



A DCI Deliberation Guide

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):

How effective are DEI practices in promoting equality, justice, and belonging in the workplace, the education sector, and society more broadly?

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

- I. Read this Deliberation Guide (required)

During the Deliberation

- I. Setting Expectations (5 min.)
- II. Getting to Know Each Other (10 min.)
- III. Defining the Terms of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) (15 min.)
- IV. Assessing the Values of DEI (15 min.)
- V. Assessing the Arguments for and Against DEI (15 min.)
- VI. Break (5 min.)
- VII. Deliberating on DEI Initiatives in the Workplace (15 min.)
- VIII. Deliberating on DEI Initiatives in the Education Sector (15 min.)
- IX. Assessing the Effectiveness of DEI Initiatives (15 min.)
- X. Reflections (10 min.)

Background

Introduction

This past spring, the Davidson College Athletic Department required all student-athletes on campus (around 25 percent of the student body) to attend a screening of the documentary “I’m Not Racist... Am I?” The film, which follows 12 New York City teenagers as they discuss race and privilege in a series of workshops, was designed to inspire conversations about systemic racism, white privilege, and how the next generation will confront these challenges, according to the filmmakers.¹ The viewing was followed by an open discussion in which the student-athletes were invited to discuss their reactions to the content of the film, including points of agreement and disagreement.

¹ [“About the Film: I’m Not Racist... Am I?”](#) I’m Not Racist Am I?. Accessed 2024.

This decision was met with criticism from the Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse (DFTD), an alumni group, who argued that the film pushed a “radical worldview as if it were endorsed by the athletic department.”² They particularly objected to a scene in the film in which the teenagers are told that “all white people are racist” and that, while minority races can be prejudiced, they cannot be racist because they lack institutional power to oppress others. DFTD, and in particular board member and former North Carolina Governor James Martin, criticized the binary oppressor/oppressed framework presented by the film, and felt that labeling someone as racist based on the color of their skin was harmful.³ Martin opposed Davidson’s decision to show the film, citing it as part of a broader movement to indoctrinate America’s youth with an extreme and divisive worldview under the guise of eliminating racism.

Davidson College defended the decision mandating student-athletes to view the film in a public statement, arguing that “even though a reading or event is assigned, that does not mean that anyone at the college expects students to agree with every idea they encounter.”⁴ It also noted that college should be a place of intellectual exploration where students are expected to encounter a diversity of ideas and perspectives about the world in the pursuit of expanding their knowledge.⁵ Proponents of Davidson’s decision, including Professor Issac Bailey, argued that the film and its message are far more nuanced than the way that DFTD portrayed it, and that learning and growth require grappling with personal discomfort.⁶ They assert that the open discussion following the screening allowed students to express views in favor of or against the content, facilitating thoughtful discourse about racism in America.⁷

This debate is part of a much broader discussion that has consistently animated public discourse in the United States in recent years. From the Supreme Court to large corporations, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies and practices have become embroiled in political and social disputes about identity, discrimination, and what, if anything, should be done to address racial, ethnic, and other forms of disparities in the US. From affirmative action to workplace DEI training to the teaching of critical race theory (CRT) in schools, the DEI ethos and the many initiatives it has inspired have sparked controversy across the nation. This deliberation guide aims to foster a constructive discussion about DEI practices in the workplace, the education sector, and society more broadly.

As you read through this guide, keep in mind the complexity of this topic and the many arguments made by those in favor of and opposed to DEI initiatives. Consider how these initiatives may both promote and undermine equality, justice, belonging, and other important

² [“Two Significant Concerns About Student Rights at Davidson College.”](#) Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse. 2024.

³ Jim Martin. [“Former NC Gov.: DEI Efforts at Davidson College Go Too Far.”](#) The Charlotte Observer. 2024.

⁴ Kendrick Marshall. [“Davidson College Stands by Decision to Show Athletes ‘Divisive’ Film on Racism.”](#) The Charlotte Observer. 2024.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Issac Bailey. [“The Truth behind the Misleading Conservative Outcry over DEI at Davidson College.”](#) Charlotte Observer. 2024.

⁷ Ibid.

values, and how their effectiveness may depend on how they are framed, designed, and implemented. While this guide provides a survey of common DEI practices across schools and firms, it is important to recognize that there are many components to DEI not included here. It is vital that we approach this deliberation with an attention to the complexity of this topic.

