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THE COVID-19 DEI CRISIS ACTION STRATEGY GUIDE

RECOMMENDATIONS TO DRIVE INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

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Executive Summary

In two tumultuous weeks, the novel coronavirus pandemic has transformed our entire way of life. Colleges and universities have abruptly suspended in-person instruction and emptied on-campus housing with the explicit goal of helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This pandemic is fast becoming a defining world moment for our Generation Z students, much as 9/11 was for millennials. Too often in times of crisis, however, it is the under-represented and marginalized who bear the brunt of sudden change. Classes shift to online as some students return home to technology deserts. If we are not vigilant, a new era of bias incidents can escalate, and we may even lose an entire generation of diverse college graduates.

It is easy to chase diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) crisis moments like an independent, impulsive cheetah, rather than in strategic and thoughtful collaboration like a wolf with their pack. Knowing the difference is an investment that can help institutions conquer these crises over the long haul.

Wherever this situation takes us, we must respond with continued, even elevated, inclusive excellence. While a public health crisis, this situation is at its core a DEI crisis with the potential for flashpoints and serious damage at any moment—and it must be treated as such, in every step you and your institution take, in every communication. How do we react with DEI awareness to a demanding situation we have never encountered?

We need a solid framework for analyzing each decision, to ensure that we are valuing and including all we are helping and not stressing or hurting them further. This paper presents the COVID-19 DEI Crisis Action Framework as a model for taking action and includes dozens of ideas and tips for on-the-ground implementation, plus resources from around the country. Its goal is to help structure your leadership, decision-making and approach to managing this crisis for the weeks and months ahead in a way that includes all community members as we shift quickly to distance learning/working to ensure everyone's safety.

THE COVID-19 DEI CRISIS ACTION FRAMEWORK

Even given the urgency, rapid evolution and short time frames of this crisis, we must shift from cheetah-like reactions to a deliberate, wolf-like approach. We must foster belonging and avoid “othering” our faculty, staff and students as we make these fast and difficult decisions. We must remain socially connected even as we separate physically—we need community (our immune systems even benefit from it). We need to maintain empathy for one another even in our isolation. How do we maintain community and belonging, elevate DEI in further behind in this crisis, and we can continue to advance an agenda that makes our organizations inclusive and excellent for everyone.

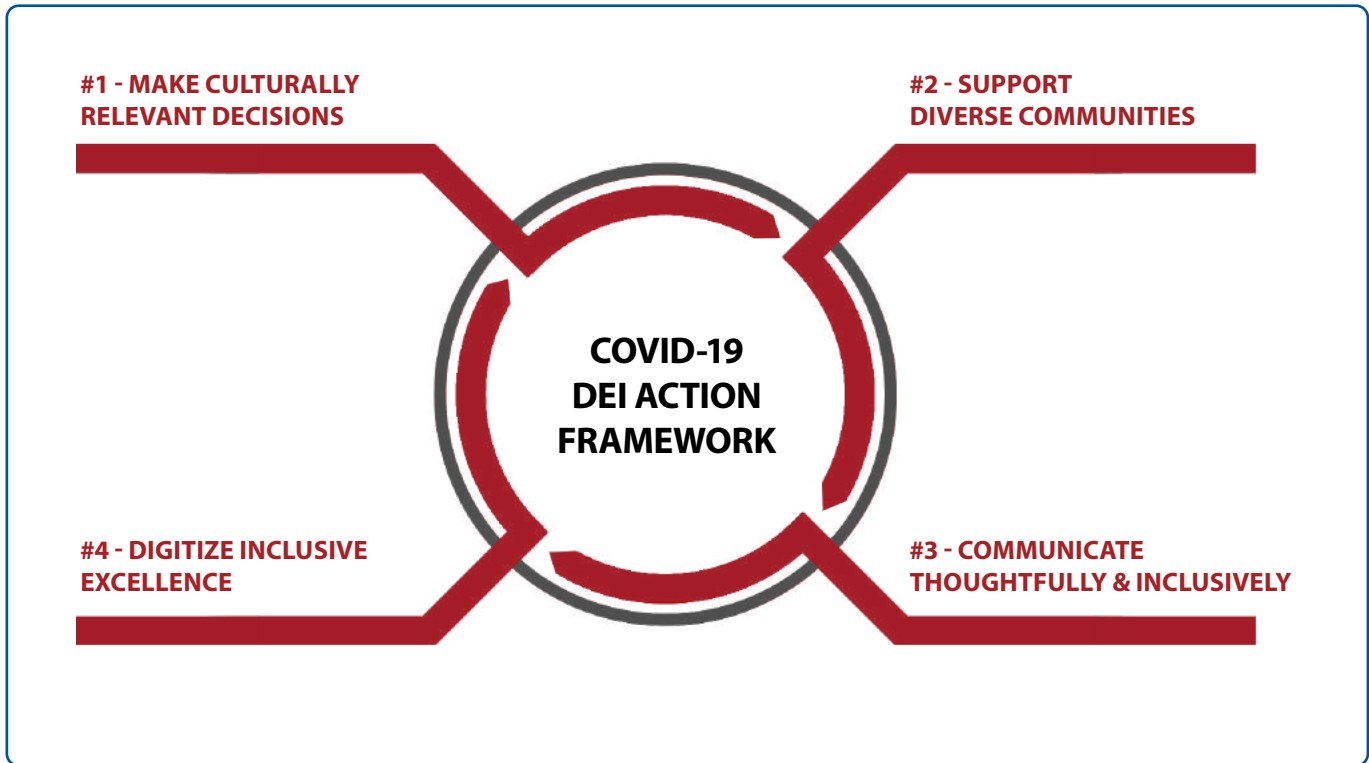
OTHERING

John A. Powell and his colleagues at the Othering and Belonging Institute of UC Berkeley assert that “othering” is the defining problem of the twenty-first century. They define othering as a set of dynamics, processes and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality for diverse communities. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone.

Exhibit 1

COVID-19 DEI CRISIS ACTION FRAMEWORK

A summary of the multidimensional action framework that we developed to support your efforts. After conversations with dozens of colleges and universities while tracking their COVID-19 actions, our recommendations fall into four main themes that each reinforce the effectiveness of the others.



FOUR MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS TO DRIVE INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE DURING THE COVID-19 DEI CRISIS

(1) Make Culturally Relevant Decisions

Applying cultural relevance is a skill that must be added to all decision-making committees. While understanding that we are each dealing with our own issues, we must keep asking DEI questions, at every point, to ensure we are reaching and including our most vulnerable and marginalized populations, to ensure everyone comes through this crisis together and well. Secondly, specifically building a focused “tiger team” to offer DEI expertise to the entire campus will improve overall responses. Finally, ground-truthing all solutions in the lived reality of members of the campus community will manifest the most effective decisions.

(2) Support Diverse Communities

An institution of learning is also a place of living, connecting, eating and working. In a time like this, the needs of diverse and vulnerable students, staff and even faculty may easily be lost in efforts to build mass solutions to a crisis. We must set up processes to address not just academic but basic and cultural needs. Specific diverse communities may need additional support. Mental and emotional health, job loss and limited financial resources, weak social networks, abusive home situations, disabilities, digital deserts, sick leave—these issues and more

must be addressed as we work to maintain a strong sense of community in classes, departments, units and for the entire school. To be inclusive, we must ensure those who understand these needs are centrally embedded in the decision-making processes. Finally, a key component of this change is rethinking many policies (e.g., shifting grades to P/F), both temporarily and for the longer term.

(3) Communicate Thoughtfully and Inclusively

There is no such thing as over-communication in a crisis, when stress reduces memory and cognitive functions and multiple touches are needed, yet all such communication must be sensitive and effective, and they must reach everyone. We offer guidance here for communicating intentionally and inclusively, as well as simply, transparently and often, as we work the challenge and provide crisis leadership.

(4) Digitize Inclusive Excellence

To successfully shift operations off-campus, we must build high-impact and inclusive digital communities and digitize inclusive excellence. Whether your institution is a digital beginner or guru, now is the time make all the connectivity at hand work effectively. Additionally, we must focus on reaching out to ensure everyone comes along with us. This portion of the paper is the heaviest in outright tips, gathered from institutions around the country, for creating not just academic connection but community with our students and all employees and digitizing inclusive excellence in a way that benefits every person.

Working within this four-part action framework, we can prevent people of diverse identities from being left further behind in this crisis, and we can continue to advance an agenda that makes our organizations inclusive and excellent for everyone.

Thank you for your extraordinary efforts and service to others in these unprecedented times. Your dedication and your actions to improve your ability to serve your students, colleagues and institution, all while managing your own collection of “STUFF” and physical separation—these efforts are seen and deeply appreciated. Please let us know how else we can support you.

