



FAQs for Higher Education **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Champions**

DEI is a centuries-old movement dedicated to upholding the freedom of all Americans to access life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Currently, there are attacks taking place across the country on DEI efforts at educational institutions that attempt to roll back years of progress and restrict access to the American Dream for *all* students. In nearly half of US states there are proposed anti-DEI bills and seven states have passed laws banning or restricting DEI initiatives at public colleges. A key strategy in the anti-DEI attacks is to make false claims about what DEI means in an attempt to undermine its legitimacy by aligning DEI to anti-American ideas.

American Pride Rises is here to support higher education DEI champions like you. This document contains **answers to key questions you might have about DEI, and language you can use to debunk false statements about DEI.**

We encourage you to use the language below to help you take on tough conversations to defend DEI, and advocate for how DEI supports diversity of thought.

How should I talk about DEI?

We must define DEI to ensure the opposition does not misrepresent it. DEI is not a collection of recent policies that can be dismantled without consequence — what we now call “DEI” is the culmination of a centuries old movement to uphold American values.

DEI is essential to building communities, including schools, that are welcoming, fair and free from discrimination and hate for *all* regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, identity, ability, background or religious affiliation. If we lose DEI from the education system, we undermine the promise of America and our leading edge in creating the best quality educational institution and talent pipelines for American businesses.

- **Diversity simply means *all* people.** Schools and educational institutions that reflect the diversity of America are best positioned to tap into the brain power, resources and cultural capital that each community holds. Without diversity, American schools risk undermining their cultural relevance, educational outcomes and innovation; and will be unable to offer leading edge educational experiences that prepare students for the globalized world.
- **Equity is fair access to opportunity.** America was founded on the idea that everyone should have a fair chance at success. Without equity, the promise of opportunity fades away for American students everywhere — and if that promise fades, so does our country’s competitive edge.
- **Inclusion is participating in the American Dream.** We are made stronger when we use our collective knowledge and skills to move our nation forward. If we abandon efforts to strengthen inclusivity, we risk limiting our country’s education edge and competitive talent pool to fuel the workforce, thus hindering progress, innovation and leadership. Inclusion is not the same as “preference” — simply because someone has an opportunity does not mean it was taken from another.



How do I enforce that DEI includes diversity of thought?

1. **Align DEI's objectives to your academic and institutional goals:** DEI is key to fostering environments that value diversity of thought, learning from our past and development of innovative new ideas. Without it, your institution risks becoming less relevant and appealing to the next generation of learners (the most diverse generation in America's history) and offering incomplete learning experiences.

In higher education, DEI supports academic freedom, giving more people the opportunity to express ideas and showcasing underrepresented voices and experience—especially in areas where these groups are traditionally excluded. DEI welcomes, nurtures and calls for expansive and diverse representation of identities, lived experiences and ideas. DEI facilitates understanding of others, boosting empathy and social cohesion, while respectfully holding conflicting ideas. Diversity is the basis of America's strength—DEI celebrates the diversity of our nation because it is the source of our power and competition.

2. **Ground your argument in data:**
 - a. **DEI enhances learning:** For decades, research has shown that diverse classrooms expand on course content by engendering more perspectives, more complicated discussion and more sophisticated analysis. ([American Council on Education](#)) It can promote collaboration skills and innovation, enriching the learning experience by including more people from different backgrounds. ([UCDA](#))
 - b. **DEI builds access, retention and success of underrepresented students in higher education:** A study found that college students who felt they belonged to the college community showed better academic performance, mental health and higher retention rates. ([Sage Journals](#))
 - c. **DEI increases opportunities for more students:** More people are given opportunities to pursue higher education and advanced degrees with DEI programs in place, contributing to a more representative academic sector. ([UCDA](#))
3. **Discuss common misconceptions:** Some might believe that DEI focuses solely on visible diversity—like racial or ethnic identities. In fact, DEI promotes diversity in all its forms, including diversity of thought.

