

How Can We Use Psychology to Foster Inclusive Excellence?

NITOP Participant Idea Exchange III

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- Marymount University (MU) is a comprehensive Catholic university in the D.C. metropolitan area that seeks to foster students' intellectual curiosity, service to others, and global understandings.
- MU has a demographically diverse student body—with students of color and international students making up 61% of the undergraduate population.
- Diverse demographics, however, do not equate to a campus climate of inclusion, one that values individuals of all backgrounds, treats them fairly, and includes them in core decision-making processes (Nishii, 2013). Following a series of overtly racist and anti-semitic incidents on campus during the spring of 2019, members of the MU community called for more intentional action on campus to decrease bias and build community and connection across differences.
- A task force was appointed to address these issues, and—after studying best practices in diversity and inclusion work—the group made specific recommendations to foster a stronger climate of inclusion at MU (report available upon request).
- Our overarching aim is inclusive excellence, which is achieved through coherent, systematic efforts to integrate diversity initiatives of substance into the pursuit of academic excellence. With this approach, we intend to move away from engaging diversity with isolated initiatives toward weaving them through the fabric of university life (Clayton-Pedersen, O'Neill, & Musil, 2017).
- Psychological research demonstrates that all students benefit personally, cognitively, and professionally when universities engage with diversity in a genuine and systemic way (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005).
- Since this work at MU is challenging and in the beginning stages, we seek to learn from the ideas and experiences of our fellow NITOP participants. After describing our current challenges and progress at MU, I will welcome discussion.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What is the status of diversity and inclusion work at your institution? What productive actions have you taken to foster a climate of inclusion in the classroom and in the wider campus community? What specific challenges do you face in doing this work? What advice do you have for others doing this work?
- 2) How does the life of the classroom intersect with campus climate? How might learning—and, by extension, campus climate—be positively impacted by paying greater attention to issues of inclusion in the classroom? What methods have you found to be effective in fostering inclusive classrooms?
- 3) According to Ruth Bernstein and her colleagues (2019), generative interactions move institutions toward greater levels of inclusion and equity. These are purposeful interactions that take place over a sustained period of time and generate social connection across differences. What does this look like in practice? What are some good examples of generative interactions that work—or could work—in the classroom and across the campus community?

Resources

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