

## DEFINING DIVERSITY

Excerpts from HLC Handbook for Accreditation (2009)

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### Criterion One: Core Component 1b

*In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.*

The Commission pledged that the new accrediting standards would engage organizations in conversations fundamental to their future. What is known for certain about the future of higher education in the United States is that it will have to be responsive to increasing numbers of students of diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and that it will have to prepare its students to live productively in a national and global society marked by extraordinary diversity. Because attention to diversity is fundamental to quality higher learning in the twenty-first century, the Commission expects every organization to address diversity in its mission documents. The premises undergirding this position are found in the Commission's **Statement on Diversity**.

Diversity is a complex concept. For some organizations, ethnic and racial representation on campus, in educational programs, or in faculty and administration might be very important, particularly if their mission is to serve communities marked by ethnic and cultural diversity. For many organizations serving educational needs of rural or homogeneous communities, recognition and understanding of the impact of diversity may be more important than representation. For other organizations, particularly those that are faith-based, diversity might mistakenly be understood to mean acceptance and tolerance. The Commission acknowledges the importance of distinct cultural contexts and, therefore, recognizes the importance that organizations attach to being able to define themselves in ways that are unique to their existence and respective missions. With its expectation that even these organizations acknowledge the importance of diversity, the Commission asks that all organizations be transparently clear in their statements of expectations of college constituencies, fair in their enforcement of those expectations, and protective of the dignity of individuals whose behavior or beliefs may not always fit those expectations.

### Examples of Evidence

As it defines and interprets evidence related to this Core Component, an organization may wish to consider the following Examples of Evidence.

- In its mission documents, the organization addresses diversity within the community values and common purposes it considers fundamental to its mission.
- The mission documents present the organization's function in a multicultural society.
- The mission documents affirm the organization's commitment to honor the dignity and worth of individuals.
- The organization's required codes of belief or expected behavior are congruent with its mission.
- The mission documents provide a basis for the organization's basic strategies to address diversity.

The tremendous diversity in organizations providing higher education degrees is a given in the United States. As we move farther into the twenty-first century, the structures of those organizations will become increasingly complex and increasingly flexible; increasingly reliant on partnerships, consortia, and collaborations to provide quality higher learning in an age transformed by technology; increasingly driven to respond to unanticipated and different opportunities to provide education to new and changing populations of students; and increasingly required to provide education relevant to a global society.

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*Examples of Evidence*

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## **DEFINING DIVERSITY**

Excerpts from Now is the Time, APLU/AASCU, 2005

*Diversity can be broadly defined to include all aspects of human difference, including but not limited to race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, social-economic status and status as a veteran. ...This report focuses in particular on achieving equal access, meaningful academic and intellectual inclusion in curriculum, research and service, and holistic integration into the academic culture of higher education for underrepresented African American, American Hispanic, Native American and Asian American students.*

*...faculty, administrators and students at colleges and universities across the country continue to grapple with the real work of creating institutions of learning that not only provide equal opportunity for people of all backgrounds, ethnicities and races, but also provide equality of education in environments that promote individual and institutional success.*

*Creating diverse – and thereby thriving- colleges and universities is not only a compelling idea, but a growing necessity, made greater by the social and demographic changes that are rapidly transforming higher education. Simply put, if higher education is to reflect the reality of our nation, it must look very different than it does at present.*

Researchers estimate that 65 percent of population growth in the US over the next two decades will be people labeled today as “minority”, and that by 2015, nearly 80 percent of students entering colleges in the US will be students of color.

Although the number of students of color is increasing today, the persistent challenge, especially in public higher education, is the retention, achievement and graduation of students of color.

*The diversity imperative provides not only personal benefit but also common good: it has critical ramifications not only for individual development but also for learning, economic success and the health of our democracy.*

*Patricia Gurin wrote in an amicus brief to the Supreme Court, the onus is on higher education institutions “to make college campuses authentic public places” places that can be the training ground for resolving what has been called the “central tension of modern life – the tension between unity and diversity” (2004, pp 33, 19)*