

## INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE FAQ

### WHAT IS INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE?

Inclusive Excellence is a planning process intended to help each UW System institution establish a comprehensive and well-coordinated set of systemic actions that focus specifically on fostering greater diversity, equity, inclusion, and accountability at every level of university life. The central premise of Inclusive Excellence holds that UW System colleges and universities need to intentionally integrate their diversity efforts into the core aspects of their institutions—such as their academic priorities, leadership, quality improvement initiatives, decision-making, day-to-day operations, and organizational cultures—in order to maximize their success.

### HOW DOES INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE WORK?

Inclusive Excellence offers an approach for organizing our work in a deliberate, intentional and coordinated manner. This approach:

- ◆ Employs a dual focus in diversity efforts, concentrating on both increasing compositional diversity, and creating learning environments in which students of all backgrounds can thrive;
- ◆ Requires a more comprehensive, widespread level of engagement and commitment ensuring that every student fulfills their educational potential;
- ◆ Places the mission of diversity at the center of institutional life so that it becomes a core organizing principle, around which institutional decisions are made;
- ◆ Calls for a close attentiveness to the student experience itself, including the impact of race and ethnicity, and the influence of physical ability, sexual orientation, gender expression, socioeconomic background, and first-generation status on their learning experiences; and
- ◆ Demands that the ideals of diversity and excellence be pursued as the interconnected and interdependent goals they are.

### WHY INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE?

In many respects, Inclusive Excellence represents the next necessary step in our evolution as a System committed to creating those diverse learning environments that we know are so vital to our students' growth, learning, and achievement. Our recruitment and retention efforts as well as our engagement in such initiatives as the Campus Climate Study and the Equity Scorecard Project have taught us that our pursuit of diversity has to be a far more multidimensional, integrative, and student-centered process if it is to produce the kinds of individual and System-wide transformation we have been seeking. Inclusive Excellence is a change-oriented planning process that encourages us to continue in our diversification efforts albeit with a greater intentionality and attentiveness of how they serve the needs of our students. Informed by a well-established body of empirical research as to the institutional contexts, practices, and cultures that contribute to the establishment of a diverse learning environment, Inclusive Excellence represents a shift not in the essence of our work but how we approach it and carry it out. Above all, Inclusive Excellence asks us to actively manage diversity as a vital and necessary asset of collegiate life rather than as an external problem.

## Working Definitions for Inclusive Excellence

Inclusive Excellence brings together a comprehensive knowledge base – research and theory— from a variety of sources. Within this framework there are some concepts and terms that are fundamentally linked to the educational mission and institutional practice, and thus deserve to be highlighted. The definitions have been categorized by four essential pillars of Inclusive Excellence— Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Excellence.

### DIVERSITY

**DIVERSITY:** Individual differences (e.g. personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, country of origin, and ability as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations) that can be engaged in the service of learning.

**COMPOSITIONAL DIVERSITY:** The numerical and proportional representation of various racial and ethnic groups on a campus. (Milem, Chang and Antonio).

**CRITICAL MASS:** Meaningful representation. Refers to a number that encourages underrepresented minority students to participate in the classroom and not feel

### INCLUSION

**INCLUSION:** The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in people, in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase one’s awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.

### EQUITY

**EQUITY MINDEDNESS:** Refers to the outlook, perspective or mode of thinking exhibited by practitioners and others who call attention to patterns of inequity in student outcomes, and are willing to assume personal and institutional responsibility for the elimination of inequity. This includes being “color conscious,” noticing differences in experience among racial-ethnic groups, and being willing to talk about race and ethnicity as an aspect of equity. Equity perspectives are evident in actions, language, problem-framing, problem-solving, and cultural practices. (Bensimon, 2008)

**DEFICIT MINDEDNESS:** Deficit thinking “posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficits (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster—such as familiar deficits and dysfunctions” (Valencia, 1997). In other words, deficit thinking “blames the student” for unequal outcomes.

