

## Quick Guide

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION DEFINITIONS

**DIVERSITY** at the University of San Diego results from the intentional gathering of varying perspectives that foster institutional excellence and genuine community relationships. Valuing diversity means recognizing and honoring the strengths each person brings to our community as we collectively confront humanity’s urgent challenges. In teaching and learning, diversity refers to difference — understood as an historically and socially constructed set of value assumptions about what/who matters — which figures essentially in power dynamics from the local to the global. Some differences have been made to matter more than others.

**INCLUSION** describes the institutional processes that incorporate and promote diversity. Inclusion refers to how institutional practices, policies and habits transform to include diverse people and perspectives, especially those from underrepresented and underserved groups. The ongoing and adaptive practice of inclusion impacts campus culture and climate.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE** operates centrally in Catholic social teaching. Social justice entails identifying and contesting processes in which power and privilege utilize diversity for inequitable outcomes along intersecting lines — race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability and more — that inhibit democratic empowerment, civil and human rights.

**INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE** is synonymous with institutional excellence, since high-quality education relies on engagement and inclusion with diverse perspectives. Inclusive excellence means commitment to diversity and equity in all of their forms, including a diversity of ideas, of people and the opportunity to learn from and with diverse peers.

**EQUITY** is the process of modifying practices that have intentionally or unintentionally disadvantaged a particular group. The outcome of equity is that all people have an equal opportunity to succeed in reaching equality in outcomes.

### **Ableism**

Beliefs or practices that rest on the assumption that being able-bodied is “normal” while other states of being are in need of being “fixed” or altered. This can result in devaluing or discriminating against people with physical, intellectual or psychiatric disabilities. Institutionalized ableism may include or take the form of unintentional or intentional organizational barriers that result in disparate treatment of people with disabilities (PwDs).

### **Accessibility**

The “ability to access” the functionality of a system or entity, and gain the related benefits. The degree to which a product, service, or environment is accessible by as many people as possible. Accessible design ensures both direct (unassisted) access and indirect access through assistive technology (e.g., computer screen readers). Universal design ensures that an environment can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people.

### **Accommodation**

A change in the environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with a disability to have equal opportunity, access and participation.

### **Ally**

An action, not an identity. Members of the advantaged group recognize their privilege and work in solidarity with oppressed groups to dismantle the systems of oppression(s) from which they derive power, privilege and acceptance. Requires understanding that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. Being an ally means taking intentional, overt and consistent responsibility for the changes we know are needed in our society, rather than ignoring them or leaving them for others to deal with. Being a true ally requires action in a way that facilitates the empowerment of persons targeted by oppression. This framework can be used to imply that one does not feel directly implicated by the oppression.

## **Bias**

Prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person or group compared with another, usually in an unfair or negative way. Unconscious bias, also known as implicit bias, is defined as “attitudes and stereotypes that influence judgment, decision-making and behavior in ways that are outside of conscious awareness and/or control.”

## **Black and/or Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC)**

While “POC” or “People of color” are often used as well, BIPOC explicitly leads with Black and Indigenous identities, which helps to counter anti-Black racism and shine a light on Native communities.

## **Black Lives Matter (BLM)**

Black Lives Matter is a human rights movement, originating in the African-American community, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism toward Black people. The movement began with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of African-American teen Trayvon Martin in February 2012.

## **Cultural Appropriation**

Originally coined to describe the effects of colonialism, cultural appropriation generally entails adopting aspects of a minority culture by someone outside the culture, without sufficient understanding of its context or respect for the meaning and value of the original. Cultural appropriation that is done in a way that promotes disrespectful cultural or racial stereotypes is considered particularly harmful.

## **Cisgender**

A term for people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. The word cisgender can also be shortened to “cis.”

## **Disability**

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of an individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment (from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

## **Diversity**

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term “diversity” is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values.

## **Decolonization**

The active and intentional process of unlearning values, beliefs and conceptions that have caused physical, emotional or mental harm to people through colonization. It requires a recognition of systems of oppression.

## **Diversity v. Inclusion v. Belonging**

Diversity typically means proportionate representation across all dimensions of human difference. Inclusion means that everyone is included, visible, heard and considered. Belonging means that everyone is treated and feels like a full member of the larger community, so they can thrive.

## **Employee Resource Group (ERG)**

Employee Resource Group (ERG) is typically, an employer-sponsored or -recognized affinity group of those who share the interests and concerns common to those of a particular race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation. For example, ERGs at a university would be intended to build community, strengthen networks and supportive relationships, as well as to improve the mobility and retention of diverse people.

## **Equity**

Fair treatment for all while striving to identify and eliminate inequities and barriers.

### **Gaslighting**

First popularized in the 1944 movie, *Gaslight*, the term means a deliberate attempt to undermine a victim's sense of reality or sanity. In a work context, it usually means behaviors that undermine the success, self-confidence, self-esteem or wellbeing of the target. For people in underrepresented or less powerful groups, it is more likely to occur, with more severe and harmful cumulative effects. Tactics can include withholding (critical information, meeting invitations, silent treatment), isolation (exclusion, causing conflict with coworkers) and discrediting (consistently shooting down the target's ideas, ignoring or taking credit for them).

