



MINNESOTA STATE
Office of Equity and Inclusion

**TERMS OF
EQUITY
AND
INCLUSION**

Ground rules for use of this document.

The following is a reference guide; a glossary of terms and language commonly used in reference to equity and inclusion efforts. While it can be referenced as an inclusive list of terms from across various sources, it should not be considered exhaustive or comprehensive.

Proper Use:

- As a quick reference guide or "cheat sheet". Follow the Wikipedia rule, while it may be an excellent ready guide, it should not be considered an academic source.
- As a tool to be included in your developing list of resources and reference items collected along the journey of increasing cultural competence, equity and inclusion.
- To provide ongoing feedback for recommendations. This document will be updated on an ongoing basis so feedback is encouraged and welcomed.

Improper Use:

- Use of this guide in place of continuing education, intercultural experiences, or other opportunities for formalized education on the use of equity and inclusion language.
- As a substitute for Webster, Oxford or any other reputable source for definition.

accountability - In the context of racial equity work, accountability refers to the ways in which individuals and communities hold themselves to their goals and actions and acknowledge the values and groups to which they are responsible.

To be accountable, one must be visible, with a transparent agenda and process. Invisibility defies examination; it is, in fact, employed in order to avoid detection and examination. Accountability demands commitment. It might be defined as “what kicks in when convenience runs out.” Accountability requires some sense of urgency and becoming a true stakeholder in the outcome. Accountability can be externally imposed (legal or organizational requirements), or internally applied (moral, relational, faith-based, or recognized as some combination of the two) on a continuum from the institutional and organizational level to the individual level. From a relational point of view, accountability is not always doing it right. Sometimes it’s really about what happens after its done wrong (Berman et al., 2010).

ableism - Discrimination, prejudice and/or bias toward an individual based on physical or mental ability or lack thereof.

accessibility - Refers to the intentional design or redesign of technology, policies, products, and services (to name a few) that increase one's ability to use, access, and obtain the respective item.

accommodation - The process of adapting or adjusting to someone or something. Accommodations can be religious, physical or mental. A reasonable accommodation specifically is an alteration in process or environment that allows an individual with a disability to enjoy equitable access within employment, public entities or education.

advocate - A person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group; to actively support or plea in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance or educate others.

adverse impact - A substantially different rate of selection in hiring, promotion, transfer, training, or other employment-related decisions for any race, sex, gender, or ethnic group in comparison with other groups.

AFAB/AMAB- Assigned female at birth / assigned male at birth.

affirmative action - A set of policies and practices designed to eliminate unlawful discrimination among applicants, remedy the results of such prior discrimination, and prevent such discrimination in the future.

agender - A person with no (or very little) connection to the traditional system of gender, no personal alignment with the concepts of either man or woman, and/or someone who sees themselves as existing without gender.

ally - Someone who possess the power and privilege (based on ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, etc.) who stands in solidarity with and is supportive of marginalized groups and communities.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) - Enacted in 1990, the ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA is divided into five titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life - employment, state, and local government, public accommodations, telecommunications and miscellaneous provisions.

androgyny - Someone who reflects an appearance that is both masculine and feminine

anti-black - The Council for Democratizing Education defines anti-Blackness as being a two-part formation that both voids Blackness of value, while systematically marginalizing Black people and their issues. The first form of anti-Blackness is overt racism. Beneath this anti-Black racism is the covert structural and systemic racism which categorically predetermines the socioeconomic status of Blacks in this country. The structure is held in place by anti-Black policies, institutions, and ideologies.

anti-racist - An anti-racist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing antiracist ideas. This includes the expression or ideas that racial groups are equals and do not need developing, and supporting policies that reduce racial inequity (Kendi, 2019).

asexual - Refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction or has little interest in sexual activity.

assimilation - The gradual process by which a person or group belonging to one culture adopts the practices of another, thereby, becoming a member of that culture. Assimilation can be voluntary or forced.

bias - a disproportionate weigh in favor of or against an idea of thing, usually in a way that is closed-minded, prejudicial, or unfair. Biases can be innate or learned. People may develop biases for or against an individual, a group, or a belief.

bicurious - A curiosity toward experiencing attraction to people of the same gender/sex (similar to questioning).