Others may state that DEI discourages dissenting opinions or promotes one way of thinking. On the contrary, DEI encourages and makes space for difference, dissent or disagreements. DEI shatters echo chambers and group-think by establishing environments for respectful debate and constructive discourse. The premise of DEI is to ensure all voices—including dissenting opinions and underrepresented views—are heard.

4. **Tell stories that demonstrate how DEI is successful in bringing valuable new perspectives to the table that result in success for your institution and your learners:** Diversity is the basis of America's strength—we should be proud of it—without it we are less powerful and less competitive as a nation. DEI creates the opportunity to explore diverse perspectives and experiences that encourage empathy, cultural competence and the ability to collaborate effectively across differences. When barriers are removed for underrepresented groups to participate, communities inevitably increase the diverse representation of thought, leading to more dynamic conversations that boost community vibrancy.



How do I lift up the inclusive nature of DEI across issues of race?

1. **Emphasize common ground by highlighting the benefits of DEI for all:** DEI's goal is to promote welcoming, safe and fair environments that benefit everyone—not just one particular racial or ethnic group but rather DEI promotes all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, identity, ability, background or religious affiliation. DEI promotes anti-racism efforts and denounces any form of prejudice or hate. DEI training for school staff and faculty can boost inclusion and a sense of belonging on campuses so that educational leaders and administrators can go further to support all students.
2. **Use data to support your argument:** There's no evidence that DEI undermines success for one particular group. In fact, there is evidence that DEI builds a stronger workforce and companies, growing profitability, innovation and belonging for all groups. Companies in the top quartile of diversity outperform those in the fourth quartile by 36% in profitability. ([McKinsey](#)) Diverse companies have both 19% points higher innovation revenues and 9% points higher EBIT margins. ([HBR](#)) Employees with higher workplace belonging showed a 167% increase in their willingness to recommend their company to others. Also, they received double the raises and 18 times more promotions. ([HBR](#))
3. **Affirm that DEI is anti-racist:** Structural and systemic racism is indisputable in American culture and the goal of DEI is to level the playing field for all groups, not to discriminate against anyone or take opportunities away.
4. **Explain what's at stake if we dismantle DEI:** Without diversity, schools see diminished innovation, creativity and problem solving; economies see weaker financial output and global competitiveness; and societies face increased polarization and fragmentation. Without equity and fairness, Americans everywhere would experience a contraction of the American Dream. DEI boosts school competitiveness and relevance, putting American universities ahead of many international counterparts as communities that embrace a range of identities, experiences and backgrounds.

Is the term 'DEI' too politicized? Should I not use that language?

By failing to use the term DEI, we give legitimacy to anti-DEI supporters who are actively creating barriers to the American Dream by undermining and overturning DEI efforts.

DEI is essential to the American Dream and should not be forced underground — forcing people to abandon DEI language is an infraction on people's freedom to speak truthfully about their American values.

Our diversity is the key to America's strength — we should be proud to support DEI, because without it we are less powerful and less competitive as a nation.

How can I help defend DEI and the American Dream?

- **Speak Up** — Tell us about your experiences: Are you facing pushback on DEI programs? Have you been the target of litigation? Your stories are powerful and help us to help you and other higher education leaders like you.
- **Stand Firm** — Do not retreat at the first challenge: Make a clear case for DEI in your school or university and make sure every anti-DEI claim or pushback is interrogated against what is permitted under the law (not levels of fear).
- **Stay In Touch** — Reach out to American Pride Rises and your fellow DEI champions for support and to share information and help build a cross-sector, nationwide coalition of DEI support.



We cannot afford to sit back and let the progress of American values and rights be halted by baseless attacks — anti-DEI legislation and litigation must be contested and DEI champions must be supported.

Speak Up. Stand Firm. Stay In Touch.

For more information go to www.aprnetwork.org or contact: info@aprnetwork.org