In service,



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Responding to COVID-19

Too often in times of crisis, it is the under-represented and vulnerable who bear the brunt of sudden change. This pandemic is fast becoming a defining world event, not just on our campuses, where every person has been affected, but for those who are vulnerable in every way we choose to define vulnerability. For them, the challenges are mounting daily.

Food insecurity, inability to participate in classes or work due to living in a technology desert, the threat of the unknown, microaggressions, homelessness, and job loss combine with social isolation and a mounting sense of depression as graduation and year-end celebrations are cancelled, and so much more.

With every day, the mood changes nationally. Dog-whistle language is widespread as the “Chinese virus” is blamed for interrupting our way of life. No one debates the need to accelerate physical distances and preserve our health care bandwidth for those who require it. Yet the specter of disconnection is growing in our communities like a dark shroud, concealing and cutting off those who most need support.

The ability to quickly return home and shelter in place, with an abundance of resources and support, is simply a reality of the privileged. In times like these, leaders must look at the world through perspectives other than their own. They must put diverse groups and communities at the center of a decision-making process that is strategic, collaborative and culturally aligned to the needs of the alpha as well as the omega in the pack.

THE CHEETAH AND THE WOLF: A METAPHOR FOR LEADERS

One of the central findings of our research in *Strategic Diversity Leadership: Activating Change and Transformation in Higher Education* is that leaders often react to DEI flashpoints with a burst of reactionary energy. There is no plan for thoughtful response, a big-picture framework to guide actions or a clear sense of considering all angles and how the pieces fit together into a cohesive whole. Instead, they tend to move with the dynamic energy of the cheetah, not with the collective strategy and collaboration of the wolf-pack.

No one can deny the need for rapid response to contain COVID-19. Nor can we be Monday-morning-criticizing the decisions of campus leaders who are facing historic challenges and, candidly, dealing with a cascading effect of poor leadership that begins at the feet of the federal government. Our leaders have been cast in a 24/7 survival mode for roughly three weeks, and folks are doing the best that we can.

But we can't stay in short-term survival mode forever. At some point, we have to shift from one-off, piece-meal, reactionary moves to a more wolf-like collective approach. We must get more people involved in decision-making, prioritize the vulnerable and chart our path towards the bigger picture. Independent and swift, our cheetah-like moves kept us moving forward at first. Now, however, as issues begin to clarify, leaders have a responsibility to shift their teams into a forward-looking, collaborative response to a situation that, candidly, will not likely stabilize for months.

Knowing the difference between reacting and doing what one person, or even a small group, thinks is best (the cheetah approach), versus moving as a collective with a shared strategy that examines all angles (the wolf method), is an investment that can help institutions to win over the long haul. Wherever this situation takes us, we must respond with continued, even elevated, inclusive excellence strategy and a coordinated, wolf-like mindset. This is the only way to ensure that the whole of our communities can continue to thrive in and beyond this difficult time.

FRAMEWORK OVERVIEW

What we need is a solid framework for analyzing each decision made, to ensure that we are valuing and including all we are helping, not stressing or hurting them further. To work through this, we must focus on a positive and optimistic overlay as well and not get sucked into the potential negativity and uncertainty of it all. Further, we must maintain that positive tone and intention for all of our students, staff and faculty, most of whom are operating on overload right now.

This paper offers the COVID-19 DEI Crisis Action Framework as a model to help structure your leadership, decision-making and approach to managing this crisis—now as well as into the days, weeks and months ahead—in a way that elevates DEI as we shift to distance learning and work to ensure everyone’s safety.

Section 1 overviews the COVID-19 DEI Action Framework. Sections 2-5 delve into each of the four main recommendations in the model, highlighting multiple key tips and action steps. This process is designed to help leaders like you shift towards operating like a wolf, maintaining the values of diversity, equity and inclusion at a high level and function.



What we need is a solid framework for analyzing each decision made, to ensure that we are valuing and including all we are helping, not stressing or hurting them further.

Our focus in the model is fourfold, to help you: (1) Make culturally relevant decisions in these moments of crisis, (2) support diverse and vulnerable populations, (3) communicate intentionally and inclusively, and (4) digitize inclusive excellence in leading your teams, building community and educating students. We close this paper with some final guidance on leveraging this framework and supporting your colleagues around the nation, by sharing tips and best practices we have collected from leaders like you.

SECTION 1

Othering, Belonging and the COVID-19 DEI Crisis Action Framework

As we manage in the COVID-19 crisis, even given its urgency, rapid evolution and short time frames, we must shift from cheetah-like reactions to a deliberate, wolf-like approach, one that is mindful of DEI challenges in otherwise admirable responses to COVID-19. We must foster belonging while avoiding othering our faculty, staff and students as we make fast and difficult decisions.

TREND: OTHERING THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

John A. Powell and colleagues at the [Othering and Belonging Institute](#) of UC Berkeley assert that “othering” is the defining problem of the twenty-first century. They define othering as a set of dynamics, processes and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality for diverse communities. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation and skin tone.

As we analyze the COVID-19 pandemic’s DEI implications, it’s clear that the problem of othering is a challenge that will clearly emerge, particularly when today’s challenges are looked at through a historical lens. For example, post-9/11, racism and hate crimes—othering—against Muslims emerged as a major reality. Hate crimes and bias incidents against this group has steadily risen through the years since.

As COVID-19 plays out, you can already quickly see the pendulum shifting; people of Asian descent have [reported being the victims of hate speech and actions](#) because of the virus’s origin in China. Anti-Asian sentiments have historic staying power, echoing the “yellow peril” concept from decades

ago, depicting Asian nationalities as a mysterious and dangerous “other.”

Although members of the Asian American community have come to be falsely labeled as America’s “model minority,” they have been othered in ways that limit the full expression of their experiences. This pan-ethnic community of over 100 diverse cultures, histories and realities has been reduced to a monolith, minimizing the racialized challenges these groups and individuals have experienced to this very day and creating a wide target for bias.



We believe this situation will escalate as we move into an era of “social distancing” and increased dog-whistle political moves such as framing COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus.” Witness how University of Florida president [W. Kent Fuchs](#) [tweeted](#) on March 13 that he’d received reports of students of Asian descent facing racist comments on campus. “There is never a place for racism in our community – or bigotry toward any person or group,” he responded in the tweet. “We must unite to defeat this virus!”

Although on-campus incidents are less likely now with schools closed, campus leaders should offer statements of support for their Asian communities and

ensure that neither micro-aggressive nor dog-whistle speech can be found in institutional communications such as social media. This principle could easily be extended to the entire international student population as well. In March the pandemic's epicenter shifted from Asia to Europe, with nations like Iran and Italy hotspots, and Spain and France going into lockdown.

**SAFETY WITH BELONGING:
SHIFTING OUR LANGUAGE FROM
"SOCIAL" TO "PHYSICAL" DISTANCING**

The challenge of othering during COVID-19 is not limited to the Asian American community, or even the broader international community. The challenge of othering is being pushed at the very core of the messaging that

