

WHITEPAPER

Mapping Your Strategy: Guideposts for an Inclusive Leadership Approach to Critical Issues in Higher Education

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Introduction

Institutions of higher education have a deep responsibility to uphold an institutional mission that allows all members of their community to thrive. The importance of navigating the higher education landscape through an inclusive lens has never been more critical. As leaders are faced with developing equitable strategies to address the campus environment, they must also address social issues that arise locally, nationally, and globally. We are no strangers to the media headlines and real life stories on campuses across the nation that are grappling with how to effectively address social issues impacting their communities.

The key question is: Are leaders adequately prepared to navigate these critical issues with an inclusive framework that will allow their campus to flourish, not flounder, when such matters arise?

The purpose of this document is to provide leaders with foundational information to help guide campuses through, what some may call “sensitive topics”, in an inclusive manner. It will provide a framework for addressing three areas of interest that have surfaced at institutions across the nation 1) Sexual and gender-based harassment and violence, 2) Freedom of expression and community values, and 3) Racist Acts and Symbols. In choosing these topics, we understand that there are many issues, and intersections of issues - immigration, religious discrimination, sexual orientation and gender identity, mental health, and gun violence - that we were unable to cover, but are no less significant or important. It is our intention that by providing a focus on the three areas identified, this guidance will help lay a foundation to equip leaders with strategies for generating a proactive and inclusive approach to a range of topics, thereby demonstrating their robust commitment to equity, inclusion, and diversity.

The background of the slide is a photograph showing the lower halves of several people standing. They are wearing various styles of trousers and shoes. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent red overlay. The text '1. Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Violence' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image. A thin white horizontal line extends from the end of the text to the right, ending in a small white circle.

1. Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment and Violence

We remain in the midst of the #MeToo and #Time'sUp movements, which have demanded our attention to the continued threat that sexual and gender-based harassment and other forms of interpersonal violence pose to equity and inclusion across multiple systems throughout our nation, workforce, and all levels of education. Institutions of higher education, in particular, feel the continued (or ever-present) call to lead in this area. The other challenge is that over the past two decades, the legal landscape in this area continues to shift under our feet.

Regardless of current or future legal requirements, the best strategy for leaders is to remain mindful at all times of an institution's core values and to view its unique culture through a lens that honors the foundational purpose of Title IX—in short, providing an answer to, “Why is Title IX important?” That is, to ensure that discrimination on the basis of sex or gender identity, which includes harassment and violence, does not interfere with the right of any community member—be they student, staff, or faculty—to equal access to the enjoyment of and participation in, all of an institution's programs, activities, and services. Moreover, equity based on sex and gender identity is a critical component of inclusive excellence, which is a concept used to convey the important reality that the excellence of an institution, like a college or university, ultimately is measured by how well it consistently engages and values the diverse backgrounds, talents, and perspectives of all of its faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders and leaders.

Some guidelines for leaders to navigate the often rocky Title IX terrain include:

- **Ensure that all senior leaders have completed required trainings related to Title IX or sexual and gender-based harassment and violence and have thoroughly reviewed and understand all of the policies and procedures that relate to this area.** Where there are multiple policies, make sure everyone understands how the policies intersect.
- It is important to not only be able to identify your institution's Title IX Coordinator, but to take it a step further. **Make sure you have had at least one meaningful, in-person, one-to-one conversation with that individual (outside of a required crisis moment) in order to obtain a deeper knowledge of your institution's policies and procedures related to ensuring an environment free from discrimination and harassment.** This is your opportunity to be curious and ask questions. Make sure you understand your potential role in any Title IX-related process. Recognize that these conversations are mutually beneficial to the Title IX Coordinator, who may use your questions or feedback to enhance Title IX processes, where possible. Establish a strong, ongoing partnership with your Title IX Coordinator.
- **Be proactive, not just reactive.** Engage a collective of stakeholders from across your institution (e.g., faculty, Title IX, Student Affairs, Student Health, Campus police, Athletics) to identify key times throughout the year, such as orientation, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, etc., that are most effective for public campaigns, activities, and programs to raise awareness of Title IX and issues related to sexual misconduct.

