GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every word and term used in our work and conversation about diversity, inclusion, and social justice. These are basic working definitions to be used as a reference to help move equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts forward.

Ability - power or capacity to do or act physically, mentally, legally, morally, financially, etc.
Access - creating the necessary conditions so that individuals and organizations desiring to, and who are eligible to, use our services, facilities, programs and employment opportunities.
Ally - a person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another group; typically member of dominant identity advocating and supporting a marginalized group.
Asexual - person who is not sexually attracted to anyone or does not have a sexual orientation. They may or may not experience romantic attraction.
Bisexuality - a sexual orientation in which a person has the potential to feel physically and emotionally attracted to more than one gender.
Culture - is a way of life of a group of people—the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
Cultural appropriation: the adoption or taking of specific elements (such as ideas, symbols, artifacts, images, art, rituals, icons, behavior, music, styles) of one culture by another culture. There have been many conversations regarding what cultural appropriation vs. cultural appreciation looks like, and to what extent we all participate in it. Cultural appropriation can be defined as the “cherry picking” or selecting of certain aspects of a culture, and ignoring their original significance for the purpose of belittling it as a trend. Appreciation is honoring and respecting another culture and its practices, as a way to gain knowledge and understanding.
Cultural Competence - refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four components: (a) Awareness of one’s own cultural worldview, (b) Attitude towards cultural differences, (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (d) Cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period.
Cultural Representations: Cultural representations refer to popular stereotypes, images, frames and narratives that are socialized and reinforced by media, language and other forms of mass communication and “common sense.” Cultural representations can be positive or negative, but from the perspective of the dismantling structural racism analysis, too often cultural representations depict people of color in ways that are dehumanizing, perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes, and have the overall effect of allowing unfair treatment within the society as a whole to seem fair, or ‘natural.’
Disability - a physical, mental or cognitive impairment or condition that requires special accommodations to ensure programmatic and physical access.
Diversity - psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals; including but not limited to race, color, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information and learning styles. A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist.
Ethnicity - a social construct which divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.
Equality - evenly distributed access to resources and opportunity necessary for a safe and healthy life; uniform distribution of access that may or may not result in equitable outcomes.

Equity - is the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all students, faculty, and staff, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that there are historically underserved and underrepresented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.

Gay - A common and acceptable word for male homosexuals, but used for both genders.

Gender - the socially constructed ideas about behavior, actions, and roles a particular sex performs. Gender Identity - a personal conception of one’s own gender; often in relation to a gender opposition between masculinity and femininity. It is how people externally communicate or perform their gender identity to others. Gender Expression - an individual’s outward and external gendered appearance. This may include hair styles, clothes, accessories, and mannerisms. Gender expression may also include gender roles which are also defined by an individual’s culture/society.

Implicit Bias: Also known as implicit social cognition, implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection.

Inclusion - the act of creating involvement, environments and empowerment in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate with equal access to opportunities and resources embrace differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people.

Intercultural competence - is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.

Individual Racism: Individual racism can include face-to-face or covert actions toward a person that intentionally express prejudice, hate or bias based on race.

Institutional power: The ability or official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The capacity to exercise control over others.

Institutional Racism: Institutional racism refers to the policies and practices within and across institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor, or put a racial group at a disadvantage. Pignant examples of institutional racism can be found in school disciplinary policies in which students of color are punished at much higher rates that their white counterparts, in the criminal justice system, and within many employment sectors in which day-to-day operations, as well as hiring and firing practices can significantly disadvantage workers of color.

Internalized oppression: The process whereby people in the target group make oppression internal and personal by coming to believe that the lies, prejudices, and stereotypes about them are true. Members of target groups exhibit internalized oppression when they alter their attitudes, behaviors, speech, and self-confidence to reflect the stereotypes and norms of the dominant group. Internalized oppression can create low self-esteem, self-doubt, and even self-loathing. It can also be projected outward as fear, criticism, and distrust of members of one’s target group.

LGBTQAAI - The acronym that means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. The addition of a “Q” at the end often means “questioning” or “queer.” One “A” stands for “asexual”, another for “allies”. The “I” means “intersex”. Lesbian - A common and acceptable word for a female homosexual only.

Marginalization - Treatment of a person, group or concept as insignificant or pervasive and places them outside of
the mainstream society.

Micro aggressions - intentional or unintentional verbal, nonverbal or environmental slights/insults that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to people based upon their marginalized group.

Multiculturalism - the practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, religions, languages, social equity, races, ethnicities, attitudes, and opinions within an environment. The theory and practice promotes peaceful coexistence of all identities and people.