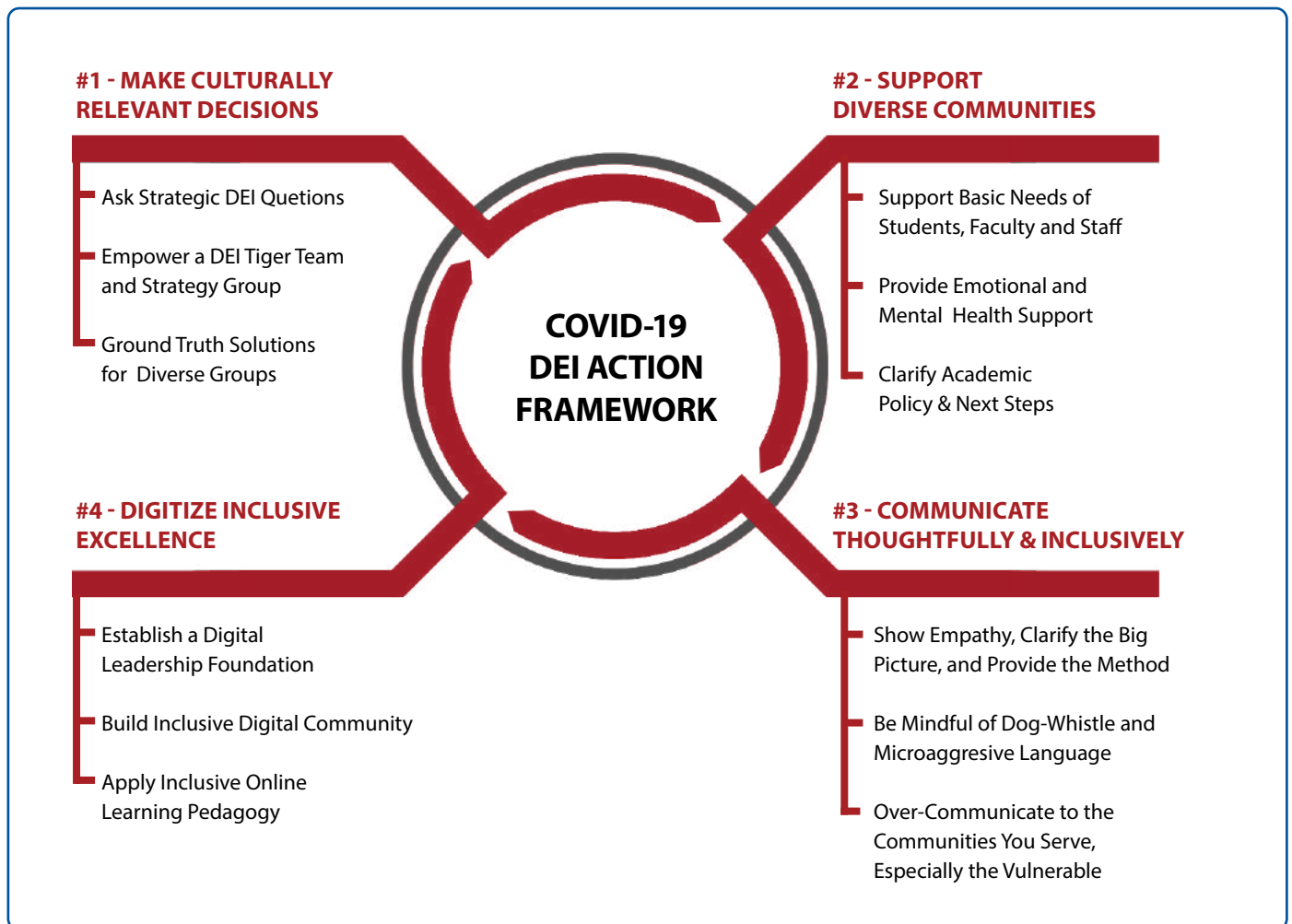
is being offered from our nation's leaders, to socially distance ourselves from another.

With every day, our nation's communities are increasingly coming to recognize the need to follow the guidance of the CDC and limit our time in groups of (at the time of this writing) 10 or more, and to stay at least six feet away from one another when possible. Yet DEI leaders like myself cringe every time we hear the term "social distancing" used in the media and in institutions' strategic communications.

Yes, we have to limit our physical contact with one another, no doubt. Yet, like the wolf, we are social creatures, for whom positive socializing has in fact been

Exhibit 1

THE COVID-19 DEI CRISIS ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK



shown in research to boost our immune functioning. The term “social distancing” does more than simply champion increased physical space—it sends a message that can have lasting implications for our work in breaking the habits of [unconscious bias](#) and [microaggression](#) to foster an everyday culture of inclusion.

As we manage the COVID-19 crisis, we need social connection, not social silos. We need community, not isolation. And we need to elevate empathy for each other, and particularly for those communities that are typically cast as “other” because of their identities and life experiences.

Perhaps the more appropriate term is not “social distancing” but “physical distancing,” a phrase that allows us to achieve the same containment benefits without losing sight of the big-picture need to remain connected and in community—as neighbors, as members of the university community and as a nation.

COVID-19 cannot allow us to expand the sense of otherness that lives so profoundly in our diverse communities. By transitioning our language from a discussion of “social distancing” to “physical distancing,” we can actively reduce othering and strengthen belonging.

FOUR MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS TO DRIVE INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE DURING THE COVID-19 DEI CRISIS

We must remember that, in addition to being a public health crisis, this situation is at its core a DEI crisis with the potential for flashpoints at any moment. This crisis must be treated as such, in every step you and your institution take, and in every communication. But how do we react with strategic diversity leadership in such a demanding situation, the likes of which we have never encountered?

Exhibit 1. presents a multidimensional situation action framework that we developed to support your efforts to manage the COVID-19 DEI crisis. The model begins by

asking the question, “How can we manage the COVID-19 public health crisis in ways that support diversity, equity and inclusion and limit unintended consequences? In response to this question, four recommendations become paramount:

#1: MAKE ALL DECISIONS CULTURALLY-RELEVANT. Make all decisions culturally relevant and strategic diversity leadership focused. Invest in building a DEI “tiger team” to improve responses. Ground-truth all solutions in the lived reality of members of your campus community. (Section 2.)

#2: SUPPORT DIVERSE COMMUNITIES. Support diverse and often vulnerable communities in a time when their needs may be lost in efforts to build scalable solutions. (Section 3.)

#3: COMMUNICATE INTENTIONALLY AND INCLUSIVELY. Communicate intentionally and inclusively, as well as simply, transparently and often, as we work the challenge and provide crisis leadership. (Section 4.)

#4: DIGITIZE INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE. Build high-impact and inclusive digital communities. (Section 5.)

This paper will walk you through several recommendations that can become a backbone to inform your leadership overcoming the COVID-19 crisis. Working within this framework, we can all prevent people of diverse identities being left further behind and continue to advance an agenda that makes our organizations inclusive and excellent for all.

Make Culturally Relevant Decisions

Great decisions come from cognitive diversity in your decision-making team and cultural relevance applied in the process of decision-making (Page, 2017). This knowledge suggests three actions: asking strategic DEI questions at every decision-point, leveraging diverse teams to drive cognitive diversity and limit group think, and ground-truthing your solutions in order to find fault lines where some groups may be left behind.

Cultural intelligence is the ability to interact and relate effectively across cultures (Williams, 2013). Whereas cultural intelligence is about developing personal competency and skills, *applying* those skills to leadership challenges is what it means to have a culturally relevant lens for decision-making. This means working to understand how culture—beliefs, worldviews, stereotypes, history, values, perspectives and assumptions—may (or may not) be relevant to a decision.

At every decision point, whether seemingly minor or major, we must apply a culturally relevant lens to decode the symbolic messages and material impact that will be sent (intentionally or unintentionally) by your actions (see Exhibit 2.1 for tips for asking strategic DEI questions with a culturally relevant lens).

ASK STRATEGIC DEI QUESTIONS AT EVERY DECISION POINT

At every Put simply, what is the DEI angle on everything your institution is doing? How might each decision affect economically vulnerable students? Students living with mental health challenges? Those who have no place to go or be? Those who are minoritized and don't feel that they belong? Those who are worried

about basic needs, from housing to food insecurity to finding free Wi-Fi so they can finish their courses online? Ask yourself “what is the worst thing that can happen if we move forward with this course of action? If we take another course of action? If we make no action?” Dynamically applying these questions to an issue is key to making culturally relevant decisions.

One aspect of this process involves decoding symbolic messages sent in your communications or decisions, intentionally or unintentionally. This process helps you serve as a cultural bridge-builder. The key is to work from prior cultural knowledge, to make connections between what is known and what is to be done from a strategic context, reading the complexity, knowing the messages that will be sent, and acting accordingly.

“S.T.U.F.F.” and Unconscious Bias in Decision-Making

This crisis is not the last time that an overwhelm of factors is going to widely impact our decision-making. It will indeed remain at an all-time high as we manage the new COVID-19 DEI reality. Leaders are going to have to make tough decisions in the face of STUFF:

- S** Stressful dynamics
- T** Time constraints
- U**ncertainty
- F**atigue
- F**ears, sometimes profound

We must remember that every single one of us is overloaded and dealing with the mangle of complex issues we call STUFF!

When DEI flashpoints occur during times of STUFF, however, leaders are more likely to make sub-optimal decisions (Eberhardt, 2019; Ross & Tartaglione, 2018).

They are less likely to see all the angles and to lead in ways that don't fall prey to their unconscious bias. Of all the stimulus that comes through our eyes, ears and noses every day, we consciously take in only a small amount of it. We're always filtering; we have to. But the reality is that we all have confirmation bias—we tend to notice things that match what we already feel and believe.

In this instance, a bias that says "everyone can get home and wants to get home in the face of the COVID-19" is clearly not the case. Some students neither wanted to go home, because it was unsafe, nor were financially capable of it. This decision-making process became micro-invalidating for these students, leaving them embarrassed, frightened and stressed because they were unable to comply.