- **Do not forget your students.** Students are critical partners in determining when and how to message effectively to other students. Be innovative with content and think outside of the box. For instance, engage Arts & Humanities faculty and students to identify different art forms, such as theater, poetry, and painting, to convey powerful messages around inclusion that call people in rather than call them out. Create programs designed to cultivate allies and upstanders.
- **Actively encourage and participate in a meaningful assessment of your institution's climate for all community members.** These assessments should ensure opportunities for individuals to share their perceptions and experiences related to their sex, gender, or gender identity, from issues of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence to related issues of gender-based equity and discrimination, to learn whether and to what extent there are barriers to feeling welcomed and valued at your institution based on one's sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation. While an online climate assessment can be one effective tool, especially at larger schools, they should be augmented, whenever possible, with targeted focus groups, office hours, listening sessions, and other modes of communication that foster in-person dialogue. Follow-through and transparency is critical. In asking community members to take the time to share their personal perceptions and experiences, your leadership team should then deliver concrete visible actions informed by the information shared. This will ensure that all members of the campus community feel heard, even if every recommendation is not feasible to implement. Creating a climate assessment committee or team that represents a variety of stakeholders can be an effective way to ensure your assessment results drive change.
- **Finally, be a champion for change.** It is important above all else that, as an institutional leader, your words and actions authentically reflect a commitment to an educational and work environment free of sexual and gender-based harassment and other forms of interpersonal violence. Demonstrate that this commitment is more than just an obligatory act of legal compliance to avoid liability, but is mission-critical to your institution and reflects its values. People will be paying close attention to the example you set, especially in response to sex and gender-based incidents that occur not only at your institution, but in the local community, across the nation, and the world. How you respond (or fail to respond) has a lasting impact and a powerful message. The appropriate response requires consultation with not only your Title IX Coordinator, but also your communications team, as more fully discussed below.

A photograph of a crowd of people walking away from the camera, overlaid with a red gradient. The people are mostly seen from behind, and the image is slightly blurred. The red gradient is semi-transparent, allowing the underlying image to be visible.

2. Freedom of Expression and Community Values


Incendiary stories of campus free speech crises and mounting violence in response to unpopular speech have gripped the news and alarmed administrators, campus leaders, and external onlookers alike. These incidents have spanned topics ranging from offensive online speech and controversial speaker invitations to anonymous posters, racist iconography, and chalking of contentious political slogans or platforms.

As campuses and higher education leaders nationwide continue to confront these incidents—many becoming the subjects of unsavory news coverage and drops in alumni giving or enrollment—questions loom regarding how administrators can effectively straddle a dual imperative to not only create a welcoming and safe environment, but to also guarantee unstinting protections for the free speech and expressive rights of all. Campus leaders today face an urgent responsibility to articulate how principles of speech and inclusion serve as mutually-reinforcing values rather than as values in tension; neither can succeed without the presence and health of the other.

The following foundational principles can serve as guideposts for supporting a balance between speech and inclusion:

- **Campus leadership should become familiar with principles of free speech, academic freedom, and open expression—most importantly, understanding and appreciating why these principles are of central importance to their campus community.** Free speech, academic freedom, and open expression not only support other campus values but also serve as standalone tenets that make the pursuit of truth and knowledge possible.
- **Colleges and universities, public and private, must do what they can to ensure that their support for free speech and commitment to diversity are not at odds with one another but are, instead, made mutually-reinforcing.** This is especially the case for any public- or campus-facing messages responding to a speech-related controversy. When addressing such incidents, administrators should take care to ensure that their responses avoid any suggestion that protections for free speech exist at the expense of inclusion, nor that the two tenets exist on opposite ends of a continuum. Additionally, in moments of calm, campuses should make all efforts to proactively articulate their joint support of free expression and inclusive excellence, tying these dual commitments back to the mission of the institution. Such statements lose their meaning if they are only articulated in the wake of a major conflict or controversy.

- **Public campuses should never confuse a legal obligation to uphold freedom of expression and speech with a duty to remain silent in the face of hateful or racist expressions, especially when such expression undermines the dignity or security of any campus group or community member.** Leaders should speak out in any and all moments where the content of even protected speech may feel in conflict with deeper values of diversity and inclusion, making the case for why the speech's content is incompatible with campus values while also strenuously defending the right of all speakers to legally protected expression. A failure to do so risks reinforcing a misperception that the First Amendment exists as a means to fan hate or sow division, rather than as a powerful tool to combat hate and bigotry.
- **Though campuses, especially public ones, should avoid punitive responses to legally protected expression, administrators can and should work to address the potential impact that legally protected speech may have on listeners or targeted groups.** Offering support and easily accessible resources to those affected by a major speech- or race-related incident will help foster a culture of accountability, ensuring that targeted community members feel supported as well as empowered to exercise their individual speech rights to the fullest of their ability.
- **Finally, leaders should encourage their campus community to think creatively about ways to confront offensive and hateful expression, ideally through a mix of speech, programming efforts, and campus-wide organizing and activism.** Programs and events that emphasize the efficacy of counterspeech as well as the sanitizing power of light can contribute to a long-term environment where campus members feel equipped to harness their own speech and expression as a way of confronting racism and bigotry.



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The background of the slide features a close-up photograph of several hands of different skin tones interlaced and supporting each other. A semi-transparent red filter is applied over the entire image. The text '3. Racist Acts and Symbols' is positioned on the left side in a white, bold, sans-serif font. A thin white horizontal line extends from the end of the text to the right, ending in a small white circle.