Explaining and Defining DEI

Before explaining DEI itself, it will be helpful to understand each term individually. Each of the three pillars of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) are nuanced terms in their own right. In the context of DEI, their meanings are not fixed and can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

Diversity

Most generally, diversity is a term that refers to the degree of difference among entities in a group. However, when people talk about promoting diversity in the workplace, schools, and society, they may be referring to different interpretations of this term. Some believe that diversity is achieved through the presence of particular socially identifying characteristics. For some, differences in race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexual orientation in a student body constitute a “diverse” school. Others might choose to emphasize lived experience, which might be informed by factors such as socioeconomic status, educational history, languages spoken, places traveled, and more. Yet others believe that diversity is about differences in thought and beliefs. According to this view, a group must include individuals who hold different viewpoints across a range of topics to be considered diverse.⁸ Throughout this guide, arguments will be presented that both extol the virtues of diversity and question if other, more important, values might be undercut in its pursuit.

Inclusion

Inclusion involves creating environments where everyone feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to participate fully.⁹ The concept varies in interpretation: it can mean *physical and accessibility inclusion*, ensuring spaces and resources are accessible to all, including those with disabilities; *cultural and social inclusion*, fostering a culture that celebrates differences; *systemic inclusion*, addressing institutional biases and barriers; and *psychological inclusion*, ensuring individuals feel respected and valued. These are not mutually exclusive, but efforts to champion these different forms of inclusion might have a range of different emphases and unintended consequences related to balancing individual needs with group dynamics and other organizational objectives.¹⁰ Additionally, there may be disagreement on the extent to which inclusion should be advanced more generally. Is ensuring that people are “in the room” enough, or does inclusion entail equally weighing the opinions and perspectives of everyone?

⁸ [“Workplace Diversity - Opposing Viewpoints.”](#) Gale in Context. 2021.

⁹ Krystal Jagoo. [“What Is Inclusion?”](#) Verywell Mind. 2024.

¹⁰ Carmen Constantinescu and Christina A. Samuels. [“Studies Flag Potential Downside to Inclusion.”](#) Education Week. 2016.

Furthermore, what might be undermined by inclusion efforts? This guide will help participants form their answers to these questions.

Equity

As it is generally understood, equity is centered on fairness and justice in the sense of ensuring that everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources, tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Unlike equality, which emphasizes treating everyone the same regardless of their starting point, equity focuses on “leveling the playing field” by addressing disparities and providing different levels of support where needed.¹¹ This involves recognizing that individuals may require unique resources or accommodations to achieve similar outcomes. The debate between equal opportunity and equal outcome is central to discussions about equity. Those who advocate for equal opportunity focus on providing everyone with the same starting point, while advocates for equal outcomes emphasize achieving similar results for all, regardless of initial differences. Proponents of equity argue that addressing systemic disadvantages and providing targeted support are crucial for fair outcomes. Critics, on the other hand, caution that focusing solely on outcomes can undermine the values of meritocracy and individual achievement, and they often favor equality as their preferred decision-making framework.¹² DEI policies generally focus on equity, and this guide will present arguments in favor of and against this approach.

Defining DEI

The overarching goal of DEI initiatives is to promote the presence and contributions of individuals from historically marginalized or oppressed identity groups in the workplace, schools, and other institutions.¹³ While ‘DEI’ is the acronym that serves as an umbrella term, individual initiatives are implemented under a variety of names and might target different elements of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This guide explores additional values associated with or impacted by DEI practices, such as equality, justice, and belonging. Like diversity, inclusion, and equity, participants might interpret these terms differently. While reading this guide, consider the merit and relevance of these values, how DEI initiatives might advance them, and how they might undermine them.

Justifying DEI

The justification for DEI initiatives is intertwined with the principles of anti-racism, as articulated by Ibram X. Kendi. According to Kendi, anti-racism is the practice of actively opposing racism by advocating for policies and ideas that promote racial equity. Kendi emphasizes that it is not enough to be passively non-racist; one must be actively anti-racist, working to identify and

¹¹ Stephen Menendian. [“Equity vs. Equality: What’s the Difference?”](#) Othering & Belonging Institute. 2023.

¹² Martha Minow. [“Equality vs. Equity.”](#) American Journal of Law and Equality. 2021.