As leaders move deeper into navigating COVID-19's complexities, they must not only use the culturally relevant question techniques poised previously (Section 2), but also prime themselves to make better decisions by ensuring everyone is fully aware of their biases and how they could be impacting their decisions. This issue is about managing our brains to interrupt those hard-wired biases that steer us toward one person and away from another. We have to look for the points in this crisis management process where unconscious bias might creep in, and then we must develop approaches to disrupt it.

Unconscious bias tends to more greatly impact decision-making processes when leaders are experiencing STUFF themselves. Therefore, it is especially important to slow down when making decisions during these times to minimize the impact of unconscious bias, to shift from fast decision to robust ones that consider DEI angles. Without this minor investment in more careful decision, these become the moments when inclusion dynamics break down and DEI flashpoints explode. As leaders, we have to push ourselves to see the world from the perspective of others.

Technique: Prime Meetings to Become More Mindful

One technique that can potentially mitigate bias and groupthink in decision-making is to begin each meeting with an opening statement that recognizes DEI as a goal, for example:

"Okay, we have to figure out our next steps, but I want to start by saying it is paramount that we figure this out in a way that does not cause harm to our diverse students.

So, just to let you know, as we begin to work this problem, I'm going to keep coming back to checking in against the question 'how does this affect our diverse and vulnerable students?'"

This cognitive priming will ensure leaders are more mindful and present during the decisions at hand, and will not slip into unconscious biases, which we all have. Put simply, when STUFF is happening, stressing and distracting us, we have to hit pause, even if ever so briefly, become more mindful about our priorities, and lock into the principles of inclusive excellence and these tools for culturally relevant decision-making.

An Artful Science

Truth be told, this process is an artful science. Applying a culturally relevant lens is more than employing hard rules or using a simple psycho-graphic profile of a "one size fits all" monolithic experience. While it is seductive to use some limited data to say "all LGBTQ," or "all Latinos," or "all African Americans do X," applying a culturally relevant lens is not about stereotyping. Applying a culturally-relevant lens means taking a pause to look at a situation from multiple angles. It is about embracing the complexity and trying to make the best decision possible, oftentimes using imperfect data in a high-stress situation like a pandemic or other crisis.

TIPS FOR APPLYING A CULTURALLY-RELEVANT LENS

- Ask, “What is the diversity or inclusion angle of this situation?” Conduct an Internet search on a particular challenge or issue.
- List potential unintended consequences. Identify the “maximum harm perspective,” then ask how realistic that outcome is. Also ask:
 - How will this decision cause harm to or impact diverse communities?
 - Who can comply with this decision? Who is challenged to do so? Who needs help and what do they need?
 - Who simply cannot answer it and what do they need?
- Determine whether the current situation has any historical or organizational precedent or implications. What was done well in that other situation? Poorly? What lessons can be learned from the past?
- List any stereotypes that may be relevant to the decisions or topic at hand.
- Note the potential symbolic messages within a negatively-received decision.
- Ask, “What symbolic messages will result because of this decision from the perspective of different groups?”
- Below is a short list of identity factors to get you thinking (it is by no means complete and has been alphabetized to avoid favoring any group). Work through each of these groups to help define how you should move forward and what is the consequences of doing so:

Age, Area of Origin, Culture, (Dis)ability, Economic Status, Educational Background, Family Structure/ Situation, Financial Status, Gender Identity/ Expression, History and Life Experiences, LGBTQIA, Military Service, Nontraditional Profile, Race/Ethnicity, Religion/Atheism, Romantic Preferences, Sexuality/Sexual Orientation, Social Status/Class and More

Source: Williams (2017). *Signal and Noise: A Primer on Strategic Diversity Leadership*

BUILD A DEI “TIGER TEAM”

As we face COVID-19, senior leadership should not be hunkering down and making decisions in a vacuum. To the contrary, they should create a DEI tiger team to turbocharge their thinking and their ability to make culturally relevant decisions. The goal of this DEI tiger team is to provide more perspective, more reach, more culturally relevant decision-making capability in this most difficult of moments.

As Scott Page, the noted author of *Difference and the Diversity Bonus* argues, cognitive diversity is critical to making the best decisions possible. This factor is

particularly relevant and effective when teams are faced with ill-defined problems, stressful conditions and an uncertain future. Think of the [Challenger disaster](#), the [Lehman Brothers collapse](#) and the [Afghanistan and Iraq wars](#)—in each of those instances, group-think and a lack of diversity contributed to less-than-optimal decision-making. Instead, we must reach out to build the tiger team, and any problem-solving committees, with a diverse range of backgrounds and skill sets.

In the C-suite of many institutions, we know our campus leadership teams are often absent of racial, gender, economic, disability and experiential diversity. With the

crisis at hand, you must strengthen your wolf pack and your ability to analyze the DEI issues, by leveraging the power of a more diverse set of perspectives to quickly get to the most powerful decisions.

Tiger Team Guidelines

- Ensure that you are proactively engaging your CDO in developing strategy and driving execution.
- Keep the tiger-team small, to four to five people, to avoid creating too much weight in meeting and convening.
- Develop a second DEI crisis strategy group of diverse leaders, perhaps leveraging your campus DEI committee, advisory committee or counsel to tap into deeper insights and drive insights to the tiger team.
- Find DEI expertise in the schools and colleges, disability services, campus cultural centers, campus diversity officers and academic units like ethnic studies, gender studies, public health, communications and other areas that can bring crisis communication, diversity and inclusion, and other areas of relevance together for managing the issues on the tiger team and the DEI strategy group.
- Set up group text systems or messaging platforms to link the tiger team. Set up a second message group to pull from broader communities of experts, to get them into the conversation.
- You may want to retain a DEI consultant and obtain an external diversity lens on the situation to help manage the situation at a higher strategic diversity leadership gear.
- Contact leaders from relevant affinity organizations who may have an informed perspective to offer.
- Normal systems will not work. You need to move faster, and text messaging is the best possible approach to gaining insights while not losing

speed and nimbleness, particularly in the early stages of the crisis and while COVID-19 continues to shift daily.

Now is not the time for hierarchy and process. Now is a time for leadership, creativity and execution.

GROUND-TRUTH YOUR SOLUTIONS

Every solution you create must be based on ground truth. It must relate back to actual reality, to lived experiences of those you are working with, not assumptions. To ensure this is so, you will likely have to ask and gather information in a few ways:

- Leverage your tiger team and DEI strategy group before making cascading decisions. Get a point of view. You don't have to follow it, but take it into consideration.
- Use technology to grow-source information or point of view to a potential strategy, leveraging your tiger team, DEI strategy group and others to potentially find unintended consequences.
- Leverage leaders from wherever they may live to gather fresh confirming and disconfirming information to drive better strategy.
- Establish a daily check-in—every morning, at mid-day, and at day's end, level-setting with the tiger team and working the challenge in a powerful and rigorous way.

Remember, it is essential to ground-truth solutions to ensure they do not actively (or inadvertently) invalidate or harm members of any identity group.



Now is not the time for hierarchy and process. Now is the time for leadership, creativity and execution.

A Final Tip on Culturally Relevant Decision-Making

As you work to build culturally relevant solutions, know that you are not perfect, and you will make mistakes. We are human. The key is to be mindful and pay attention in the present moment; to lead with kindness, a lack of judgment, compassion and curiosity; and to respond rather than react to circumstances.

We are all dealing with STUFF. Stay focused and don't let past events, or past or potential failures, overwhelm you. When you need to, create space between what you are feeling and how you react.

Work the tools and processes offered here to set your intentions so you can make the best decisions possible that set a context for supporting diverse communities of students, faculty and staff as you engage this COVID-19 DEI challenge.

Support Diverse Communities

One reality became crystal-clear in this COVID-19 challenge: Many of our leaders must widen and strengthen their culturally relevant leadership lens. We build on this point in the second part of the framework here, asking what support systems do students, staff and faculty of diverse communities need to get through this crisis? How do race, ethnicity, economic background, sexual orientation, nationality and other diverse identities come into play as we develop the plan to manage COVID-19?

SUPPORT BASIC AND CULTURAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS, STAFF AND FACULTY

While yours is an institution of learning, it is also a place of living, eating and working. Many students have basic needs beyond academics that must also be attended to in this crisis, as do staff, and at times, faculty who are living check-to-check and struggling to make ends meet.

As we build solutions that are scalable, we need to make culturally relevant decisions, and keep basic needs, emotional and mental health, and academic guidance at the top of our decision-making processes. Again, at every decision point in the process, you should ask yourself: How will this decision impact the most vulnerable? What unintended consequences could emerge? Understanding diverse realities is key to managing the COVID-19 DEI crisis dynamics.

