

# Definitions of Diversity

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JMC programs have created a smorgasbord of definitions for diversity.

Many diversity plans give the word a comprehensive meaning, such as: “Diversity is defined here in a broad sense as human groupings based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, age, religion, sexual orientation, learning styles, nationality and disability.”

A few programs adopt more of an affirmative action definition that focuses on race and gender considerations to redress past wrongs or to mirror current populations.

And other programs highlight the growing internationalization of students and faculty.

This definitional breadth created a debate at the Accrediting Council meeting in May 2007. A report of that meeting said: “Members expressed a concern that some schools include international student and faculty statistics in reports on the diversity standards. Council members said that including international students in these statistics was not the intent of Standard 3.... The Council applauds the value of internationally diverse student bodies and faculties, but this discussion focused on the difference between the goal of seeking redress for past underrepresentation of domestic populations and the goal of providing enrichment through increasing internationalism.”

In the end, the Council voted to require programs seeking accreditation to break out data to separate U.S. minorities from international students and faculty. In essence, the Council decided that Standard 3, first and foremost, is about taking affirmative action to redress past underrepresentation and to mirror today's domestic populations.

Our study shows that many JMC programs, through their diversity plans, have adopted a different view, considering the internationalizing of faculty and students to have equal standing under a standard that is titled “Diversity and Inclusiveness.”

**Good idea... Carefully decide how to define diversity, keeping in mind historic meanings as well as embracing the future.** In the global future, students will need to understand and communicate not only with different races and ethnic groups in the United States, but with people in Asia, Latin America, Africa and around the globe.

Before studying how JMC programs choose to define diversity, here are key terms:

*Affirmative Action:* A policy or program that seeks to redress past discrimination through active measures, sometimes including preferential treatment, to ensure equal opportunity for persons in protected groups.

*Protected Groups:* Protected classes under the law include race, color, ancestry, gender, religion, sexual orientation, medical condition, disability, veteran status and age. (The Age Discrimination in Employment Act specifically prohibits age-based discrimination toward those age 40 and above.)

*Race:* A local geographic or global human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics (White; Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander).

Some schools define diversity broadly, others in terms of affirmative action

Hispanics account for 15% of U.S., African Americans 13%, and Asians 5%

*Ethnicity*: A population that shares common characteristics such as religion, traditions, culture, language, and tribal or national origin regardless of race (Hispanic or Latino, as in a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race).

In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 34 percent of the nation's people list themselves as belonging to a minority population group – 11 percent higher than in 2000. Hispanics account for 15 percent of the U.S. population, African Americans 13.5 percent, and Asians 5 percent.

ACEJMC monitors diversity that it can *see*. Race, ethnicity and gender can be confirmed through physical appearance, and a site team expects to see an appropriate mix of men and women and colors.

Here is a disturbing example: A Western university in a well-populated area reported a 58 percent *minority* student population, yet a 93 percent white full-time faculty and a 92 percent white adjunct faculty. This is such a stark discrepancy that an accreditation team would be justified in questioning the program's commitment to faculty diversity.

But some categorizations of diversity have no physical appearance. The opening definition that began this chapter also lists “class, age, religion, sexual orientation, learning styles, nationality and disability.”

Sexual orientation, for instance, is not something that hiring committees ask. (They don't ask race, ethnicity and gender questions either, but these are more readily apparent through physical appearance.) Citing sexual orientation in a definition of diversity, then, seems more like saying that a program should not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation rather than to proactively pursue hiring a gay or lesbian faculty member on the basis of being underrepresented in that category.

Diversity is hard to monitor if you can't see it or ask about it. For instance, a number of JMC programs list the need for “socio-economic diversity” among both faculty and students. Regarding students, that term is a call to admit and financially support students from economically disadvantaged circumstances. But regarding faculties, what does socio-economic diversity mean? Are faculties supposed to hire applicants who come from poorer backgrounds, or those who most desperately need a paycheck?

A number of diversity plans include “religion.” How would a school go about hiring a Presbyterian to balance out an agnostic on the faculty, since questions about religion are prohibited in the hiring process at public universities?

Some diversity plans list the need for a range in “ideology” and “political thought.” Such balance certainly seems appropriate in an academic setting, but how could schools operationalize the concept? Have a hiring spree for liberals or conservatives, depending on which is in short supply on the faculty?

Okay, we're having a bit of fun here. The point is, diversity plans use a lot of words that really aren't operational in a faculty search.

Some diversity definitions, then, are clearly designed to be proactive: *Seek out and hire minority and women faculty, if underrepresented.*

Other diversity concepts are defensive in nature: *Don't discriminate on the basis of religion or age or sexual orientation or physical disability or political ideology.*

Some diversity requires action; other elements require reaction

## Part of diversity is really a pledge of nondiscrimination

Definitions of diversity in JMC diversity plans can be incredibly broad. Referring to student diversity, a West Coast school includes “interests and aspirations” of students. For faculty, diversity plans list “marital status” and “professional and philosophical approach.” Listing these in a diversity plan is really a pledge of nondiscrimination rather than an affirmation to seek a student or faculty balance based on such factors.

