessity of diversity statements, asserting that “the university must acknowledge that diversity work is in fact critical to the values that have led to progress—and that it must be shared by all

members of the academic community” (2019).

Pointing out what should be considered a central issue regarding diversity statements, Jeffrey Flier, whom Charlotte Canning and Richard Reddick (2019) responded to in their article, summarizes the issue as follows:

Diversity and equity principles and programs should be reviewed to clarify the current intended meaning of terms and the goals of policies, with open community dialogue. At the moment, honest dialogue about the goals and consequences of these initiatives is uncommon, and overt criticism is virtually taboo. Skepticism tends to be voiced privately or in small groups rather than in public forums. Self-censorship is the rule. When institutional leaders issue statements about diversity, they are typically anodyne, vague, and euphemistic, reflecting the highly charged context in which they will be received and interpreted. There is exhortation, but little serious engagement with specific policies and goals (2019, para. 14).

As components of the institution dedicated to such high ideals as truth, knowledge, and integrity, it is incumbent upon the departments and organizations calling for diversity statements to define exactly what kind of diversity is sought. Pamela Newkirk (2019) points out that diversity initiatives sometimes backfire due to the subjective nature of the hiring process, which includes both the appraisals from hiring committees and applicants. Importantly, Newkirk echoes findings concluding that diversity statement requirements become institutionally standard so that they are not viewed as targeted hiring practices by select departments. Some applicants might be resentful about writing a diversity statement that will be evaluated as part of their hiring criteria, and this resentment can be felt by those whose fields are not directly related to social issues (particularly STEM) as well as those whose research and

teaching are already thoroughly steeped in diversity- and inclusion-related topics.

Brian Leiter (2020) airs his concern that without a solid and widely agreed upon conceptualization and definition, diversity statements can amount to requirements for potential new faculty to make public statements aligning them with political views they do not necessarily agree with in part or in full. The legal problems with this amount to infringements on the values and beliefs of certain individuals part of our contemporary pluralistic democracies. For background, Sarah Brown (2019a) summarizes six years of diversity-related issues on campuses, drawing attention to the growing ideological split within and between both student and faculty bodies. That in mind, Zachary Michael Jack pays particular attention to how ideologically homogenous faculty bodies are formed:

Diversity well-practiced means that previously homogenous departments, which once naturally agreed on what they must do to meet common challenges, may still achieve the hard-won consensus they seek, but only if they are willing to devote the increased time and intrinsic respect necessary to incorporate the views of those who see the world differently. (2020)

Sarah Brown (2019b) suggests that creating a more diverse campus requires starting with hiring practices of presidents, provosts, and deans, and Julia Piper (2019) provides examples of the growing diversity in leadership of campuses across the United States with the inclusion of more women of colour. Regardless of the demographic composition of the campus, though, editors at *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2019) posed the question if there exists a squelching of conservative views on campuses, and sought to remind readers that one of the functions of faculty in the institution of higher education is to challenge the received wisdom and

culturally-laden assumptions of students by providing multiple points of view on issues. This would be difficult were the ideological diversity of a faculty body to closely match that of students, which over time seems to have become the case as the institutional hiring practices begin to reflect the predominant paradigms of the institution that have been taught for decades.

In addition to this, the existing nature of college campuses during the COVID-19 crisis means that marginalized students experience a more difficult time seeking redress for their grievances. In-person assemblies are much more difficult and less likely to acquire the necessary attention for students concerns to be met, and so Aisha Ahmad (2020) recommends that administrators make it a point to include student representatives at all levels of administrative practices. Included in most student bodies are exchange and international students. Bringing attention to this, Karin Fischer (2020) identifies deficiencies in teaching foreign students about the social norms of the societies in which they are studying, which includes in the West conversations about sensitive topics related to racial and ethnic, gender and sexual, religious and nationalistic historical and contemporary relations. This recommendation seems to allude to forming entire courses in which students learn about the subjective and objective intricacies of diverse populations that form pluralistic democratic societies, which already exist in the Social Sciences and Humanities. However, the need seems to lie at the institutional rather than departmental level, and the call to include students in administrative decisions seems to indicate the inclusion of students in deciding what and how diversity and inclusion training of the student body can or will be fulfilled. Some of the same homogenizing challenges still face this process, but the focus on students' needs should be the central concern in raising awareness of the social, cultural, economic,

and political dimensions and facets of bringing about a more diverse institution and campus.

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