



Nicholls State University

Terms and Definitions

Diversity: At its core diversity is about representation. We recognize that diversity is a fluid concept in that self-identity is a crucial factor in addition to pre-defined groups and attributes in determining representation

Inclusion: The term inclusion is used to describe the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity -- in people, in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (e.g. intellectual, social, cultural, geographic) with which individuals might connect.

“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.” ~ Verna Myers, Diversity Advocate

Underrepresented: Populations that are disproportionately represented in higher education, specifically at Nicholls State for the purposes of this document. Trend data should be considered this might apply for fluidly to some populations.

Glossary of relevant terms:

Ableism- discrimination against persons with mental and/or physical disabilities; social structures that favor able-bodied individuals.

Acculturation- the process of learning and incorporating the language, values, beliefs, and behaviors that makes up a distinct culture. This concept is not to be confused with assimilation, where an individual or group may give up certain aspects of its culture in order to adapt to that of the prevailing culture.

Affirmative Action- proactive policies and procedures for remedying the effect of past discrimination and ensuring the implementation of equal employment and educational opportunities, for recruiting, hiring, training and promoting women, minorities, people with disabilities and veterans in compliance with the federal requirements enforced by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP).

Ageism- discrimination against individuals because of their age, often based on stereotypes.

Ally- a person who takes action against oppression out of a belief that eliminating oppression will benefit members of targeted groups and advantage groups. Allies acknowledge disadvantage and oppression of other groups than their own, take supportive action on their behalf, commit to reducing their own complicity or collusion in oppression of these groups, and invest in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression.



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Anti-Oppression - Recognizing and deconstructing the systemic, institutional and personal forms of disempowerment used by certain groups over others; actively challenging the different forms of oppression.

Bias - a positive or negative inclination towards a person, group, or community; can lead to stereotyping.

Bigotry - intolerant prejudice which glorifies one's own group and denigrates members of other groups.

Bisexuality - romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.

Bullying - intimidating, exclusionary, threatening or hostile behavior against an individual.

Chicano/a - a term adopted by some Mexican Americans to demonstrate pride in their heritage, born out of the national Chicano Movement that was politically aligned with the Civil Rights movement to end racial oppression and social inequalities of Mexican Americans. Chicano pertains to the particular experience of Mexican-descended individuals living in the US, but not all Mexican Americans identify as Chicano.

Cisgender - a gender identity where an individual's self-perception of their gender aligns with their perceived sex.

Classism - biased attitudes and beliefs that result in, and help to justify, unfair treatment of individuals or groups because of their socioeconomic grouping. Classism can also be expressed as public policies and institutional practices that prevent people from breaking out of poverty rather than ensuring equal economic, social, and educational opportunity.

Collusion - when people act to perpetuate oppression or prevent others from working to eliminate oppression. Example: able-bodied people who object to strategies for making buildings accessible because of the expense.

Colonialism - control by individuals or groups over the territory/behavior of other individuals or groups. (Horvath) Imperialism refers to the political or economic control, either formally or informally, and creating an empire.

Colorblind - term used to describe personal, group, and institutional policies or practices that do not consider race or ethnicity as a determining factor. The term "colorblind" de-emphasizes or ignores race and ethnicity as a large part of one's identity.

Cultural Assimilation - an individual, family, or group gives up certain aspects of its culture in order to adapt to the dominant culture.



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Cultural Competence - 1) Knowledge, awareness and interpersonal skills that allow individuals to increase their understanding, sensitivity, appreciation, and responsiveness to cultural differences and the interactions resulting from them. The particulars of acquiring cultural competency vary among different groups, and they involve ongoing relational process tending to inclusion and trust-building. 2) A process of learning that leads to the ability to effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities posed by the presence of social cultural diversity in a defined social system.

Cultural Pluralism - recognition of the contribution of each group to a common civilization. It encourages the maintenance and development of different life styles, languages and convictions. It strives to create the conditions of harmony and respect within a culturally diverse society.

Culture - a social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

Denial - the refusal to acknowledge the societal privileges that are granted or denied based on an individual's identity components. Those who are in a stage of denial tend to believe, "People are people. We are all alike regardless of the color of our skin." In this way, the existence of a hierarchical system of privileges based on ethnicity or race are ignored.

Disability - physical or mental impairment, the perception of a physical or mental impairment, or a history of having had a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Discrimination - unfavorable or unfair treatment towards an individual or group based on their race, ethnicity, color, national origin or ancestry, religion, socioeconomic status, education, sex, marital status, parental status, veteran's status, political affiliation, language, age, gender, physical or mental abilities, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Diversity - psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles. A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist.

Empowerment - when target group members refuse to accept the dominant ideology and take actions to redistribute social power more equitably.