**REPRESENTATIONAL EQUITY:** Proportional participation of historically underrepresented racial-ethnic groups at all levels of an institution, including high status special programs, high-demand majors, and in the distribution of grades. (Bensimon, 2008)

### EXCELLENCE

**EXCELLENCE:** The quality of being excellent; state of possessing good qualities in an eminent degree; exalted merit; superiority in virtue.

**WHY NOT  
IMPLEMENT  
ANOTHER TEN-  
YEAR PLAN?**

Despite its twenty-year history of strategic plans for diversity, success on the widespread scale the UW System intended remains frustratingly out of reach, with only modest gains in key areas. Though Plan 2008 provided a bold, progressive vision for transforming the UW System, it did not—and could not—fully anticipate the myriad of practices and processes that its institutions would need in order to cultivate truly diverse and equitable learning environments. Moving forward, we as a system of higher education institutions intend to focus our efforts on driving diversity deep into our everyday cultures, daily practices, and organizational patterns where it can take root and eventually blossom.

**WHAT ABOUT  
THE GOALS OF  
PLAN 2008  
WHICH WE  
HAVE YET TO  
REACH?**

Establishing a critical mass of faculty, staff, and students from historically underrepresented groups will remain a top priority for UW campuses under Inclusive Excellence. As institutions of learning, as a collective system of higher education, and as a state, our futures depend heavily on our ability to educate and hire those who will soon constitute the new majority in this country. We shall maintain our support of efforts aimed at diversifying our institutions, including our multicultural/disadvantaged initiatives, pre-college programs, and efforts such as the Equity Scorecard Project to enhance access, retention, and graduation rates for students of color as well as to ensure their full and successful participation at all levels of institutional life.

**WHAT DOES  
SUCCESS  
ACCORDING TO  
INCLUSIVE  
EXCELLENCE  
LOOK LIKE?**

Success will be recognized by numerous hallmarks, some of which include:

- ◆ Thorough institutionalization of equity and diversity where they are embraced as core values and used to inform campus decision-making, educational practices, and policy-making;
- ◆ Greater compositional and equitable representation diversity of among faculty, students, staff, and other university personnel;
- ◆ Steady and significant rates of retention and upward mobility for faculty and staff who are members of underrepresented populations;
- ◆ Steady and significant increases in the retention and graduation rates for all UW students;
- ◆ Proportional representation of students from underrepresented and underserved populations in competitive academic programs and co-curricular activities that are indices of excellence;
- ◆ Improved campus climates that provide a strong, abiding sense of belonging and community for all UW students;
- ◆ Better alignment and cohesiveness between diversity efforts and other institutional initiatives, particularly those that focus on excellence in undergraduate education;
- ◆ Greater numbers of UW students who possess the requisite multicultural competencies they need to navigate an increasingly diverse democracy; and
- ◆ The enhanced capacity of UW System institutions to meet the ever-emerging and complex needs of its students, the state, and society, now and in the future.

**WHAT KINDS OF BENCHMARKS WILL WE HOLD OURSELVES TO UNDER INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE?**

UW System Administration and UW institutions will likely engage in collaboration with one another to identify which reliable measures will be used to assess how they are doing in their Inclusive Excellence-related efforts.

**HOW LONG WILL WE HAVE TO IMPLEMENT INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE ON OUR CAMPUSES?**

The Inclusive Excellence process is an iterative one, something that unfolds and develops over time, according to each institution's mission, culture, identity, and demographics. If institutions work diligently and steadily to incorporate their diversity work into the larger institutional culture, Inclusive Excellence and diversity more generally will simply become integrated into the larger fabric of the institution.

**WHAT KINDS OF RESOURCES DOES INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE REQUIRE?**

Inclusive Excellence is not a free-standing initiative to be treated as separate or distinct from other institutional planning efforts. Therefore, its implementation should not require any additional resources of either the financial or human kind. It will require the leveraging of institutional resources so that they are distributed according to a campus' most pressing diversity needs.