3. Racist Acts and Symbols

In this period of rising tensions, leaders should assume that racist acts are going to occur at their institution, and that racist symbols are present and enduring. In other words, it's no longer a question of if this will happen at your institution, but rather, when it will happen. The approach taken by leadership in relation to such events will determine the extent to which students, faculty, and staff feel respected on campus, and the extent to which they engage with the campus and advocate for the institution within their networks. For prospective students, awareness of racist acts and the presence of racist symbols detract high-performing students from applying and enrolling.

When applying an inclusive lens to racist acts and symbols that are both circumstantial and enduring, leaders must integrate symbolic and practical leadership to maintain awareness of campus climate and take proactive actions whenever possible to mitigate both the possibility of students' experiencing such acts while also ensuring that responses are culturally appropriate and inclusive. Values both stated and unstated are reflected in more ways than in statements and policies; they are reflected in the symbols and legacies of the institution as well.

- **Know your institution's values around diversity and inclusion, how those values have been articulated, and how those values are realized in daily interactions.** People are watching whether leaders are tying their diversity and inclusion principles to concrete and impactful actions, so symbolic leadership is insufficient. Addressing discrimination requires vigilance and constant action beyond messaging. Consider the ways that administrators and faculty are trained to recognize and address racist acts in their workplaces, laboratories and classrooms: does your institution make such training mandatory, and does your institution share data with departments about progress and outcomes in addressing hate and bias? Racial incidents impact an entire campus and a comprehensive approach to policy development, training and professional development, and climate assessment will go a long way in assuring that stakeholders know that the institution has a plan in place to mitigate such acts.

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- **Know your institution's climate history. Inclusive leadership demands data.** Review your institution's trend data on hate and bias: what kinds of incidents have occurred at the institution, and what have been the responses? Has the climate improved, declined, or remained the same? What plan is in place to improve campus climate? What are its outcomes, and how does the institution know if there is success? Consider assessing your campus climate action plan annually, and maintaining a standing hate/bias response team that addresses all incidents and that is responsible for consistent, proactive training that addresses all forms of hate and bias at your institution.
- **Know the origin stories for your buildings, statues, and other symbols.** Buildings and statues that celebrate those whose actions are considered racist, offensive, and degrading to members of the campus community may also serve as a symbolic devaluation of the institution's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. These buildings and statues are present on campuses across the United States. If your institution does not maintain a building name and statue review committee, consider forming one comprised of faculty, students and staff responsible for implementing a building name review process consistent with the institution's policies and principles for equity and inclusion.

4. Messaging to Your Community: The Power of Communication



Leaders must strive to develop proactive measures for addressing campus concerns through an inclusive lens. This ensures consistency in messaging for various social groups and a sensitivity to these issues and their impact on the campus, especially on those from historically marginalized communities. It is important to acknowledge that poorly-handled instances of sexual and gender-based harassment and violence, speech rights, and racist acts and symbols stand to undermine the civil rights and civil liberties of all—especially those of historically marginalized communities—by limiting their freedom to learn, contribute, and participate fully in their campus community.

Leaders who ignore this basic fact will ultimately fail in their ability to effect change and communicate their commitment to inclusive excellence. The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges' states, "At the center of these tensions are leaders who bear ultimate accountability and responsibility for risk management, institutional reputation, and the creation of an open and safe campus environment, and who are just as often taken to task for their failure to act as they are for the actions they take."¹

If an institution's tactical and communication approach is focused solely, or even primarily, on response and recovery, a critical part of the process is missed. Institutional leaders must build a culture of preparedness within the campus community: a culture that encourages and supports individuals who choose to identify and communicate issues and situations that could potentially cause a crisis event. Leaders must establish an effective campus infrastructure to respond to these critical matters in order to prevent being in constant reactionary mode when such situations arise. Some key considerations include:

- Developing an effective communication strategy to respond to incidents that impact the campus community - campus climate communication team
- Developing campus protocols for media contacts/calls
- Ensuring that your campus has strong policies, procedures and practices

A campus climate communication team can serve as a tool to help leaders coordinate a "real time" response involving the relevant stakeholders to help advise and guide leaders. This team should have a lead convener, generally the head of marketing and communications, who will serve in collaboration with the chief diversity officer and approximately four to six other key individuals. In order to be effective, this team should convene within a 24-to-48 hour window once the members receive notice. The team should gather facts, evaluate and analyze the incident, and coordinate a timely and appropriate response with built-in flexibility that can be applied based on the nuances of the circumstances. This team then makes the decision whether to send a message, who the message should come from (the content, timing, and tone), and ensures consistency in campus responses to each of the various social issues.

¹ AGB Board of Directors' Statement on Campus Climate, Inclusion, and Civility, 2016.