Address Employee Vulnerability

While students are a top concern for obvious reasons and while faculty hold sway in important ways, it is the experiences of staff who are too often forgotten in our priorities conversation generally and as we

manage the COVID-19 changes underway. This issue is especially true for less-senior staff, who may be most concerned about basic needs and survival, may not be used to telecommuting from home, or may not have job duties that are immediately transitioned to working from home in a location-free reality.

Many staff are simply trying to figure out how to work in this new normal environment. What does it mean to “telecommute?” How do they show their supervisor that they are engaged? Can they be off-camera to do a webcast? What if a child runs in the room asking for something? What if they can’t access a document? How do they prove that they are working? They are asking, ‘where do I get a laptop?’ and ‘will my job go away?’ particularly hourly workers. ‘How do I home-school my children and still work when nobody help and I am being discouraged from taking them to daycare or a baby-sitter?’

These questions, and so many more, are top-of-mind now. These dynamics will drive anxiety, reduce productivity and create a sense of othering at a time when we are all struggling with instability and uncertainty. One of the most important things for leaders to do is to affirm their teams, clearly outline teleworking arrangements and be nimble in this new normative context.

Paid Time Off

One of the most empowering strategies we have seen, at institutions including the University of California system (Exhibit 3.1) and the University of Michigan, is that they have already leaned in and created COVID-19 paid time-off strategies. While these decisions are

financially intensive to be sure, they are the type of approach every institution should be considering irrespective of size, complexity and control.

The pressure to slow the spread of this new disease, conserve limited health resources and provide systems to help employees, as well as our students, is at a mission-critical level. Leaders have to articulate clear procedures regarding check-in times and hours of availability, expectations, workflows and more.

With proper planning, communications problems can be minimized (Section 4) and “othering” can be reduced. Indeed, well-planned, flexible work arrangements sometimes enable departments to extend their service hours and to become more impactful. Exhibit 3.2 presents some additional tactics to help support employees in these difficult times.

Exhibit 3.1

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA GUIDANCE TO EXPAND PAID ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE UNDER COVID-19

University of California President Janet Napolitano outlined a policy change to create expanded paid administrative leave to address the extraordinary demands on UC employees due to the COVID-19 impact. The executive order makes all employees eligible to receive a one-time allotment of up to 128 hours of paid administrative leave to be used no later than December 31, 2020, based on certain conditions.

The paid administrative leave hours may be used by UC employees who are unable to work due to COVID-19, including:

- When an employee is unable to work due to the employee’s own COVID-19-related illness or that of a family member.
- When an employee is unable to work because the employee has been directed to not come to the worksite for COVID-19-related reasons and/or the work site has implemented a COVID-19-related remote-work program or is under a “shelter in place” order and it is not operationally feasible for the employee to work remotely;
- When an employee is unable to work following a COVID-19-related school or daycare closure that requires the employee to be at home with a child or dependent, and it is not operationally feasible for the employee to work remotely or in conjunction with the childcare commitment.

This type of policy creates an important safety net to support employees, particularly those who are vulnerable during this pandemic moment.

Source: University of California Executive Order, March 16, 2020. University of California President Janet Napolitano extended administrative time off policy.

Exhibit 3.2

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT FACULTY, AND STAFF, ESPECIALLY THE VULNERABLE

HOST CALLS/MEETINGS Host daily calls or virtual meetings every morning to level-set where your organization is and to situate teams to the new normal and help them to acclimate.

OFFER MORE SUPPORT. Spend extra time coaching and micro-affirming all staff and employees with words of support that help them to feel valued and confident in their ability to navigate the current challenge.

CREATE A EMERGENCY FUND. Establish a COVID-19 emergency fund for faculty and staff to access as well as students.

MAKE FOOD PANTRIES AVAILABLE. Make sure faculty and staff can access your food pantries. Maintaining these pantries during this time is essential.

OFFER PAID TIME OFF. Provide employees with COVID-19 paid time off (Exhibit 3.1), to address health and personal issues that are dramatically impacting employees and or their family members.

BE FLEXIBLE. Allow staff to work flexible and extended hours to complete their work. In a time when they have to home-school their children with no help, this may mean that their work day extends into the evening or begins very early. Work flexibly and adaptably to make this happen.

MAKE TECHNOLOGY ACCESSIBLE. Ensure that staff have technology—hardware (computers), infrastructure (wireless access, WiFi, hotspots)—and the ability and knowledge to use them.

PROVIDE RESOURCES. Consider identifying a team member to be the go-to person to help staff members with these challenges, whether they are in IT or not. Find a savvy technologist and empower them to lead. Leverage instructional videos, FAQs and job aids on how to use technology.

Support Basic and Cultural Needs of Students, Along with Academics

Colleges and universities serve as a social safety net for many diverse and vulnerable students who consider student housing their only home. In the COVID-19-catalyzed need to make quick decisions, students with economic challenges have been made to feel devalued, unimportant and pushed out because they do not have the access to the critical financial, planning and parental resources required to change course in a moment's notice. These students were "othered" when institutional officials made scalable policy decisions, driven by the best of intentions yet resulting in a microaggressive backlash against vulnerable students.

Those who work with minoritized students are well aware of this reality. But many leaders are not—they are failing to recognize that the same feelings of distress that gripped students as they were being pressured to leave campus under COVID-19 echoed feelings felt every semester during winter and spring breaks. When dormitories are closed and others are vacationing or visiting home, these students are left rudderless, each and every year. Faced with the embarrassing prospects of completing surveys that probe into their challenges, they feel marked with the scarlet letter of a life of constraint as their peers jet off to places of privilege and safety.

Colleges and universities have typically offered contingency plans for students who are not able to leave campus, and many are doing so now, even

though guidance from county and city offices are making this process more complex. A proactive step for leaders is to identify institutional policies that push economically vulnerable and minoritized students to the margins, particularly as you navigate the COVID-19 crisis.

We must understand how inequality is reproduced on campus and prepare ourselves to better support students while they are learning from a distance as well as when they return to our campuses in the future.

Understanding the Needs of Diverse Cultural Groups

Contributing to an inclusive and equitable environment is a skill set we can all learn. We tend to view diversity as a value but having this value without the requisite skills and actions to deliver on it will cause people with good intentions to fall short, as we see happening during the COVID-19 crisis.

For student members of the LGBTQIA community, going home during COVID-19 may be especially traumatic because they may not be “out” to their families or accepted for their gender identity or expression. Going back home would be devastating on many levels. Beyond these factors, some of your students may have experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse at home. For these reasons and at the intersection of multiple identities, going home is simply not an option for some students.

As we manage COVID-19 moving forward, understanding diverse and intersectional students has to become a top priority if we are going to stay strong in our commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Sara Goldrick-Rab, professor of higher education policy and sociology at Temple University and founder of the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice, has developed a [comprehensive list of strategies for schools](#) to help support their students during this time. Her document does a great job of addressing many of the

needs listed above, such as healthcare, food, housing and learning supplies that would have normally been available to students, along with emergency aid to help fill in other gaps. We highlight some of these items in Exhibit 3.3.



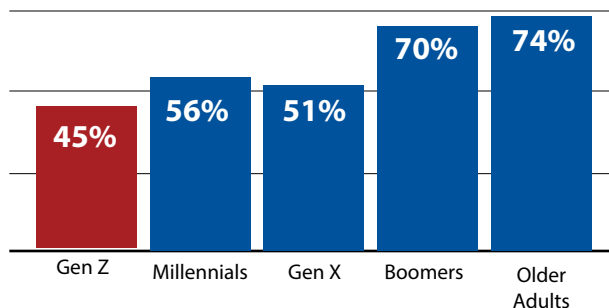
We tend to view diversity as a value but having this value without the requisite skills and actions to deliver on it will cause people with good intentions to fall short, as we see happening during the COVID-19 crisis.

PROVIDE EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

In a world where COVID-19 has gripped so many in fear and stress, the mental health needs of our students and employees, are likely to skyrocket when they are most disconnected from their daily routines and from the therapeutic and supportive services (and people) they have come to rely upon both formally and informally.

Exhibit 3.4

Excellent or Very Good Mental Health by Generation



Source: APA (2018), “Stress in America™: Generation Z.”

Mental health challenges have fast become one of the defining dynamics of this generation of students, leaving many campus counseling facilities struggling to keep up with a demand for services that did not exist as recently as 10 years ago. According to the 2018 APA survey “Stress in America: Generation Z,” for members of Gen Z (our

BASIC NEEDS STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE STUDENTS

HEALTHCARE

Many students are uninsured.

- They need to know that if they are eligible for Medicaid, and if they can get coverage to get screened and treated.
- For students who are ineligible for Medicaid or undocumented, they can go to a health center and access care onsite with sliding-scale fees.
- Ensuring your campus health center accepts Medicaid is also crucial for serving #RealCollege students. If it doesn't, please offer them information on nearby community providers.