¹³ [“Issues & Controversies - Anti-Racism.”](#) Info Base. Accessed 2024.

dismantle racist policies and practices that perpetuate inequality.¹⁴ This argument is grounded in the belief that racism, and other forms of discrimination in society, are not primarily perpetuated by individuals and “bad actors,” but by systems and institutions of power.¹⁵ This approach calls for a collective effort to change policies and create systems that support equity for all racial groups.

Another justifying argument comes from Tema Okun, who argues that America operates under a culture of white supremacy.¹⁶ White supremacy culture, as described by her, refers to the pervasive and often invisible set of norms and behaviors that maintain white dominance and privilege. Okun identifies characteristics of this culture, such as perfectionism, individualism, and defensiveness, which perpetuate inequity and marginalize non-white individuals. According to Okun, recognizing and addressing these traits is essential for creating truly inclusive environments.¹⁷

On this view, DEI initiatives are crucial because they provide the structural changes needed to combat systemic racism, white supremacy culture, and other forms of institutionalized discrimination. By implementing DEI measures, organizations can create more equitable environments that support the success and well-being of all employees, and schools can dismantle barriers that make it categorically harder for some students to succeed. The overarching point of anti-racism is the active effort required to fight against racism. This principle underpins DEI initiatives, as proponents argue they are the practical means by which organizations can actively work to dismantle systemic barriers and promote inclusivity. Without such initiatives, efforts to achieve equality, justice, and belonging remain superficial and ineffective.

Arguments Against DEI

One of the primary arguments against DEI initiatives is that they impose a particular cultural perspective that may not be universally accepted.¹⁸ Critics argue that DEI efforts often reflect a specific ideological stance that prioritizes certain values and norms over others. This can lead to the marginalization of viewpoints that do not align with the dominant DEI framework, potentially stifling genuine diversity of thought and intellectual expression.¹⁹

These critics point to research and anecdotal evidence that suggests that DEI initiatives can create a climate of fear for white individuals who may be afraid to speak or act freely, fearing

¹⁴ Katrina Schwartz. [“How Ibram X. Kendi’s Definition of Antiracism Applies to Schools.”](#) KQED. 2019.

¹⁵ Brita Belli. [“Kendi: Racism Is about Power and Policy, Not People.”](#) Yale News. 2020.

¹⁶ Tema Okun. [“White Supremacy Culture - Still Here.”](#) 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jonathan Butcher. [“DEI, Sold as a Way To Promote Racial Harmony, Does Just the Opposite.”](#) The Heritage Foundation. 2024.

¹⁹ [“Has DEI Gone Too Far? Exploring the Impact and Scope of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives.”](#) Flexibility. Accessed 2024.

repercussions if they say or do something that is perceived as wrong or insensitive.²⁰ This fear can stifle open communication and lead to an atmosphere of anxiety and caution rather than genuine inclusivity and engagement.

Critics argue that DEI initiatives can inadvertently create a culture of dependency rather than fostering self-resilience. According to this view, DEI advocates often use the struggles of marginalized communities to push their agenda, which can create a victim mentality within those communities.²¹ On this view, these initiatives emphasize dependency on external assistance rather than empowering individuals to overcome challenges through self-reliance and personal accountability.

Opponents of DEI also contend that rather than fostering equality, justice, and belonging, these initiatives can be divisive.²² By emphasizing group identity and historical grievances, DEI policies from this perspective likely create an environment of division and resentment. This divisiveness can undermine a sense of unity and common purpose within organizations, leading to fragmented and polarized cultures in workplaces and schools.

Critics also argue that DEI initiatives can lead to racial favoritism, where individuals from certain demographic groups are given preferential treatment based on their race or ethnicity rather than their qualifications or performance. This can create perceptions of unfairness and resentment among employees who feel that their opportunities are being limited or overshadowed by demographic considerations. Such practices are seen as contrary to the principles of meritocracy and equal opportunity, and at times in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.²³

The History of DEI

The roots of the concept of DEI as we know it today can be traced back to the transformative Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This period marked a significant turning point in American history, characterized by efforts to dismantle systemic racial discrimination and promote equality. DEI initiatives, which formed following the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, were seen by their proponents as a necessary extension of this legislative movement. DEI aimed to hold companies accountable and ensure that the principles of equity were upheld in schools and workplaces.²⁴

While DEI continued to inform policies and practices throughout the corporate and academic worlds, it largely remained on the periphery of public discourse throughout the remainder of

²⁰ [“Two Significant Concerns About Student Rights at Davidson College.”](#) Davidsonians for Freedom of Thought and Discourse. 2024.

