

Senior Project: GrC DEI Committee Handbook

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[Link to Finished Product](#)

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Introduction and Project Abstract

The GrC Student Advisory Board developed a DEI Committee consisting of student members and faculty advisors to amplify resources and equal opportunities for the department in the Spring of 2023. For the Graphic Communication major at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, having a DEI Committee is valuable for several reasons, particularly given the context of Cal Poly lacking diversity. In fact, Cal Poly is considered the only predominantly white institution of the 23 CSU campuses, and also the whitest public university in California. A DEI Committee in GrC significantly contributes to creating a more inclusive, productive, and innovative environment in the department and at Cal Poly SLO as a whole. It's a step towards not just enhancing the educational experience for all students but also preparing them to enter a global workforce that values and practices diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Since this committee was recently launched and is experiencing early stages of development, the expectations and structure remain slightly vague and raised confusion and miscommunication among group members. In order to create a lasting impact on the behalf of the GrC DEI Committee, the handbook aims to unite and strengthen members through a meaningful purpose, clear expectations, and strong foundational structure. This handbook has been created in a digital format to be easily accessible for both student and faculty committee members. It is designed to serve as a comprehensive guide, addressing any queries the committee may encounter. All committee members are encouraged to engage with the content by editing, adding to, reformatting, or revising the handbook to enhance its effectiveness and functionality. Maintaining the handbook's relevance by regularly updating it with the most helpful information contributes to the long-term success of the GrC DEI Committee. Implementing the GrC DEI

Committee handbook as a reliable guiding tool will maximize the positive impact of the DEI Committee and enhance the training and development of members for years to come.

Literature Review

Defining DEI Theory

The American Psychological Association (APA) is the main professional organization of psychologists in the United States, and the largest psychological association in the world. It has over 157,000 members that include scientists, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. The APA defines the theory of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as a conceptual framework that “promotes the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially populations that have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, disability, and other demographic factors” (n.d.). In more specific terms, diversity refers to the composition or representation of various social identities, equity involves providing resources to help diverse populations achieve their maximum state of functioning, and inclusion strives for an appreciation and celebration of different perspectives and experiences. The elements and concepts within DEI Theory directly apply to my senior project, as the GrC DEI Committee Handbook guides committee members on how to amplify resources and a sense of belonging within the department while giving them ample resources and information to ensure long-term success.

Element 1: Implementing Change

One of the elements that is critical to the DEI Theory is applying its methods to meaningfully implement change. To improve DEI and execute valuable initiatives, an academic

journal published by the National Library of Medicine uses a case study from Endicott College to demonstrate how the creation of the Cultural Diversity Task Force led to positive cultural change. The first step was to inform areas of intervention and communicate gaps in DEI to faculty and department directors to increase inclusion. The task force identified seven steps in the development of intercultural curricula (Driscoll, et al.):

1. Identify important situational factors
2. Conduct a needs assessment
3. Identify/define key learning objectives
4. Decide upon feedback and assessment methods
5. Choose the most appropriate teaching and learning activities
6. Integrate activities into a coherent whole
7. Reflect on the process and identify key learning

To ensure that department-wide initiatives actively engaged faculty, the rationale for their application was thoroughly explained so that changes could be implemented in updated course content, updated syllabi, student engagement, supplementary faculty training programs, and the amplification of resources. These ideas parallel my senior project, as the task force operates with similar objectives of the GrC DEI Committee. The handbook has a large portion dedicated to outlining examples of initiatives the committee can embark on and its impact on the GrC department and Cal Poly SLO as a whole. The Journal of Educational Research and Practice expands upon higher education's responsibility to facilitate progressive change through Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) (Dawson et al., 2022). With the CRT approach, textbooks

and course materials, design choices, and classroom management can all take a more holistic approach to increase a sense of belonging. Research has shown these strategies are important to implement because they can “create culturally responsive and inclusive learning environments that increase engagement” (Dawson et al., 2022). It is clear that to drive long-term success and continued evolution of departmental DEI initiatives, it is crucial to continually evaluate efforts and skills while creating ongoing educational opportunities related to DEI.