FOOD

Many students are facing food insecurity and need access to affordable food.

- Campus food pantries should confer with the local food bank to ensure you can serve the community while adhering to CDC guidelines. One option may be to prepare bags of food that can be left for students to pick up. Food bank locations or food resources can be found by visiting AuntBertha.com or by the Why Hunger hotline at 1(800) 5-HUNGRY.
- Before closing dining halls, proactively communicate with students about their alternative options. The main message they need to hear is that they will have access to food.
- If this crisis goes on and students' finances are deeply affected, some students may become newly eligible for SNAP. Be sure to get them information about that critical program and help them apply. You may direct students to your state health and human services websites that offer resources about available public benefit programs and screeners to test their eligibility.

EMERGENCY AID

Students will face unexpected expenses and a likely loss of wages during this time because of lack of paid family and medical leave.

- Some may need plane fare to get home, while others need money to pay their rent.
- If you haven't already, now is the time to deploy an emergency aid fund that is as minimally invasive and burdensome as possible.
- If you have an online application and distribution system in place, you'll be ready to go.

HOUSING

Some students living on campus may have nowhere else to go.

- Set up an easy, confidential way for students to communicate with a counselor and identify alternative housing arrangements.
- Off-campus students will also struggle during this time, particularly if they are unable to pay rent due to job loss or unexpected expenses.
- Students may experience homelessness because where they have been staying is no longer an option if someone in that household is sick, or due to increased fear, or even due to pressure from the household to conserve resources.
- Share information with students on how to reduce their utility bills and apply for emergency funding if they need it.

For those worried about quarantining in a home where they do not feel safe, help is available 24/7/365 from the National Domestic Violence Hotline: @NDVH by chat or their hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

Source: Goldrick Rab, S. (2019). Beyond the Food Pantry: Supporting #RealCollege Students During COVID19.

students) only 45% report excellent or very good mental health, significantly less than baby boomers (many of our leaders) at 70%. As for receiving treatment or therapy, 37% of Gen Zers have, compared to 22% of boomers.

On-campus centers managing physical needs and counseling centers offer quality care at low or no cost to students. Depending on location or socioeconomics, students will lose access to those services. Student Affairs administrators should consider how to offer some of those through teletherapy and other virtual solutions. Find ways to coach students to coordinate care near their homes and ensure that students have sufficient medication supply [to manage the next several weeks and months](#).

Miami University regional campus staff working in Student Support Services and other units have taken it upon themselves to identify those students who have used their offices as a home away from home. They are now working to systematically reach out to them with emails, letters, and social media connections, to let students know that they are here for them as a resource and support system.

Self-Care Through Belonging and Community

While far from ideal, encourage students to reach out to family and friends if they are forced to provide self-care. It is essential that they do not socially isolate themselves in this critical time when we are practicing physical distancing from one another. Research shows that having a supportive adult, someone from whom you gather strength, can be the key to coping with stress and building perseverance. When we connect with others, we experience better attention, better emotional well-being, and even better physical health (Exhibit 3.4).

Strong relationships help all of us to foster a sense of belonging. When we feel that we belong, we are more

likely to be invested and to persevere and less likely to withdraw, become depressed, and pessimistic. Optimism, belonging, and community are key during this time. As leaders we have to keep these three ideas at the top of our consciousness as we lead our teams, collaborate with our staffs, and support our students.



When we connect with others, we experience better attention, better emotional well-being, and even better physical health.

Fostering Grit

Additional tips you can pass on to help build a support system include developing a grit plan (Exhibit 3.5). Grit is defined as the capacity for steady perseverance towards goals while overcoming obstacles across time (Duckworth, 2016). Grit will certainly be required in this tough time. We can begin cultivating a “gritty” mindset and, just as importantly, a gritty community that are self-supporting and -sustaining. One aspect of the plan includes encouraging your students and staff to develop clear goals that they want to accomplish during this time.

Gritty people are supported (Baruch-Feldman, 2017). They don’t have just one person they can count on but are surrounded by a community of grit, a place where individuals come together to motivate and ignite each other’s passions and purpose. When you surround yourself with gritty people, you are more likely to sustain grit.

- Identify the grittiest people you know and perhaps hero those individuals for others, highlighting their strategies and establishing them as “community grit leaders” to provide examples, role models and mentoring for others during these tough times.
- Use the Grit Plan Tool (Exhibit 3.6) and ask students and staff as well to identify three people in their

SOCIAL BELONGING THEORY: IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS AND PHYSICAL/MENTAL HEALTH

As a fundamental human motivation, belonging involves feeling socially connected. Research in the past two decades has shown that good things happen when students experience belonging, including measurable improvements in both academic performance and physical health.

For underrepresented students, however, belonging doesn't necessarily come easily. As first-year students, living in a new community and place while experiencing fewer people they identify with all exacerbate the social changes and stress most students share when going to college.

Freshman-year interventions that reframed this adversity as normal and affecting everyone (while not minimizing it) created astonishing results: by senior year, both GPA and physical health had improved over control groups (Walton & Cohen, 2011). The greatest improvements were seen in the more marginalized, non-Asian ethnic minorities relative to European Americans. This reframe essentially decreased the likelihood that students attributed their struggles as arising from their differentness.

Social belonging lessens the impact of marginalization. How can we create this in the current crisis? Staff and instructors have a front-line opportunity to leverage this effect to ease the emotional burden on students.

Techniques for Building Belonging

REFRAME CURRENT CHALLENGES. Survey students in your digital classroom for common reactions to the pandemic and show them that most of them are having similar experiences and fears.

FACILITATE CONNECTION. Pair or group students up for interactions where they find commonalities and can then find a friendly face at the next virtual class meeting.

USE SOCIAL CHECK-INS. Begin class with a **social check-in**, using digital polling technology that produces word clouds. Our NIXLA associate Brandy Bryson, professor of Social Work and Director of Inclusive Excellence at Appalachian State University, suggests that faculty start with a check-in when they next convene students in their now-online classrooms. Brandy says it's important to hold space for these students and allow them to express their emotions before jumping back into content. She finds that faculty may be uncertain about doing this, but you can reassure them that they do not need a counseling degree. Simply let the students reconnect with each other and get used to this new format and situation before teaching.

lives who are positive sources of good energy and encourage them to reach out to these individuals.

CLARIFY ACADEMIC POLICY, PROCESS, AND NEXT STEPS

With STUFF gripping each of us in the COVID-19 crisis, it is critical to clarify and adapt academic policy in

these critical times to ease the burden and facilitate functioning (Appendix). Some institutions are making final examinations optional. Others are allowing students to take graded classes as pass/fail, and still others are considering the financial implications of giving different types of refunds in this very unique time in our nation's history.

We believe that if the COVID-19 plan is not handled well, we may ultimately lose thousands of students who simply leave college, never to return, or, in the case of community colleges, never to re-enroll. Just as identity dynamics and economic vulnerability are at play in terms of basic needs, these same dynamics are relevant as we consider academic policy, process and helping our students navigate critical next steps.

Another COVID-19 DEI angle that could be slipping through the cracks is the reality of the disability community. Students with physical and mental disabilities can face academic hurdles for a variety of reasons. As we know, Section 504 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973 calls for educational institutions to develop customized educational plans for any student who needs an accommodation. What does this mean in the current context? When you shift to a virtual environment, for instance, new inequalities emerge. If no educational services were provided to the general student population, it would not be required to provide services to students with disabilities. But in this case, there is. How do we diagnose the situation and provide that support? Finding the strategy to serve this community will require a full range of online or virtual instruction, instructional telephone calls and the deployment of other curriculum-based activities.

Diversity Units Will Be Key to Supporting All Students

Critical now will be the leadership of disability centers, multicultural affairs offices, federally-funded TRIO programs, McNair programs, NSF-funded LSAMP initiatives, LGBTQIA offices, counseling offices, multicultural student offices and basic needs offices, as well as faculty who teach in Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, LGBTQ Studies, and those with large groups of diverse student relationships.

These leaders often toil in the background of our institutions, taking on the unrecognized time, effort and emotional labor of serving our diverse students, who



Diversity leaders are the campus experts for dealing with trauma. They do it every day. They see it every day, and we need their voices to help us amplify our ability to support all students.

already often felt on the verge of crisis before COVID-19. As Dr. Brandy Bryson of Appalachian State notes, "They hold space for students. They make space for students to share their fears, their pain, their trauma, and their insecurities on a daily basis." In this moment, the knowledge and leadership lens of these caring community members must be elevated as we clarify our next steps.