Environmental Equity - measures the amelioration of the myriad inequities and disproportionate impacts that groups in society have faced, especially in the realm of environmental protection and access to nature and the environmental goods that aren't equally shared.



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Equal Employment Opportunity - (EEO) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibit discrimination in any aspect of employment based on an individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Equality - evenly distributed access to resources and opportunity necessary for a safe and healthy life; uniform distribution of access to ensure fairness.

Equity - the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.

ESL - (E)nglish as a (S)econd (L)anguage. A term used to describe language learning programs in the United States for individuals for whom English is not their first or native language.

Essentialism - the practice of categorizing an entire group based on assumptions about what constitutes the "essence" of that group. Essentialism prevents individuals from remaining open to individual differences within groups.

Ethnicity - a social construct which divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

Ethnocentrism - the practice of using a particular ethnic group as a frame of reference, basis of judgment, or standard criteria from which to view the world. Ethnocentrism favors one ethnic group's cultural norms and excludes the realities and experiences of other ethnic groups.

Eurocentrism - the practice of using Europe and European culture as a frame of reference or standard criteria from which to view the world. Eurocentrism favors European cultural norms and excludes the realities and experiences of other cultural groups.

Feminism - theory and practice that advocates for educational and occupational equity between men and women; undermines traditional cultural practices that support the subjugation of women by men and the devaluation of women's contributions to society.

Gay - people of the same sex who are attracted sexually and emotionally to each other. More commonly utilized to describe male attraction to other males.

Gender - the socially constructed ideas about behavior, actions, and roles a particular sex performs.

Gender Identity - a personal conception of one's own gender; often in relation to a gender opposition between masculinity and femininity. Gender expression is how people externally communicate or perform their gender identity to others.



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Global Environmental Racism - race is a potent factor in sorting people into their physical environment and explaining social inequality, political exploitation, social isolation, and quality of life. Racism influences land use, industrial facility siting, housing patterns, infrastructure development, and “who gets what, when, where, and how much.” Environmental racism refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color.

Handicap - (see Disability)

Harassment - unwelcome, intimidating, exclusionary, threatening or hostile behavior against an individual that is based on a category protected by law.

Hazing - verbal and physical testing, often of newcomers into a society or group, that may range from practical joking to tests of physical and mental endurance.

Heterosexism - social structures and practices which serve to elevate and enforce heterosexuality while subordinating or suppressing other forms of sexuality.

Hispanic - the U.S. Census Bureau defines Hispanic as people who classified themselves as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories, which also included the subgroups Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican or Cuban.

Homophobia - a fear of individuals who are not heterosexual. Often results in hostile, offensive, or discriminatory action against a person because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer identified, or because they are perceived to be. These actions may be verbal or physical and can include insulting or degrading comments; taunts or ‘jokes’; and excluding or refusing to cooperate with others because of their sexuality.

Human Rights - the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, often held to include the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression, and equality before the law.

Identity Group - a particular group, culture, or community with which an individual identifies or shares a sense of belonging. Individual agency is crucial for identity development; no person should be pressured to identify with any existing group, but instead the freedom to self-identify on their own terms.

Inclusive Language - words or phrases that include all potential audiences from any identity group. Inclusive language does not assume or connote the absence of any group. An example of gender inclusive language is using “police officers” instead of “policemen”.

Inclusion - the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.



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Indigenous - originating from a culture with ancient ties to the land in which a group resides.

Individual Racism - the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism; can occur at both a conscious and unconscious level, and can be active or passive. Examples include telling a racist joke, using a racial epithet, or believing in the inherent superiority of Whites.

Institutional Racism - refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for Whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as People of Color. An example includes City sanitation department policies that concentrate trash transfer stations and other environmental hazards disproportionately in communities of color.

Intent vs. Impact - this distinction is an integral part of inclusive environments; intent is what a person meant to do and impact is the effect it had on someone else. Regardless of intent, it is imperative to recognize how behaviors, language, actions, etc. affect or influence other people. An examination of what was said or done and how it was received is the focus, not necessarily what was intended.

Internalized Racism - occurs in a racist system when a racial group oppressed by racism supports the supremacy and dominance of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power.

Intersectionality - the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another.

“-isms” - a way of describing any attitude, action or institutional structure that subordinates (oppresses) a person or group because of their target group: race (racism), gender (sexism), economic status (classism), age (ageism), religion, sexual orientation, language, etc.

Latino/a - individual living in the United States originating from, or having a heritage relating to Latin America.

Lesbian - a woman whose primary sexual attraction is to other women.

LGBTQ (QIA) - acronym for “Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (Questioning Intersex Allies).” The description of the movement expanded from gay and lesbian to LGBTQ and some include questioning, intersex, allies, same-gender-loving, asexual, pansexual, and polyamorous.