²¹ Corey Brooks. [“America Works. DEI Doesn’t.”](#) Tablet Magazine. 2024.

²² Rod Dreher. [“DEI Training: Harmful, Phony, And Expensive.”](#) The American Conservative. 2023.

²³ Callum Borchers. [“Merit, Excellence and Intelligence: An Anti-DEI Approach Catches On.”](#) WSJ. 2024.

²⁴ Kiara Alfonseca. [“DEI: What Does It Mean and What Is Its Purpose?”](#) ABC News. 2023.

the 20th century and into the 2000s. However, the DEI movement gained renewed momentum during the Obama administration. Following his election, some claimed that the election of an African-American president proved that the US had overcome its history of racial oppression and was now a “post-racial” nation.²⁵ These claims provided a stark contrast to events that took place during his administration, where fatal encounters between law enforcement officers and Black men such as Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and Michael Brown inspired the “Black Lives Matter” movement. Such controversies brought increased focus on DEI initiatives, including in the Obama administration, which implemented a variety of initiatives aimed at promoting diversity in federal agencies, educational institutions, and the private sector.²⁶ These initiatives included the introduction of more policies that encouraged the recruitment and retention of diverse talent and promoted inclusive workplace cultures.

The tragic deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the summer of 2020 acted as a catalyst for a profound national reckoning on racial justice and inequality and thrust the discourse around anti-racism into the national spotlight. Their killings ignited a global movement demanding accountability and systemic change. This period saw a surge in support for DEI initiatives as organizations and institutions recognized the urgent need to address racial disparities and promote social justice, with the corporate diversity training market reaching an estimated size of \$3.4 billion in 2020.²⁷

Most recently, this explosion in DEI initiatives has come under scrutiny. Many corporations, including John Deere, Microsoft, and Coinbase have cut back on their DEI training programs, and in some cases, laid off workers who were part of DEI departments.²⁸ This has occurred in response to claims that DEI practices promote discrimination by favoring individuals in the hiring process based on their race and only serve to exacerbate racial divisions in the US.

The following sections are devoted to exploring the topic of DEI in more depth, focusing on the two main arenas where these initiatives are championed: workplaces and the education sector. Each section will identify common DEI practices associated with each and explain some of the arguments made in favor of and against them.

DEI in the Workplace

Diversity Hiring

In both the corporate world and higher education, the use of diversity statements and identity-based hiring practices have come under scrutiny. The issue of diversity statements will be examined in the following section focused on DEI in the education sector – here we will examine a practice known as diversity hiring where firms make a targeted effort to fill open roles with

²⁵ [“Issues & Controversies - Anti-Racism.”](#) Info Base. Accessed 2024.

²⁶ [“President Obama Signs Executive Order to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in the Federal Workforce.”](#) U.S. Office of Personnel Management. 2011.

²⁷ Jesse Singal. [“What If Diversity Training Is Doing More Harm Than Good?”](#) The New York Times. 2023.

²⁸ Ariel Zilber. [“Microsoft Fires DEI Team — Becoming Latest Company to Ditch ‘Woke’ Policy.”](#) New York Post. 2024.

individuals with certain racial or gender identity characteristics. These practices aim to rectify historical imbalances and provide opportunities for underrepresented groups.

The benefits of a diverse workplace are well-documented, according to the consulting firm McKinsey. Their study on diversity found that companies with higher gender diversity are 25% more likely to have above-average profitability, and those with ethnic diversity in leadership are 36% more likely to outperform their peers financially.²⁹ Proponents assert that diverse teams bring a variety of perspectives and solutions, enhancing innovation and decision-making processes.³⁰ Moreover, a diverse workforce can better reflect and serve a diverse customer base, improving global market understanding and reputation.³¹ Proponents also contend that a disproportionate number of white males benefit from many merit-based hiring practices, casting doubt on their impartiality.³²

Critics argue that targeted hiring practices can lead to discrimination against those not belonging to underrepresented groups, giving unfair advantages based on demographics rather than performance.³³ This perspective suggests that the best talent is often overlooked in favor of meeting diversity quotas. There are also concerns that these practices may foster resentment and division within the workforce, rather than unity and inclusion. Lastly, the Wall Street Journal recently published an article calling into question the main findings of the seminal McKinsey study on diversity, arguing that its methodology was flawed.³⁴

