



*Commission on Colleges
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
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DIVERSITY

A Position Statement of the Commission on Colleges

Diversity is not an abstract concept; rather, it is a true picture of an ever-changing national demographic landscape that reflects every sector of society. Institutions of higher education mirror diversity through their missions, their structures, and their students, faculty, and staff.

Diversity in higher education is enriched by the distinct mission of each institution. Formal commitments to prepare students for work and interaction in the larger, global society carry with it an obligation to ensure that every student has the skills and knowledge necessary to be productive and contributing citizens of this nation. Irrespective of the skill sets students bring with them, each institution pledges to take students from where they are to the levels they need to be in order to realize their potential and their value in a democratic society.

The strength of American higher education rests with its structural diversity and the array of institutional types designed to meet the needs of any student pursuing a college or university credential. This diversity includes, but is not limited to public, private for-profit, private not-for-profit, large, small, urban, rural, technical colleges, historically black institutions, single-gender institutions, military academies, community colleges, comprehensive institutions, liberal arts colleges, and research institutions. It is within this rich diverse structure that students find the type of institution that can best support their learning endeavors.

Diversity is reflected in the student body of an institution, as well as among the faculty, staff, administrators, trustees and other stakeholder groups. It is this exposure to a myriad of cultural backgrounds that enriches the learning and teaching experience. It is this person-centered aspect of education that introduces individuals to the broader society in which higher education operates—supporting sensitivity to such differences as culture, ethnicity, race, religion, international origin, and gender that are subject to the unique mission and culture of each institution.

Diversity is an asset to higher education; promoting diversity is a challenge. It challenges institutions to ensure access (recruitment), to take measures to successfully teach (retention and graduation), to provide requisite academic support, and to adapt teaching and learning styles to meet the needs of a diverse student body. It also presents some unique opportunities for teaching, learning, service, research, professional development and overall social, economic and intellectual growth.

As an asset, its benefits are numerous. Some of the outcomes of achieving and embracing diversity in higher education are as follow:

- Assists institutions in achieving their mission,
- Sustains a quality learning environment and quality educational experience,
- Creates an inclusive learning environment that empowers students,
- Develops a work force that can contribute to the social and economic competitiveness of the country, and
- Embraces the foundation of a democratic society.

Diversity in higher education is critical to the social and economic future of this country. Consequently, the Commission on Colleges supports the leadership role of its member institutions in promoting and sustaining diversity in all arenas of higher education.

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