Marginalization - the placement of minority groups and cultures outside mainstream society. All that varies from the norm of the dominant culture is devalued and at times perceived as deviant and regressive.



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Microaggression - the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

Multicultural - of or pertaining to more than one culture.

Multiculturalism - the practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, attitudes, and opinions within an environment. The theory and practice promotes peaceful coexistence of all identities and people.

Neo-Colonization - term for contemporary policies adopted by international and western “1st world” nations and organizations that exert regulation, power and control over “3rd world” nations disguised as humanitarian help or aid. These policies are distinct but related to the “original” period of colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas by European nations.

Norm - an ideal standard binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate power and acceptable behavior.

Oppression - the systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privilege groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups.

Pan-Africanism - describes the theory relating to the desire to educate all peoples of the African diaspora of their common plight and the connections between them. Some theorists promote linking all African countries across the continent through a common government, language, ideology, or belief.

Pansexuality - a term reflective of those who feel they are sexually, emotionally, and spiritually capable of falling in love with all genders.

People/Person of Color - is not a term that refers to real biological or scientific distinction between people, but the common experience of being targeted and oppressed by racism. While each oppressed group is affected by racism differently and each group maintains its own unique identity and culture, there is also the recognition that racism has the potential to unite oppressed people in a collective of resistance. For this reason, many individuals who identify as members of racially oppressed groups also claim the political identity of being People of Color. This in no way diminishes their specific cultural or racial identity; rather it is an affirmation of the multiple layers of identity of every individual. This term also refrains from the subordinate connotation of triggering labels like “non-White” and “minority.”

Polyamory - the practice or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the consent of all involved.



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Prejudice - a pre-judgment or unjustifiable, and usually negative, attitude of one type of individual or groups toward another group and its members. Such negative attitudes are typically based on unsupported generalizations (or stereotypes) that deny the right of individual members of certain groups to be recognized and treated as individuals with individual characteristics.

Privilege - power and advantages benefiting a group derived from the historical oppression and exploitation of other groups.

Queer - term used to refer to people or culture of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community. A term once perceived as derogatory is now embraced by some members of the LGBTQ community.

Race - a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the political needs of a society at a given period of time.

Racial and Ethnic Identity - an individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and the ethnic categories that an individual chooses to describe him or herself based on such factors as biological heritage, physical appearance, cultural affiliation, early socialization, and personal experience.

Racial Equity - the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer influenced how one fares. Racial equity is one part of racial justice and must be addressed at the root causes and not just the manifestations. This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

Racism - individual and institutional practices and policies based on the belief that a particular race is superior to others. This often results in depriving certain individuals and groups of civil liberties, rights, and other resources, hindering opportunities for social, educational, and political advancement.

Racism (endorsed by Dismantling Racism Training) - A system of advantage based on race. A system of oppression based on race. A way of organizing society based on dominance and subordination based on race. Penetrates every aspect of personal, cultural, and institutional life. Includes prejudice against people of color, as well as exclusion, discrimination against, suspicion

of, and fear and hate of people of color. Racism = Prejudice + the POWER to implement that prejudice.

Reverse Discrimination - unfair treatment of members of a dominant or majority group. (Society of Human Resources Management); according to the National Multicultural Institute,



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this term is often used by opponents of affirmative action who believe that these policies are causing members of traditionally dominant groups to be discriminated against. The Supreme Court considers it to be illegal to consider race and other demographic categories in hiring and other employment related decisions.

Safe Space - a space in which an individual or group may remain free of blame, ridicule and persecution, and are in no danger of coming to mental or physical harm.

Sex - system of classification based on biological and physical differences, such as primary and secondary sexual characteristics. Differentiated from gender, which is based on the social construction and expectations of the categories “men” and “women.”

Sexual Orientation - the direction of one’s sexual attraction toward the same gender, opposite gender, or other genders. It is on a continuum and not necessarily a set of absolute categories.

Social Justice - a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole

Social Power - access to resources that enhance chances of getting what one needs or influencing others in order to lead a safe, productive, and fulfilling life.

Stereotype - a positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a certain group.

Tolerance - acceptance and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes, and cultures; does not necessarily mean agreement with the differences.

Transgender - an individual whose gender identity differs from the societal expectations of their physical sex. Transgender or “trans” does not imply any form of sexual orientation. Cisgender is a gender identity where an individual’s self-perception of their gender matches their sex. For example, a cisgendered female is a female with a female identity.

White Privilege - refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are White. White people who experience such privilege may or may not be conscious of it.

Taken from the Sierra Club: Diversity,, Equity, & Inclusion Resources. This glossary should be utilized as a guide to gain and maintain a more meaningful understanding of the Diversity and Inclusion efforts on campus. It will be updated as we recognize that many of these terms are fluid and responsive to the most current cultural conceptualization of such terms.