Employee DEI Training

DEI training, whether optional or mandatory, aims to promote values of equality and belonging, according to proponents. Training programs educate employees on unconscious biases, systemic discrimination, and the importance of inclusive behaviors, and are designed to create a more respectful and cohesive work environment.³⁵ Such training, supporters argue, can also provide tools for conflict resolution and improve overall workplace dynamics by encouraging open communication and understanding.³⁶

Critics argue that mandatory training can sometimes backfire, entrenching biases and creating resentment rather than fostering genuine understanding.³⁷ They cite research that has shown

²⁹ Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle et al. [“Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters.”](#) McKinsey and Company. 2020.

³⁰ Michael Boyles. [“DEI: What It Is & How to Champion It in the Workplace.”](#) Business Insights Blog - Harvard Business School. 2023.

³¹ Kristy Gardiner. [“A Leadership Guide to Diversity & Inclusion in the Workplace.”](#) Positive Psychology. 2024.

³² Callum Borchers. [“Merit, Excellence and Intelligence: An Anti-DEI Approach Catches On.”](#) Wall Street Journal. 2024.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ James Mackintosh. [“Diversity Was Supposed to Make Us Rich. Not So Much.”](#) Wall Street Journal. 2024.

³⁵ Kristy Gardiner. [“A Leadership Guide to Diversity & Inclusion in the Workplace.”](#) Positive Psychology. 2024.

³⁶ Michael Boyles. [“DEI: What It Is & How to Champion It in the Workplace.”](#) Business Insights Blog - Harvard Business School. 2023.

³⁷ Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev. [“Why Diversity Programs Fail.”](#) Harvard Business Review. 2016.

that mandatory sessions may fail to produce long-term positive changes and might even exacerbate workplace tensions.³⁸ Additionally, some view these programs as expensive "window-dressing" for companies that distract from organizations' core priorities and serve more as a public relations tool than a genuine effort to reduce discrimination.³⁹

Promotion and Pay Practices

Promotion and pay practices that emphasize diversity can help ensure that historically marginalized communities are represented at higher levels of business. Proponents claim that these practices not only promote equality but can also enhance organizational performance by leveraging diverse leadership perspectives.⁴⁰ They also argue that inclusive promotion practices can improve employee retention by demonstrating a commitment to fairness and career development for all employees, demonstrating to those from diverse backgrounds that there is a path to senior leadership for them.⁴¹

Critics argue that such practices undermine organizations' commitment to meritocracy and the pursuit of excellence, suggesting that promotions should be based solely on individual performance and qualifications rather than demographic factors.⁴² There is a concern that emphasizing diversity in promotions could lead to perceptions of favoritism and diminish the recognition of hard work and talent. Additionally, there is a fear that these practices might not always identify the best candidates for leadership roles, potentially impacting organizational effectiveness.⁴³

DEI in the Education Sector

Diversity Statements

Diversity statements are increasingly used in higher education hiring to ensure that institutions are actively working towards creating a diverse environment. Proponents argue that these statements help to formalize commitments to DEI and can be instrumental in attracting a diverse pool of faculty and staff. In this view, they also serve as a tool to assess the commitment of prospective employees to fostering an inclusive campus culture, which is vital for supporting underrepresented groups.⁴⁴

³⁸ Rod Dreher. ["DEI Training: Harmful, Phony, And Expensive."](#) The American Conservative. 2023.

³⁹ Jesse Singal. ["What If Diversity Training Is Doing More Harm Than Good?"](#) The New York Times. 2023; Jim Fein and Mary Mobley. ["DEI Is Distracting Our Military From Its Primary Task."](#) Heritage Foundation.

⁴⁰ Michael Boyles. ["DEI: What It Is & How to Champion It in the Workplace."](#) Business Insights Blog - Harvard Business School. 2023.

⁴¹ Kate Stone. ["DEI and Retention: How Inclusive Practices Boost Employee Loyalty."](#) Diversio. 2024.

⁴² Michael Boyles. ["DEI: What It Is & How to Champion It in the Workplace."](#) Business Insights Blog - Harvard Business School. 2023.

⁴³ Kiara Alfonseca. ["DEI: What Does It Mean and What Is Its Purpose?"](#) ABC News. 2023.