Conclusion

College administrators are increasingly recognizing the need to adopt a broad and thoughtful approach to increasing diversity, ensuring equity, and creating an inclusive campus environment in which all students can thrive and succeed. Ensuring such an environment requires an honest assessment of the extent to which diversity is valued and viewed as integral to the mission and success of an institution. It requires intentionally integrating diversity and inclusion efforts into all aspects of the campus community and doing so in a way that acknowledges and respects the ever-changing social, cultural, and legal landscape.

Guided by the insights provided in this document, campus leaders can begin to adopt, or continue to build upon, a commitment to inclusive excellence: recognizing that an institution's success is dependent on how well it integrates diversity-related efforts at all levels of the institution, from day-to-day operations to leadership priorities and institutional culture.

About the Authors

This document represents the collaborative work of four members of EVERFI's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Board. The insights provided are informed by their years of collective experience serving in leadership roles in both the public and private sectors, and includes spearheading efforts to implement a vision for inclusive excellence at one of the largest university systems in the country, co-authoring work on campus free speech and free expression, and overseeing nondiscrimination and equal opportunity policies for students, faculty, and staff at some of America's most prestigious campuses, and through work with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

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Yvette Gullatt has more than twenty years of experience in diversity and institutional equity leadership. She currently serves as Vice Provost for Diversity and Engagement and Interim Vice President for Student Affairs for the University of California system. In these roles she provides strategic leadership and advice for translating UC's vision of inclusive excellence into sustainable policies, practices, and programs. Yvette has PhD, MA, and BA degrees from the University of California, Berkeley.

Adeline Lee

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Adeline Lee served as the inaugural Program Coordinator of PEN America's Campus Free Speech Initiative, partnering with senior campus leaders across the country to navigate flashpoint free speech controversies as well as promote dialogue on the First Amendment, diversity and inclusion, and hateful expression. She is a graduate of Wellesley College, former Coro Fellow, and co-author of "Chasm in the Classroom" analyzing over 100 campus speech infringements and debates from 2016-2019 following the presidential election and increased national prominence of hate groups.

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Sheree M. Ohen (Marlowe) has extensive experience as a skilled strategist and executive advancing equity, inclusion, and diversity in higher education. In her current role as Chief Officer of Diversity and Inclusion at Clark University, Ohen is responsible for the advancement and implementation of a strategic vision and initiatives that demonstrate the University's commitment to maintaining a welcoming, inclusive environment for all students, faculty, staff and visitors. As a licensed attorney specializing in criminal law, civil rights litigation, and employment law, Ohen has utilized her legal experience to advance inclusive excellence in the higher education setting. She earned a BA in English from the University of California, Berkeley, and a JD from Golden Gate University School of Law, and is actively involved in the community, serving on boards and elected positions of several local, regional, and national organizations.

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In her current role at the University of Virginia, Catherine Criswell Spear oversees the University's prevention, education, and response efforts in support of the University's nondiscrimination and equal opportunity policies for students, faculty, and staff in the Academic Division, the Medical Center, and the College at Wise. Prior to the University of Virginia, Ms. Spear was the Title IX Coordinator at Stanford University. She also worked in the Cleveland office of the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) for 19 years, both as the office's Chief Attorney and then as its Director, responsible for enforcing federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, national origin, age, disability, and sex.

About EVERFI



ABOUT EVERFI

As an organization, EVERFI is committed to addressing the world's most intractable problems through technology and education. We expanded from our initial focus in 2008 of helping historically-underserved students gain access to financial literacy education. Today, EVERFI delivers prevention education, data analytics, and research for 1,500 colleges and universities. Serving more than five million learners annually, EVERFI helps higher education partners create safer, healthier, and more inclusive campus communities. Through online prevention education and compliance training, policy and program guidance, professional development, data insights, and performance benchmarking, EVERFI drives lasting, large-scale change on the critical issues of health and well-being facing students, faculty, and staff.

OUR EXPERTISE

Our Impact and Education team has over 80 years of higher education experience with expertise in

public health, sexual violence and substance abuse prevention, wellness and mental health, and diversity and inclusion. In addition to subject matter expertise, our team includes members who are academically and professionally trained in research, data analytics, compliance and legal affairs, and curriculum design. We are committed to helping student affairs administrators educate and understand their student population, and direct resources to achieve breakthrough impact and best-in-class outcomes.

OUR COURSES

We combine academic and industry research, insights from leading experts and practitioners, best-practices in online learning pedagogy, and feedback from our partners to develop courses that educate and empower. We prepare learners to make informed, thoughtful decisions about their own behavior and to support their friends and peers. Nine independent studies, published in leading professional journals, demonstrate the efficacy of EVERFI's alcohol misuse and sexual assault prevention programs.