BIPOC - A person or group who identifies as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color

bisexual - A person who experiences attraction to some men and women or identifies as experiencing an attraction to people of varying genders.

blind - A term most frequently used to describe a severe vision loss. Either blind or low vision are acceptable terms to describe all degrees of vision loss.

cisgender - A gender description for when someone's sex assigned at birth and gender identity correspond in the expected way (e.g. someone who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man). A simple way to think about it is if a person is not transgender, they are cisgender. The word cisgender can also be shortened to "cis".

Civil Rights Act of 1964 - Is one in a series of monumental acts of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement that outlawed segregation and employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

civil union - A relationship between a couple that is legally recognized by a governmental authority and has many of the rights and responsibilities of marriage.

classism - Any attitude or institutional practice which subordinates people due to income, occupation, education and/or their economic condition.

collusion - When people act to perpetuate oppression or prevent others from working to eliminate oppression.

Critical Race Theory - A framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color.

culture - Cultivated behavior; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience.

cultural appropriation - Theft of cultural elements for one's own use, commodification, or profit — including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgment or respect for its value in the original culture.

cultural competency - The ability to use critical-thinking skills to interpret how values and belief influence conscious and unconscious behavior; the understanding of how inequity can be and has been perpetuated through socialized behaviors; and the knowledge and determined disposition to disrupt inequitable practices to achieve greater personal and professional success

cultural fluency - The ability to understand norms and perspectives of diverse cultures, recognize the context and cues, and respond in ways to achieve shared meaning.

cultural humility – A process of reflection and lifelong inquiry involving self-awareness of personal and societal biases as well as awareness of aspects of identity that are most important to others we encounter leading to continuous learning in an accepting and thoughtful manner.

denial - Refusal to acknowledge the societal privileges that are granted or denied based on an individual's ethnicity or other grouping.

disability - A functional limitation that affects an individual's ability to perform certain functions.

disability (ADA) - A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability. The ADA makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on that person's association with a person with a disability.

discrimination - Behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

diversity - The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

equity - The proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all.

equity (campus context) - The creation of opportunities for historically underrepresented populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing gaps in student success and completion.

ethnicity - A dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that (1) allows people to identify or to be identified with groupings of people on the basis of presumed (and usually claimed) commonalities including language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, ways of being, religion, names, physical appearance and/or genealogy or ancestry; (2) can be a source of meaning, action and identity; and (3) confers a sense of belonging, pride and motivation.

ethnocentrism - The emotional attitude that one's own race, nation, or culture is superior to all others.

first generation - An individual, neither of whose parents completed a baccalaureate degree.

fluid(ity) - adj. generally with another term attached, like gender-fluid or fluid-sexuality, fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available (e.g. man and woman, bi and straight).

FTM/F2M - Abbreviation for a female-to-male transgender person.

gender - Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for boys and men or girls and women. While aspects of biological sex are similar across different cultures, aspects of gender may differ.

gender diversity - Refers to the extent to which a person's gender identity, role or expression differs from the cultural norms prescribed for people of a particular sex.

gender expression - External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine and feminine, although what is considered masculine or feminine changes over time and varies by culture.

gender fluid - A person whose gender identification and presentation shifts, whether within or outside of societal, gender-based expectations.

gender identity - Refers to a person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl). For some people, their gender identity does not fit into one of those two choices (see non-binary below). Unlike gender expression (see above) gender identity is not visible to others.

Gender-neutral/gender-inclusive - Inclusive language to describe relationships (spouse and partner instead of husband/boyfriend and wife/girlfriend), spaces (gender-neutral/inclusive restrooms are for use by all genders), pronouns (they and ze are gender neutral/inclusive pronouns) among other things.

gender non-conforming - An adjective and umbrella term to describe individuals whose gender expression, gender identity or gender role differs from gender norms associated with their assigned birth sex.

gender normative - A person who by nature or by choice conforms to gender-based expectations of society. Also referred to as gender straight.

gender role - Refers to a pattern of appearance, personality and behavior that, in a given culture, is associated with being a boy/man/male or being a girl/woman/female.

glass ceiling - Barriers, either real or perceived, that affect the promotion or hiring of protected group members.