⁴⁴ Brittany Smith. ["The Case for Diversity Statements."](#) University of Michigan: College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. Accessed 2024.

Critics argue that mandatory diversity statements can act as ideological litmus tests, potentially discriminating against individuals with differing viewpoints. This concern is likened to historical loyalty oaths, where conformity to specific political beliefs was enforced. There is also the argument that such statements may undermine academic freedom and lead to hiring biases, as faculty members might feel pressured to express certain views to secure employment.⁴⁵

Teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Related Fields

Teaching CRT and related fields in education is supported for several reasons. Advocates argue that exposing students to a diversity of viewpoints fosters intellectual rigor and a comprehensive understanding of societal structures. CRT provides valuable insights into how history, systemic racism, and institutional biases affect various aspects of contemporary society, which is crucial for developing informed and socially conscious students. Additionally, proponents argue that restricting the teaching of CRT in classrooms infringes on freedom of speech and is another attempt to “whitewash” history.⁴⁶ To many CRT scholars, it is a complex and nuanced set of critiques of American society and history taught at the highest levels of education (e.g. law school), not the teachings in K-12 curricula decried by some.⁴⁷

Opponents of including CRT in educational contexts argue that its tenets are extreme and divisive. They contend that CRT promotes a victim/oppressor binary that can be traumatic for white students, blaming them for historical and systemic issues beyond their control. According to this view, CRT often exaggerates the role racism plays in America, promoting a cynical and pessimistic view of the US.⁴⁸ Critics also suggest that such teachings foster division rather than unity, emphasizing differences over commonalities and potentially leading to resentment and conflict among students.⁴⁹ In one example, a mom in Tennessee reported that her seven-year-old daughter came home from school saying, “I’m ashamed that I’m White...Is there something wrong with me? Why am I hated so much?”⁵⁰

Affirmative Action in Higher Education

Affirmative action in higher education has been a contentious issue, highlighted by the recent Supreme Court case, *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023), which ruled against the use of racial preferences in college admissions. The DCI focused on this issue in one of its D Teams this past spring, and interested participants can find [that guide here](#).

⁴⁵ Conor Friedersdorf. [“The Hypocrisy of Mandatory Diversity Statements.”](#) The Atlantic. 2023.

⁴⁶ “Issues & Controversies - Critical Race Theory.” Info Base. Accessed 2024.

⁴⁷ Gary Peller. [“I’ve Been a Critical Race Theorist for 30 Years. Our Opponents Are Just Proving Our Point for Us.”](#) Politico. 2021.

⁴⁸ “Issues & Controversies - Critical Race Theory.” Info Base. Accessed 2024.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Pidluzny. [“DEI Spells CRT: Legislation Restricting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs Will Improve the Intellectual Environment at Missouri Universities.”](#) America First Policy Institute. Accessed 2024.

⁵⁰ [“Why Is Critical Race Theory Dangerous for our Kids?.”](#) Marsha Blackburn: US Senator for Tennessee. 2021.

Proponents of affirmative action in the college admissions process argue that it is essential for providing access to education for historically underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. Affirmative action helps to correct systemic forms of oppression and ensures that diverse perspectives are represented in academic institutions. By fostering a diverse student body, affirmative action enhances the educational experience for all students and helps to break down barriers that have historically excluded marginalized communities. On this view, affirmative action is seen as an effort to “level the playing field,” not discriminate based on race.⁵¹

Critics argue that affirmative action is inherently discriminatory, prioritizing race over merit and leading to students who are less qualified being admitted over those who are more qualified. This view can be summarized by Chief Justice John Robert’s quote in a 2007 SCOTUS decision: “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” Opponents contend that such policies overlook the qualifications and achievements of applicants, instead focusing on demographic factors. This perspective suggests that admissions should be based solely on individual merit and academic performance, without consideration of race or ethnicity.⁵²

Setting Expectations (5 min.)

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to constructively discuss DEI policies and initiatives, including how they might effectively promote or counteract equality, justice, and belonging in the workplace, education sector, and society more broadly. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own thoughts about the topic. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, our areas of agreement and disagreement, and what we have learned from our time together.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these

⁵¹ [“Issues & Controversies - Affirmative Action.”](#) Info Base. Accessed 2024.

⁵² Ibid.

dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators' stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., "All people think this," or "No educated people hold that view")

Getting to Know Each Other (10 min.)