Diversity leaders are the campus experts for dealing with trauma. They do it every day. They see it every day, and we need their voices to help us amplify our ability to support all students. We must get these leaders involved in COVID-19 DEI tiger teams and strategy circles and ensure that their voices are being heard in their roles leading on the ground and in community with diverse and often minoritized students.

Serving Diverse Students Is a Shared Responsibility

Our approach to navigating COVID-19 cannot fall purely on the backs of diversity offices, certain faculty and allies. Even in the midst of this crisis, all leaders need to be upleveling their strategic diversity leadership capabilities, improving their cultural intelligence, and strengthening their culturally relevant decision-making abilities.

Cultural intelligence involves the ability to see the world from multiple perspectives. It means having an awareness of one's own world view and, for those in empowered identity groups, it also means maintaining an awareness of the privilege that comes with that membership. Cultural intelligence means having empathy towards diverse groups and causes, as well as knowledge of different

GRIT PLANNING TOOL

1 - Goals

1a	What goals do you want to accomplish over the next several weeks and months, while the world addresses the COVID-19 crisis?
1b	How do each of these goals connect with what matters in your life the most (e.g., being the first to graduate in your family, getting a good job, getting into a good medical school, being an example for your family, maintaining employment to support your children and dependents, etc.)?
1c	For each goal, what is your “why”?

2 - Positive vs. Negative Energy

2a	Who/what are resources of positive energy and affirmation for you—the people, the YouTube videos, the podcasts, the books, the affirmations, etc., that can serve as important reservoirs of strength to help manage your life during the COVID-19 DEI crisis and sustain you in tough times?
2b	Who are some of the negative people and relationships that will drain you? List them out and minimize your interactions with each person as much as you can.

3 - Challenges and Resources

3a	What are some challenges that you anticipate encountering over the next several weeks and months as you manage this stressful time?
3b	What resources exist to manage each of these challenges?

4 - Overcoming Challenges

4a	Think about the toughest moment in your life. Write it down and describe it.
4b	How did you overcome that challenge?
4c	How can your ability to overcome that challenge, inform your ability to sustain yourself at this time?

The Cookie Jar: Think about your past experiences overcoming challenges as cookies in a jar. Every time you experience challenges dealing with COVID-19, think about these successes and know that you are enough, that you can overcome this challenge and all challenges when you just keep working, keep walking, keep learning and stay connected to your support system. During these difficult moments pull a cookie out of the jar.

Source: Adapted from Baruch-Feldman (2017). *The Grit Guide for Teens: A Workbook to Help You Build Perseverance, Self-control and a Growth Mindset*. Oakland, CA: Instant Help Books.

cultural groups. Finally, cultural intelligence creates the ability to interact across differences.

It's easy to see that most decisions favor the empowered majority, the ones with the resources and flexibility to change their lives mid-stream. What message does making those decisions send, then, to international students, nontraditional students, financially challenged students, or LGBTQIA students who cannot easily move home or are not accepted at home by their parents and guardians? How about your part-time staff? These individuals bear the brunt of these decisions and we must even the playing field by asking key questions on their behalf.

Students who are in vulnerable circumstances already look at the academic and financial aid processes of their institutions with dread. In these moments, those feelings will be exacerbated. This is true for many students, but particularly for those students who feel like outsiders to the process in the best of times. The strategies that institutions put into place, and the people that they empower to manage these crisis dynamics, are important and are a topic we return to in our discussion of digital engagement, in the fourth and final part of the framework.



It's easy to see that most decisions favor the empowered majority, the ones with the resources and flexibility to change their lives mid-stream.

SECTION 4

Communicate Thoughtfully and Inclusively

The third major aspect of the DEI Crisis Action Framework focuses on communication—central in any situation that involves uncertainty, stress and fear. It is one thing to come up with a plan; communication then becomes a key component of implementation. Especially when events are out of the ordinary, offering strong, reassuring and strategic communications can make change easier for everyone.

Yet as decision-makers and communicators, it's easy to fall off-base with messaging. Common failings include assuming people will understand things the first time, assuming they read everything, assuming they will immediately comply—all impediments to facilitating the abatement of this COVID-DEI crisis with messaging. Research shows that we need to read a new message multiple times, even as many as 10 times, to have it soak in.

Given that fact, we also know that stress interferes with memory and judgment. How do we communicate well to every segment of our communities in a crisis? The answer lies in balancing empathy with action, and, as mentioned in Section 1, in continually asking those strategic DEI questions. In addition, throughout this crisis, we must uphold the core principles of good communication, including transparency, agile response, frequency of updates and simple words

Here are three main ways to keep your communications effective, plus a set of tips.

EMPATHY, BIG-PICTURE PLAN, METHOD

In a crisis situation, messages can best communicate clearly by following a three-part formula: (1) establish empathy, (2) deliver the big picture, and (3) explain the method for how we will get there.



THE 3 KEYS TO EFFECTIVE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

#1 ESTABLISH EMPATHY

#2 DELIVER THE BIG-PICTURE PLAN

#3 EXPLAIN A METHOD TO GET THERE

#1 EMPATHY. Establishing empathy will calm the recipient and help them hear your message more clearly. Use terms that bring people together rather than those that are divisive. Take a “we” perspective rather than an “us/them” mindset. Make statements such as “I know this is strange and new for all of us. You are invaluable and we want to keep you safe.” (See Microaffirmation, below.)

Other ways to show empathy is to focus on deeply shared values such as unity, community, security, opportunity, fairness, mobility and empowerment. Or to share your experiences.

#2 BIG-PICTURE PLAN. Outlining the big picture helps orient the recipient of your communications. Example:

“We want to provide you with the education you signed up for, no matter what is happening in the world.”

#3 METHOD. Given the plan, what do you need them to do? This component is often the core of your message and it’s easy to jump straight here. Now that they know you care about them and they are listening; now that they know what you are trying to accomplish, they can really hear this request.

This type of policy creates an important safety net to support employees, particularly those who are vulnerable during this pandemic moment.

SCRUB FOR DOG-WHISTLE LANGUAGE AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

The term dog-whistle refers to the whistles that are so high in pitch that only dogs, not their human owners, can hear them. This term applies to seemingly ordinary phrases that convey a specific hurtful message to a certain group of people yet do not give the impression of being overtly racist or biased. Examples of dog-whistles in politics include Richard Nixon’s innocuous-sounding “law and order,” a phrase that enticed the votes of white people upset about integration, by implying increased policing of African American and Latinx communities. We have seen a surge of dog-whistle terms in the last few years, including some new ones, with hate groups co-opting common phrases like “inner city” and “America first.”

While these coded messages may not be noticed by the empowered majority, they are certainly heard loud and clear by the marginalized groups they apply to (and their allies, who are often in other marginalized groups). If you have not developed expertise in these issues, ask a colleague who might have another perspective to look over your communications.

Microaggressions are brief and unfortunately common verbal, behavioral and environmental communications,

whether intentional or unintentional, that transmit hostile, derogatory or negative messages to a target person because they belong to a certain group. In short, they invalidate, for example using a trans person’s original (“dead”) name and gender on their campus identity card. Experts point out that any of us might use language that may slight or invalidate someone else, even with only the best of intentions (Harrison and Tanner, 2018).

In short, all communications must be scrubbed for these nuances.



MICROAFFIRMATION TECHNIQUES FOR A CRISIS

#1 ACTIVE LISTENING

#2 RECOGNIZING & VALIDATING EXPERIENCES

#3 AFFIRMING EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

Technique: Use Microaffirmations

An important tool to have at hand as leaders is microaffirmations (Wing Sue, D., Alsaidi, S., Awad, M., Glaeser, E., Calle, C., & N. Mendez, 2019; Rowe, 2008). Rather than focusing on the negative, we must start training our minds to focus on the positive things that we can say and do to create ripples of inclusion. Microaffirmations are an easy tool that leaders can use immediately and frequently to improve interpersonal situations, especially in crisis. These are subtle messages that are positive and respectful, and that show support, appreciation, inclusion and worth. Three key skills of micro-affirmation noted by Powell, Demetriou and Fisher (2013) are:

LISTEN ACTIVELY. Active listening focuses on hearing clearly what is being shared, and demonstrated

through eye contact, open body posture, summarizing statements, and/or asking qualifying questions to ensure understanding.

RECOGNIZE AND VALIDATE. Recognizing and validating experiences involves elucidating the what, why, and how. It is helpful to delve deeper by identifying and validating the constructive behaviors a student demonstrated to manifest or respond to the experience, expressing care about the effect of the event, and demonstrating a willingness to think through a productive path forward.