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.

heterosexism - The belief or assumption that everyone is, or should be heterosexual; the idea that being heterosexual is normal, natural and healthy, and all other people are somehow unnatural, abnormal and unhealthy.

heterosexual - A male whose sexual orientation is toward females or a female whose sexual orientation is toward males. Also referred to as straight.

homosexual - A male whose sexual orientation is toward other men or a female whose sexual orientation is toward females. Homosexual males typically prefer the term gay and homosexual females typically prefer the term lesbian.

identity sphere - The idea that gender identities and expressions do not fit on a linear scale but rather on a sphere that allows room for all expression without weighting one expression as better than another.

immigrant - The action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country. See also, emigration.

implicit bias - Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness.

inclusion - Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

inclusion (campus context) - Defined as the active, intentional and ongoing engagement with diversity in the curriculum, in the co- curriculum and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.

inclusive excellence - The recognition that a community or institution's success is dependent on how well it values, engages and includes the rich diversity of students, staff, faculty, administrators, and alumni constituents.

intersectionality - A feminist sociological theory, intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

invisible minority - A group whose minority status is not always immediately visible, such as disabled people and LGBTQ+ people. This lack of visibility may make organizing for rights difficult.

'ism's' - A way of describing any attitude, action or institutional structure that subordinates (oppresses) a person or group because of their target group, color (racism), gender (sexism), economic status (classism), older age (ageism), religion (e.g., Anti-Semitism), sexual orientation (heterosexism), language/immigrant status (xenophobia), etc.

LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIAA+ - Acronyms referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex agender, and asexual.

marginalized / marginalization - The process by which minority groups/cultures are excluded, ignored or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community. A tactic used to devalue those that vary from the norm of the mainstream, sometimes to the point of denigrating them as deviant and regressive.

microaggression - Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.

MTF/M2F - Abbreviation for male-to-female transgender person

non-binary and/or genderqueer - Terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms. The term is not a synonym for transgender and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.

oppression (institutionalized) - Systematic mistreatment of people within a society identity group supported and enforced by the society and its institution, solely based on the person's membership in the social identity group.

oppression (internalized) - The manner in which members of an oppressed group come to internalize the oppressive attitudes of others toward themselves and those like them.

pansexual - A term most commonly used in the world outside of academia as a sexual identity (and sexual orientation) term similar to bisexuality, but more inclusive of trans people. It also shows an awareness of the implied gender binary in the term, bisexual.

pell-eligible - A student who applied for a Pell Grant and was determined to be eligible.

people-/person-first language - A way of describing disability that involves putting the word person or people before the word disability or the name of a disability, rather than placing the disability first and using it as an adjective. Some examples of people-first language might include saying "person with a disability," "woman with cerebral palsy" and "man with an intellectual disability." The purpose of people-first language is to promote the idea that someone's disability label is just a disability label-not the defining characteristic of the entire individual.

permanent resident - Any person not a citizen of the United States who is residing in the U.S. under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent resident as an immigrant. Also known as permanent resident alien, resident alien permit holder and green card holder.

pluralism - A situation in which people of different social classes, religions, races, etc., are together in a society but continue to have their different traditions and interests.

prejudice - An opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive but usually refers to a negative attitude. Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred. Prejudices are formed by a complex psychological process that begins with attachment to a close circle of acquaintances or an in-group such as a family. Prejudice is often aimed at out-groups.

privilege - A special right, advantage or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.

privilege (heterosexual) - Those benefits derived automatically by being heterosexual that are denied to homosexuals and bisexuals. Also, the benefits homosexuals and bisexuals receive as a result of claiming heterosexual identity or denying homosexual or bisexual identity.

privilege (white) - Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally, white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.