Element 2: Current Trends

To maximize the effectiveness of DEI initiatives, efforts should align or at least consider current trends in DEI Theory. According to Bea Bourne, Senior Lead for DEI at Purdue Global, it is becoming more important to measure success through metrics such as DEI budget, diversity of employees and leadership, retention rates, incident reports, participation in DEI training, and mentorship programs (2023). Tracking and measuring these points allows for monitoring trends such as racism or discriminatory incidents in the workplace, how effective DEI training and development programs are at increasing inclusion and productivity, and the impact of having a diverse range of senior leaders. Implementing the use of data can identify DEI gaps and “help an organization to attract and retain underrepresented groups” (Bourne, 2023). I am incorporating these trends into my senior project by having sections on key performance indicators to guide student and faculty committee members on how to have more tangible forms of success. Explaining the importance of measuring the impact of DEI efforts in the handbook will allow committee members to understand “the importance of outcome metrics beyond demographics” while using data to “follow up and take action” (Zheng, 2023).

Element 3: Challenges

One of the most prominent challenges currently relating to DEI Theory at colleges and universities is the Supreme Court's decision to end race conscious admissions. Removing affirmative action has resulted in enrollment declines in higher education and California in particular saw "a precipitous drop in African-American enrollments at their flagship institutions" (Reddick, 2023). This has led many students to feel like DEI practices are less valued at their schools, relating to my senior project by assuring students that their unique voices matter and how to amplify resources. Another challenge for many DEI initiatives and committees is not having a strong supporting foundation. The American Sociological Association recognizes the need for an encouraging and knowledgeable mentor to support current leaders and foster ones to guide the future. Richard J. Reddick, Distinguished Service Professor in Educational Leadership and Policy & Associate Dean for Equity, Community Engagement, and Outreach for the University of Texas-Austin, claims his mentor was pivotal in helping his team achieve goals through "copious amounts of written feedback and always had his door open to help students better hone their arguments" (American Sociological Association, n.d.). Reddick's mentor instilled hope for change within his team, which is what the hope is for the DEI Committee faculty advisors. As outlined in the handbook I created, faculty advisors fulfill a mentor-like role, guiding the committee, offering them meaningful feedback, and supporting appropriate initiatives to propel DEI forward.

Synthesis/Thesis

It is clear that the elements of implementing change, aligning with trends, and addressing challenges prominent in DEI Theory directly apply to the creation of a handbook to lead the DEI Committee forward in the Graphic Communication department. The Institute of Education Sciences affirms the importance of handbooks to “protect the institution, support a productive culture, and ease concerns by creating clear expectations” (Crowley & Simmons, 2019). By aligning my senior project to these goals and relating directly to DEI Theory, the effectiveness of the handbook is maximized. One challenge of handbooks is that members may not read them due to a struggle to access the material and it often has outdated information (Maea, 2019). To address these concerns, the handbook will be located in a shared online drive with both faculty and student committee members for easy access. Committee members are also expected to update the handbook as needed, which is convenient to do since it is an editable Google Document. Human Resource Manager and LinkedIn Top Voice author, Manisha Arya, outlines five essential characteristics that make a handbook engaging and meaningful (n.d.):

1. Be accessible to edit and follow, most effective in a digital format
2. Communicate its value and purpose
3. Train and Reinforce learners on the handbook content
4. Solicit feedback on content and design
5. Lead by example

These factors are emphasized in the handbook to maximize its helpfulness to the DEI Committee and its role in strengthening an inclusive community. Combining the strategic creation of a

handbook accompanied by its alignment to critical elements of DEI Theory help provide a strong supporting foundation to the GrC DEI Committee while making diverse voices and ideas celebrated.

Results

I created my [handbook](#) by first meeting with student members of the DEI Committee to assess what topics would be beneficial to them and future members. They also confirmed that creating the handbook in Google Docs was the best mode to relay information since both students and faculty can easily access it and edit it as needed. Adding or changing information in the handbook allows it to stay up to date to provide future members with the most relevant and helpful information or resources. Google Docs also allows the table of contents to be linked to different headers and subheaders, making it easy to navigate despite it being a document with over 20 pages.