In this section, we will take less than a minute to once again share our names, where we are currently located, and answer one of the questions below.

1. Other than your current profession/career path, what profession interests you the most and why?
2. What is one thing you could change about yourself if you could?

Defining the Terms of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) (15 min.)

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have a range of different meanings. For example, diversity might mean differences in identity characteristics (race, gender, religion, etc.), differences in thought (diversity of opinions), or something else. In this section, we will discuss these different values and what they mean and what they look like to each of us, recognizing that no one definition is necessarily right or inherently better than others. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk.

- **What does the term *diversity* mean to you? What does *diversity* look like in the workplace, in schools, and in society?**

- What does the term *inclusion* mean to you? What does *inclusion* look like in the workplace, in schools, and in society?
- What does the term *equity* mean to you? What does *equity* look like in the workplace, in schools, and in society?

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Assessing the Values of DEI (15 min.)

In this section, we will discuss the three pillars of DEI and their integration into the workplace, the education sector, and society more broadly. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk.

- What are the strongest arguments for and against advancing *diversity* in the workplace, schools, and society?
- What are the strongest arguments for and against prioritizing *inclusion* in the workplace, schools, and society?
- What are the strongest arguments for and against championing *equity* in the workplace, schools, and society?

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Assessing the Arguments for and Against DEI (15 min.)

In this section, we will discuss the overarching DEI debate. While later sections will delve into specific policies and initiatives, this section focuses on the arguments made to justify DEI practices, and those made in opposition to them. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk.

- What is your evaluation of the arguments made by Ibram X. Kendi, Tema Okun, and others justifying their approach to DEI? Which elements do you find most and least persuasive?
- What is your evaluation of the arguments made against the DEI ideology? Which ones do you view as the strongest and weakest?

- **Are there other arguments, on either side, that are not included in this guide and should be considered?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Break (5 min.)

Deliberating on DEI Initiatives in the Workplace (15 min.)

In this section, we will focus on DEI initiatives in the workplace. Participants should not feel restricted by the guide and are welcome to discuss DEI practices not mentioned in the background section. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk.

- **Which, if any, DEI initiatives (e.g. diversity statements, mandatory/optional DEI training and workshops, etc.) should be prioritized and advanced by businesses? Why?**
- **Which, if any, DEI initiatives should be avoided by businesses? Why?**
- **What should be the overarching objectives of firms with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion?**
- **What value systems, if any, should be prioritized over DEI in the workplace?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Deliberating on DEI Initiatives in the Education Sector (15 min.)

We will now focus on DEI initiatives in schools and the education sector. As with the previous section, participants are welcome to discuss DEI practices in the education sector not mentioned in the background section. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk.

- **Which, if any, DEI initiatives (e.g. affirmative action, the teaching of critical race theory, etc.) should be prioritized and advanced by schools? Why?**
- **Which, if any, DEI initiatives should be avoided by schools? Why?**
- **What should the overarching objectives of the education sector be with respect to diversity, equity, and inclusion?**
- **What value systems, if any, should be prioritized over DEI in schools?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Assessing the Effectiveness of DEI Initiatives (15 min.)

The DCI has outlined a few of the objectives of DEI policies and initiatives. These include greater equality, justice, and belonging in the workplace, the education system, and society more broadly. In this section, we will discuss these goals and whether DEI practices and policies advance, or undermine, them. We will each take 1-2 minutes to answer at least one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk.

- **In what ways do DEI efforts help advance the goals of equality, justice, and belonging?**
- **In what ways do DEI efforts fail to advance the goals of equality, justice, and belonging?**
- **Aside from, or in addition to, equality, justice, and belonging, what other values should we seek to promote in the workplace, the education sector, and society more broadly? Why?**

After everyone has spoken once, the group is welcome to continue discussing these questions as time allows. Participants are encouraged to ask clarifying and follow-up questions.

Reflections (10 min)

While today's conversation is an important step in the journey, effectively balancing DEI practices with other objectives is necessarily an ongoing effort. Please reflect on the insights from your discussion with your fellow participants today, and then answer one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group is welcome to continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
2. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
3. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problems and potential solutions?
4. Was there anything that was said or left out from the discussion that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
5. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations about DEI practices?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

About This Guide

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The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics and organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathways Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue, or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dc@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathways Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.