



# Understanding Definitions for Valuing Diversity and Inclusion

for

First Semester Transition 101

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## USING DEFINITIONS

It is important to get student thought streamlined on accurate understandings of terms and concepts. Instructors present these definitions before or after class discussions—discussing these definitions before discussions can help set context and presenting them after discussion can give consensus on the meanings of terms, as you may find that concepts have different meanings to students.

## DEFINITIONS

- Diversity: the degree to which there is variety/variableness in a group or unit; incongruence. In people populations, diversity refers to the differences, visible and inconspicuous, that we may have.
  - *Differences may include gender, sex, race, culture, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status, etc. They also includes unique characteristics, talents, ideas, hobbies, norms, etc. All of these add value to us as individuals.*
- Inclusion: action(s) that incorporates all persons or parties without prejudicial or preferential treatment, understanding the differences in characteristics do not remove basic human dignities.
  - *Inclusion is different from tolerance, because tolerance does not always advocate incorporation. However, inclusion promotes efforts that make individuals part of the whole group.*
- Discrimination: individual actions (both intentional and unconscious) that engender marginalization and inflict varying degrees of harm on a person, or group, because of perceived differences.
  - *Intent does not matter in discrimination; it is solely based on the outcomes of actions; therefore, if a person or group reveals that your actions are discriminatory, you should offer a sincere apology, even if you never intended to discriminate and never had any animus towards that person or group.*
- Prejudice: a negative thought, attitude, or disposition about a person, or group of people, because they are or exhibit a characteristics different than you.
  - *Prejudices can manifest themselves in different ways, but it is important to note that disliking someone because of their differences is more a reflection of you than the perceived differences. There are many reasons, people may be prejudicial towards someone, but generally they are based on five social categories:*

## PROMINENT SOCIAL CATEGORIES

- **Race & Ethnicity**

There are nuanced differences in race and ethnicity; however, these concepts are closely connected. Race is the socio-political designation based of a person on biological or visibly genetic differences; whereas, ethnicity denotes the cultural component and norms associated with particular races. All in all, it is never acceptable to treat people negatively

because of their race or ethnicity. Negative treatment can include, but is not limited to: excluding people from places and venues; physical or verbal abuse, including making jokes about people; and/or assuming a person engages in undesirable behaviors because of their race or ethnicity.

- **Sex & Gender/Gender Identity**

It is incorrect to use sex and gender interchangeably. Sex refers to the anatomy of an individual's reproductive system, and secondary sex characteristics. Thus, a female denotes the sex that can bear offspring or produce eggs, distinguished biologically by the production of gametes (ova) that can be fertilized by male gamete. However, gender refers to either social roles based on the sex of the person (gender role) or personal identification of one's own gender based on an internal awareness. A woman is an individual adult female that self-identifies with the female population and accepts, to some degree, the common social roles of females, despite that individual's sex.

- **Sexual Orientation**

Sexual orientation is an individual's sexual identity characterized by who a person has a sexual attraction to. Behaviors, mannerisms, and norms do not dictate sexual orientation; and assuming someone's sexual orientation based on any information other than the respective individual's admission is wrong. At that same time, inquiries into a person's sexual orientation may make either party uncomfortable. Therefore, disclosure of one's sexual orientation should always be voluntarily.

- **Disability and Health Status**

"Disability" is more of a legal term, than a medical one. A person with a disability doesn't live life with any less normalcy than a person without one; and, persons with disabilities should never be treated or made to feel abnormal because of their disability. Some disabilities are not even visible. A disability is simply an impairment that may limit some activity or function of life—but disabilities do not limit life.

- **Religion**

Religion is a belief system that establishes behaviors, morals, life and social perspectives, and even cultures, based on understanding of deities and sacred texts. There are thousands of established religions in the world and these systems vary. In addition, persons may be "areligious" meaning that they do not practice any established organized religion. Despite a person's proclivities, assumptions about religions or judgements about people for possessing certain religious affiliations are wrong.