I decided to begin the handbook with a preface explaining its objectives and how readers could use it, as well as defining DEI and the context of DEI at Cal Poly SLO. Receiving feedback from a fourth year GrC major led me to view the importance of explaining what DEI is, how it is applied in the context of our college, and how the GrC department can make meaningful change that impacts the university as a whole. The result of this was students feeling more motivated to succeed in their role as DEI Committee members by understanding their contributions toward creating meaningful change that impacts individuals, communities, and the corporation as a whole.

To analyze the results of my Senior Project, I received meaningful feedback from multiple sources: students within GrC, students outside of the department, GrC DEI Committee members, and the Associate Dean for Diversity and Curriculum for CLA. I collected feedback from creating a Google Form that allowed feedback givers to view the handbook I created and answer questions that assess the handbook's relevance, design navigation, helpfulness, specificity, clarity, and areas for improvement. 75 percent of responses affirmed that the handbook is easy to understand, is thorough and well organized, and contains important topics. 25 percent of responses also pointed toward areas of improvement by including sections dedicated to performance metrics and how to strengthen DEI in curriculum as well as policies.

Conclusion

This project was indescribably meaningful to me since I am passionate about strengthening inclusivity in any environment, and was one of the pioneering creators of the GrC DEI Committee. The values of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cal Poly SLO can be empowered one department at a time to enrich the educational journey for all students while preparing them to enter a global workforce where they will interact with a diverse range of perspectives, ideas, experiences, and backgrounds. I hope the handbook can be used as a supporting resource for years to come and allow the Graphic Communication department to be a beacon of creativity, a space where differences are not just accepted but celebrated, and a community that embraces progressive change collectively.

Reflection and Limitations

Although the handbook is thorough and covers many areas that would benefit the GrC DEI Committee, it is important to note that not all the work is complete. As stated in the feedback survey, one of the most crucial aspects for this committee is to know how effective their initiatives are by using performance indicators and success metrics. I plan to collaborate with both student and faculty DEI Committee members to assess what kinds of performance metrics would give insight into successful practices and room for growth. To enhance DEI on a more fundamental level, as the feedback survey also mentioned, the handbook should also describe how the department could implement these values by integrating them in policies and curriculum structure. Since department policies and curriculum development lay outside of my knowledge, I would collaborate with the department head of GrC as well as the Dean of CLA to assess how DEI could be strengthened in the curriculum. This could be an ongoing conversation the DEI Committee has with faculty of the Graphic Communication department as well as DEI leaders in the College of Liberal Arts.

Difficulties of this project that I encountered were choosing which topics to include in the handbook and what areas of focus would be the most helpful to the DEI committee. In order to narrow my area of focus, I looked at DEI handbook examples from esteemed universities such as Harvard, but tailored topics to meet specific objectives of the GrC department as well as fit within the context of Cal Poly SLO. Another limitation I encountered was completing my project in a short time frame of ten weeks, and I was not able to complete a final version of the handbook within this period. The completed version necessitates valuable collaboration with the DEI Committee as well as DEI professionals and coordinators at Cal Poly SLO, and finding

aligned availability times to meet was difficult. In order to successfully move forward with this project, I plan on scheduling a meeting with faculty and student members of the DEI committee at the beginning of Spring Quarter 2024 to assess how I can implement the improvements noted in my feedback assessment. I will meet with them every other week until a finalized version is approved to maximize the benefits and fulfill its purpose to guide future student and faculty members of the GrC DEI Committee. I look forward to collaborating with others who are passionate about amplifying diversity, equity, and inclusion for the Graphic Communication department and am enthused to see how the handbook can serve as a supporting resource for the DEI Committee. I am eagerly anticipating the opportunity to collaborate with others who share a passion for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Graphic Communication department through making the handbook the best it can be.

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