**Good idea... Recognize that some forms of diversity (race, ethnicity and gender) require effort and success by a program, whereas other forms of diversity involve the avoidance of discrimination.**

Ideally, a diversity plan reflects some passion and heart. Quite a few, though, read more like legal documents. They refer to minorities as “protected classes.” In fact, when asked for a copy of their diversity plans, a handful of programs sent their Affirmative Action Plans instead.

In contrast, other diversity plans designate merit as the only selection criterion. For example, one department states a “commitment to create an environment in which no individual is given or denied opportunity because of race, color, gender, creed, ethnicity, national origin, or disability.” By saying *given or denied*, the statement appears to reject the principles of affirmative action to redress past wrongs or to mirror current populations.

A diversity plan at an HBCU reads: “Recruit, hire, place, train and promote in all job classifications, faculty and staff, without regard to non-meritorious factors such as race, color, age, religion, sex, national origin, disability or veteran status.” Some HBCUs say that student diversity, for them, means attracting white, Hispanic and international students.

Is diversity a quantitative or qualitative concept, or some of both?

One school in the Southwest calls diversity a qualitative concept because it deals with ways people interact amid their differences. Another writes that diversity is “broader than any set of statistically measurable variables.” A bluntly written diversity plan declares that “diversity goes beyond the mere existence” of people and requires the embracing of personal and cultural differences.

# Diversity: No Excuses

By Arlene Notoro Morgan  
Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

When I headed the Pluralism Committee at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in the early 1990s, I faced a good deal of resistance about a hiring plan we were enacting that mandated a “diversity” goal as part of each department head’s Management by Objective (MBO) annual goals.

The mandate came from the late Jim Batten, Knight Ridder CEO who was leading a newspaper-wide diversity program as co-chair of the Newspaper Association of America’s diversity committee. Considering how quickly demographic changes were impacting his newspapers, Batten obviously felt it was time to make diversity a value for everyone from the newsroom clerk to the guy who drove the circulation trucks.

There was a lot of grumbling throughout the organization and certainly at *The Inquirer* about the “political correctness” aspects of Batten’s quest and even more hostility when then *Inquirer* Editor Maxwell King created a policy that required 50 percent of all future newsroom hires would be journalists of color and women. At the time, minorities made up a little more than 10 percent of the newsroom and women were about 30 percent. I was in charge of moving those numbers, especially minorities.

We created a five-year plan to meet a long list of pluralism plan goals, ranging from examining the diversity content of certain topics like fashion, food and obituaries to creating a specialty training program to bring young journalists of color into beats like science, sports, business, criticism and photography. Managers would be judged each year about how well they implemented the goals. Success meant a fatter MBO check at the end of the year. Regardless how a manager felt about the efforts to diversify, company policy made it very clear that this was a value that could not be ignored. King didn’t tell managers how to think, but he certainly felt empowered about telling them how to behave.

Within three years, *The Inquirer* newsroom’s minority numbers reached 18 percent of the staff. The female increases of just a few percentage points weren’t as dramatic but women rose in the ranks, taking on more high-level jobs such as foreign reporters and editorial page editor and columnists.

As we prepared for the first Unity convention in 1994, the *Akron Beacon Journal* won the public service Pulitzer Prize for its exhaustive series on how race impacted life in the city and Knight Ridder’s motto became “Diversity: No Excuses.”

I believe the Knight Ridder experience offers deans who are still stymied about how to reach the diversity accreditation goal a game plan for change.

First, a dean who wants change on the diversity front must create a Faculty Pluralism Planning Committee to come up with a three- to five-year proposal of goals that would serve as the guide on everything from faculty recruitment and community service to adding a diversity requirement to a faculty member’s annual evaluation and tenure process.

The second step would be to create a Pluralism Plan subcommittee on curriculum issues to examine how professors are integrating their syllabi. Questions to consider should include how often teachers assign a story that stipulates a diverse topic or sources? How much of a semester’s study is devoted to challenging students to seek diverse story ideas? What conversations are taking place to show that diversity goes beyond race and ethnicity to a full spectrum of attitudes, including class, gender, sexual orientation, age, political and religious differences?

Another subcommittee could be created as a search committee to seek the best possible candidates to fill open slots on the faculty and administration. In the current atmosphere of newsroom buyouts and layoffs, surely it should be easier to find a more diverse population to fill visiting professorships, instructors of professional practice, and adjunct teaching slots that are often the entry-level points for finding permanent faculty members.

I concede that this is tough work. The dean and department heads that embrace these ideas are going to get a lot of grumbling. That is the nature of change. But the time is long past for fulfilling promises about how to meet the diversity standard. We need leaders like Jim Batten who will fearlessly challenge the status quo that permeates so much of the curriculum and hiring policies that have been the obstacle to diversity.

Despite the sad demise of the Knight Ridder organization, the spirit of its “Diversity: No Excuses” motto lives through the many journalists of color --- and increasingly in some Knight Ridder-trained deans and faculty members -- who got their break because Jim Batten wasn’t afraid to hold his editors and publishers accountable. I can think of no better tribute to his memory than for the journalism academy to carry out his vision.