### **Gender Nonconforming or Gender Non-binary**

A way of identifying and/or expressing oneself outside the binary gender categories of male/masculine and female/feminine.

### **Heteronormativity**

The societal assumption and norm that all people are heterosexual. The basic civil rights and social privileges that a heterosexual person automatically receives that are systematically denied to gay, lesbian or bisexual persons, simply because of their sexual orientation.

### **Institutional Racism**

Refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. This applies even if the institutional policies may never mention any racial group. If the effect is to create advantages for those who are white and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color, the term is applicable.

### **Intersectionality**

An approach largely advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another, but rather, they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive. Exposing [one's] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white woman, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life.

### **Latinx**

Used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina to describe a person of Latin American origin or descent.

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ)**

LGBTQ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

### **Marginalization**

A social process by which individuals or groups are (intentionally or unintentionally) distanced from access to power and resources and constructed as insignificant, peripheral or less valuable/privileged to a community or "mainstream" society. This term describes a social process, so as not to imply a lack of agency. Marginalized groups or people are those excluded from mainstream social, economic, cultural or political life. Examples of marginalized groups include, but are by no means limited to, groups excluded due to race, religion, political or cultural group, age, gender or financial status. To what extent such populations are marginalized, however, is context specific and reliant on the cultural organization of the social site in question.

### **Microaggression**

A comment or action that unconsciously or unintentionally expresses or reveals a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group, such as a racial minority. These small, common occurrences include insults, slights, stereotyping, undermining, devaluing, delegitimizing, overlooking or excluding someone. Over time, microaggressions can isolate and alienate those on the receiving end, and adversely affect their health and well-being.

### **Microaffirmation**

A microaffirmation is a small gesture of inclusion, caring or kindness. Examples include listening, providing comfort and support, being an ally and explicitly valuing the contributions and presence of all. It is particularly helpful for those with greater power or seniority to "model" affirming behavior.

### **Neurodiversity**

When neurological differences are recognized and respected as are any other kind of human differences or variations. These differences can include Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum and Tourette Syndrome.

## Privilege

An unearned, sustained advantage that comes from race, gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, age and other differences. For example, readers are invited to “unpack” white and male privilege in [these papers](#) by Wellesley College’s Peggy McIntosh.

## Pronouns

Words to refer to a person after initially using their name. Gendered pronouns include she and he, her and him, hers and his, and herself and himself. “Preferred gender pronouns” (or PGPs) are the pronouns that people ask others to use in reference to themselves. They may be plural genderneutral pronouns such as they, them, their(s). Or they may be ze (rather than she or he) or hir (rather than her(s) and him/his). Some people state their pronoun preferences as a form of allyship.

## Queer

An umbrella term used by people who wish to describe themselves as neither heterosexual nor cisgender.

## Racism

A belief that racial differences produce or are associated with inherent superiority or inferiority. Racially-based prejudice, discrimination, hostility or hatred. Institutionalized racism, also known as systemic racism, refers to forms of racism that are engrained in society or organizations. It is when entire racial groups are discriminated against, or consistently disadvantaged, by larger social systems, practices, choices or policies.

## Systems of Oppression

A term that helps us better identify inequity by calling attention to the historical and organized patterns of mistreatment. In the United States, systems of oppression (such as systemic racism) are woven into the very foundation of American culture, society and laws. Other examples of systems of oppression are sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism and anti-Semitism. Society’s institutions, such as government, education and culture, all contribute or reinforce the oppression of marginalized social groups while elevating dominant social groups.

## Transgender

An umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity is something other than their Sex Assigned at Birth (SAAB). The SAAB is a person’s first association with gender, typically based on physical sex characteristics.

## Under-Represented Minority/ties (URM)

Some institutions have defined sub-groups within larger racial/ethnic minority groups that are particularly underrepresented relative to their size. For example, in a given field, Mexican Americans may be an underrepresented minority, even if Hispanic people are otherwise proportionately represented.

## Universal Design

The process of creating products that are usable by people with the widest possible range of abilities, operating within the widest possible range of situations; whereas accessibility primarily refers to design for people with disabilities.

## White Fragility

Coined by the author Robin DiAngelo, the term is used to describe the privilege that accrues to white people living in a society that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. DiAngelo argues that this builds an expectation of always feeling comfortable and safe, which in turn lowers the ability to tolerate racial stress and triggers a range of defensive reactions.

## White Supremacy

The idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs and actions of white people are superior to people of color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. While most people associate white supremacy with extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis, white supremacy is ever-present in institutional and cultural assumptions that assign value, morality, goodness and humanity to the white group, while casting people and communities of color as worthless (worth less), immoral, bad, inhuman and “undeserving.” Drawing from critical race theory, the term “white supremacy” also refers to a political or socio-economic system where white people enjoy structural advantage and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not, both at a collective and at an individual level.