Oppression: The combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant groups”). Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing. 

Four Levels of Oppression/“isms” and Change:

- Personal: Values, Beliefs, Feelings
- Interpersonal: Actions, Behaviors, Language
- Institutional: Rules, Policies, Procedures
- Cultural: Beauty, Truth, Right

Power - ability to control, coerce or influence people based on privilege identities. Power may be positional and provide access to social, political, and economic resources.

Power-over - used in discriminatory and oppressive way. Having power over others and therefore domination and control over others (e.g. through coercion and violence)

Power-with - shared with all people in struggles for liberation and equality. Using or exercising one’s power to work with others equitably, for example, in a social movement.

Privilege - any unearned benefit, right or advantage one receives in society by nature of their identities 

Progress & Retrenchment: This term refers to the pattern in which progress is made through the passage of legislation, court rulings and other formal mechanisms that aim to promote racial equality. Brown v. Board of Education and the Fair Housing Act are two prime examples of such progress. But retrenchment refers to the ways in which this progress is very often challenged, neutralized or undermined. In many cases after a measure is enacted that can be counted as progress, significant backlashes—retrenchment—develop in key public policy areas. Some examples include the gradual erosion of affirmative action programs, practices among real estate professionals that maintain segregated neighborhoods, and failure on the part of local governments to enforce equity oriented policies such as inclusionary zoning laws.

Queer - Some LGBTQ people use this term as a way of reclaiming the power associated in the past with this term and other derogatory terms (such as fag or dyke). Others use it as a more general all-inclusive term to represent a variety of sexual orientations and/or gender identities or anything that defies easy definition or categorization. Like any term or label, there is no general consensus on what Queer means, and it is still considered offensive by older generations.

Race - a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance, ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the political needs of a society at a given period of time.

Racial Equity: Racial equity refers to what a genuinely non-racist society would look like. In a racially equitable society, the distribution of society’s benefits and burdens would not be skewed by race. In other words, racial equity would be a reality in which a person is no more or less likely to experience society’s benefits or burdens just because of the color of their skin. This is in contrast to the current state of affairs in which a person of color is more likely to live in poverty, be imprisoned, drop out of high school, be unemployed and experience poor health outcomes like diabetes,
heart disease, depression and other potentially fatal diseases. Racial equity holds society to a higher standard. It demands that we pay attention not just to individual-level discrimination, but to overall social outcomes.

Racism: Racism is a system in which one race maintains supremacy over another race through a set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and institutional power. Racism is a “system of structured dis-equality where the goods, services, rewards, privileges, and benefits of the society are available to individuals according to their presumed membership in” particular racial groups. A person of any race can have prejudices about people of other races, but only members of the dominant social group can exhibit racism because racism is prejudice plus the institutional power to enforce it.

Respect - a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important, valued and should be treated in a dignified way

Sexual Orientation - the direction of one’s sexual attraction toward the same gender, opposite gender, or other genders. It is on a continuum and not necessarily a set of absolute categories.

Social Construct - An idea that appears to be natural and obvious to people who accept it but may or may not represent reality

Social Justice- to take action as an advocate for a just society where all people have a right to fair and equitable treatment, support and resources

Stereotype: An exaggerated or distorted belief that attributes characteristics to members of a particular group, simplistically lumping them together and refusing to acknowledge differences among members of the group.

Structural Racism: A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time.

Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.

Systemic Racism: In many ways “systemic racism” and “structural racism” are synonymous. If there is a difference between the terms, it can be said to exist in the fact that a structural racism analysis pays more attention to the historical, cultural and social psychological aspects of our currently racialized society.

Transgender

1) An umbrella term for transsexuals, cross-dressers (transvestites), gender queers, and people who identify as neither female nor male and/or as neither a man nor as a woman. Transgender is not a sexual orientation; transgender people may have any sexual orientation.

2) Transgender people are those whose psychological self (“gender identity” – one’s internal experience of their gender) differs from the physical sex with which they were born (“biological sex” - one’s body - genitals, chromosomes, etc.). Often, society conflates sex and gender, viewing them as the same thing. However, gender and sex are not the same thing.

White Privilege: White privilege, or “historically accumulated white privilege,” as we have come to call it, refers to whites’ historical and contemporary advantages in access to quality education, decent jobs and liveable wages, home ownership, retirement benefits, wealth and so on. The following quotation from a publication by Peggy Macintosh can be helpful in understanding what is meant by white privilege: “As a white person I had been taught about racism that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. . . White privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in every day, but about which I was meant to remain oblivious.”