pronouns - A pronoun is a word that refers to someone or something that is being talked about (like she, it, them, and this). Gender pronouns (like he and hers) specifically refer to people that you are talking about. You can't always know what pronoun (she/her, he/him, they/them) someone uses by looking at them. Asking and correctly using someone's personal pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.

protected status - A characteristic that, in accordance with federal and state law, is protected from discrimination and harassment: age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

queer - An umbrella term that individuals may use to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms.

questioning - An identity label for a person who is exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity and is in a state of moratorium in terms of identity formation.

race - A dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that (1) sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics; (2) associates differential value, power and privilege with these characteristics and establishes a social status ranking among the different groups; and (3) emerges (a) when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic or cultural) to each other's world view or way of life; and/or (b) to justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current or future) of, and prejudice toward other groups.

race & ethnicity - The measures are representative for the following nine race and ethnicity groups:

- American Indian
- Asian and Pacific Islander Black or African American Hispanic of any race
- Two or more races
- All students of color and American Indian students: include the five categories above
- White
- Nonresident Alien: A student who is not a permanent resident of the U.S. and consequently, is not reported within a racial or ethnic group Unknown race and ethnicity

racial and ethnic identity - An individual's awareness and experience of being a member of a racial and ethnic group; the racial and 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.

racism (cultural) - Refers to representations, messages and stories conveying the idea that behaviors and values associated with white people or whiteness are automatically better or more normal than those associated with other racially defined groups.

racism (institutional) - 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.

racism (structural) - The normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage Whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of White domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of society including its history, culture, politics, economics and entire social fabric. Structural racism is more difficult to locate in a particular institution because it involves the reinforcing effects of multiple institutions and cultural norms, past and present, continually reproducing old and producing new forms of racism. Structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism – all other forms of racism emerge from structural racism.

racist policy - A racist policy is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between or among racial groups. Policies are written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations and guidelines that govern people. There is no such thing as a nonracist or race-neutral policy. Every policy in every institution in every community in every nation is producing or sustaining either racial inequity or equity between racial groups. Racist policies are also express through other terms such as “structural racism” or “systemic racism”. Racism itself is institutional, structural, and systemic (Kendi, 2019).

reasonable accommodation - Any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodation also includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.

refugee - Generally, any person outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on the person's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

safe space - A place where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age or physical or mental ability; a place where the rules guard each person's self-respect and dignity and strongly encourage everyone to respect others.

sexism - A system of beliefs or attitudes which relegates women to limited roles and/or options because of their sex.

sex assignment - The initial categorization of an infant as male or female.

sexual identity - How a person identifies physically: female, male, in between, beyond or neither.

sizeism - The mistreatment of or discrimination against people based upon their perceived (or self-perceived) body size or shape.

social justice - Social justice includes 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.

stereotype - An exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group - a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

transgender - An umbrella term for persons whose gender identity, gender expression or behavior does not conform to that typically associated with the sex to which they were assigned at birth. Trans is sometimes used as a shorthand for transgender. Not everyone whose appearance or behavior is gender-nonconforming will identify as a transgender person.

transition - A complicated, multi-step process that can take years as transgender people align their anatomy with their sex identity and/or their gender expression with their gender identity.

underutilization - The condition of having fewer protected group members in a particular job classification than would be reasonably expected by their availability in the labor force.

unisex - Clothing, behaviors, thoughts, feelings, relationships, etc., which are considered appropriate for members of any gender/sex.

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 supremacy - A historically-based, institutionally-perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and people of color by white people and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.

xenophobia - A culturally based fear of outsiders. It has often been associated with the hostile reception given to those who immigrate into societies and communities. It could result from genuine fear of strangers or it could be based on things such as competition for jobs, or ethnic, racial, or religious prejudice.

ze - Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of he/she.

zir - Gender neutral pronouns that can be used instead of his/her.

Citations and Sources

This document has been adapted from the Diversity and Inclusion Dictionary from Virginia Commonwealth University Division for Inclusive Excellence and using information from:

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