AFFIRM EMOTIONAL REACTIONS. We can verbally acknowledge that someone has experienced an emotional event, whether exciting, frustrating, hurtful, etc. Doing so enables the conversation to focus on turning those feelings toward actions that will empower, heal and/or foster learning.

These affirmations are tiny acts that open doors to opportunity. They are gestures of belonging and caring and graceful acts of listening. They can and should occur wherever people wish to help others succeed. Microaffirmations are found in the practices of generosity, giving credit to others, compassion and providing comfort and support when others are in distress. Consider:

- Offer statements of support for your Asian communities to counter dog-whistle terms.
- Commit to using words and nonverbal cues that support others.
- Commit to everyday acts of kindness and encouragement.
- Lean in to helping others feel better and do better.
- Reach out to help others access opportunity.
- Acknowledge others' strengths so they can work through their challenges.

OVER-COMMUNICATE TO YOUR COMMUNITIES

There is no such thing as too much communication. Like a toddler learning to walk will look over their shoulder for the reassuring presence of a parent, the university must be ever-present, reassuring and clear in its communications (Exhibit 4.1). There will be many messages sent out, and it is unreasonable to expect that everyone will read them all, or even remember the ones they have read.



There is no such thing as too much communication... the university must be ever-present, reassuring and clear in its communication.

It's also key to offer communication in many different formats because people simply communicate differently. Consider an open Q&A video chat for at-risk groups who have many questions.

Use social media, email, webpage postings and press releases. Since these outlets may be consumed by different audiences, you are not repeating yourself.

We close with nine top tips for effective communication in a crisis.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION TIPS

KEEP IT SHORT - A crisis is not the time to sound pedagogic or intellectual or to use complex vocabulary. Keep it both short and simple so your core message will stand out. Focus on one- and two-syllable words. Avoid formal or flowery language.

SHARE THAT YOU CARE - Affirm in your messages that the health and safety of your students, staff, faculty and leaders is your top priority.

AFFIRM YOUR CORE MISSION - You are acting because you want to give the students the benefit of their education, you want to support faculty in continuing to teach, you want to keep staff employed, etc.

EXPLAIN - With the stress of change, it helps to remind people frequently about how your new decisions help the bigger picture and help them. How is this action helping the crisis to be resolved? Students, especially, benefit from some background explanation as to how the world operates. Don't assume everyone knows what you know.

REMAIN ACTIVE AND AVAILABLE - Social media runs 24/7 and people with questions want to know your institution is there for them.

SHARE UPLIFTING EXAMPLES - Do you have a success story that exemplifies an attitude or solution? Something that worked in the face of the crisis? Share it.

BE PATIENT - Communicate often and across platforms and repeat yourself. When the brain is stressed, we forget, we resist understanding, we don't have time to read all missives. Keep putting your message out there in different forms.

BE VULNERABLE - Share your struggles too, but not in a "poor me" way. While being vulnerable doesn't always feel comfortable, listeners trust you and listen better when you are sharing the burden along with them in some way. How has this been hard on you? Share one aspect, but don't focus on it.

BE HONEST AND TRANSPARENT - Honesty may also feel difficult, but it will always win in the long run in communications. Lack of transparency will accelerate distrust, which is a harder problem to eliminate, and people will stop listening and following directions. Everyone has a good nose for falsehood and pandering. If you don't know, admit it. If you made a mistake, apologize.

SECTION 5

Digitize Inclusive Excellence

The technology wave has been building for several years, but the COVID-19 crisis has turbocharged its relevance for organizations everywhere. Shifting to online learning is a technical matter. Building a digital community is key to retaining the integrity of the institution, now virtual, while its denizens are physically scattered. Institutions should be developing a digital plan to foster belonging—not merely to teach online courses. This task involves leaders hosting daily digital update meetings with their staff and leveraging technology to show the way for their communities.

When I was at the Boys & Girls Clubs of America one of the major initiatives that my team developed was how to “digitize youth development” for nearly four million youth across four thousand clubhouses. We learned that this requires:

#1 Digital Operations. Digital courses, programs, process and governance.

#2 Equipment. Sufficient computers, phones, tablets and hardware to do what is required.

#3 Connectivity. High speed Wi-Fi and cellular networks to allow effective connectivity, and, just as importantly:

#4 Leadership and Plans. Individuals who know how to lead, teach and build community in the digital world, which includes implementing a plan to combine all these parts effectively.

As we peer into the void of COVID-19, these same lessons are relevant. We are working fast to create connection, learning systems and high-impact digital opportunities for teaming, leading and educating. Yet this process must become more than the sum of its

moving parts—we must digitize the community, and, while doing so, incorporate inclusive excellence.

In this fourth and last segment of the framework, we overview key tips and guidance for doing exactly this, “digitizing inclusive excellence,” by establishing a foundation of digital leadership, building inclusive digital communities and leveraging inclusive online pedagogy to foster high-impact learning with students. This brief includes dozens of strategies for diversity and inclusion in the formal classroom environment and for all other environments, ranging from informal learning to recreational and student groups.

ESTABLISH A DIGITAL LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

One of the first steps in establishing a digital foundation for your institution overall, academic department, diversity office, CDO division, student affairs division, or the like, is to determine your current level of digital competence (Westermann, Bonnet, & McAfee, 2014). Westermann, Bonnet and McAfee offer a classic framework for thinking about digital competence as a function of two things: (1) Digital Capacity and (2) Digital Leadership Skill (Exhibit 5.1).

In Exhibit 5.1, we present four archetypes of digital capacity and capability that can be used to think about your staff and organizations. They are:

DIGITAL BEGINNERS. The Digital Beginner archetype describes people and organizations who are just starting the journey and have little skill, comfort or technological ability to teach, lead and build community through technology.

DIGITAL FASHIONISTAS. Digital Fashionistas have all of the latest (and coolest) technology, but lack the leaders, the plan or the capacity to do much with that technology.

DIGITAL ESSENTIALS. The Digital Essential schools have the skills and abilities and are actively utilizing their technology, but may be constrained by outdated equipment or may not have all of the technology resources that they need.

DIGITAL GURUS. Digital Gurus have the full technology capacity they desire, the plan, the leadership and the knowledge and skills to utilize it all—and they do.

Research on digital mastery has found that only about a quarter of organizations in a given industry are digital gurus (Westerman, Bonnet, McAfee, 2014). It takes time to become a digital guru—time that the current world health situation does not allow us. Yet in this time of physical distancing, our students are going to feel alone, stressed and struggling with a sense of belonging. They need us to step into digitizing the community.

Exhibit 5.1

FOUR ARCHETYPES OF DIGITAL ORGANIZATIONS

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">DIGITAL CAPACITY</p>	<p>DIGITAL FASHIONISTAS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the technology they could ever need: the latest and best LMS, computer systems, networks, etc. • No plan for activating digital • No leaders with digital experience • No digital governance or processes • Many faculty/staff are afraid of technology • Technology and people may not be aligned • Do not view students as teachers/leaders in digital activation 	<p>DIGITAL GURUS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of technology: LMS, computers, networks, etc. • Have/use a digital engagement plan for learning, student development, outreach and community building • Leaders with clear digital leadership readiness • Most faculty have the comfort and ability to teach online • Can tap into the knowledge and expertise of students at a high level
	<p>DIGITAL BEGINNERS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting the digital journey: lack sufficient digital hardware and systems • Fearful of action • No digital plan or formal leaders with expertise • No digital governance • Many are afraid of technology • Only a few are using the technology competently • Do not view students teachers/leaders in digital activation 	<p>DIGITAL ESSENTIALS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not invested in the latest technology yet managing OK with what they have; may have hardware limitations, although their networks are solid • Have/use a digital engagement plan for learning • Leaders with clear digital leadership readiness • Most faculty have the comfort and ability to teach online • Can tap into the knowledge and expertise of students at a high level
	<p>DIGITAL LEADERSHIP SKILL</p>	

Source: Adapted from Westerman, Bonnet, and McAfee. *Leading Digital: Turning Technology into Business Transformation*

Digital Capacity

Digital capacity is the presence of the latest equipment and connectivity—smart phones, computers, social media accounts, high-speed networks, learning management systems, digital communication networks, digital education tools, digital course materials and other assets that allow you to get closer to students, colleagues, parents and others and empower your community to transform how they learn, receive advising, collaborate, build community and share information.

While there may be differences in the number of tools available between the largest research universities, and the smallest community colleges or liberal arts institutions, many institutions of higher education maintain a high level of digital capacity, especially compared to nonprofit institutions, K-12 schools and all but the largest companies. The true differentiating factor comes in our ability to leverage this capacity in the service of leadership, teaching, learning and student development.

Digital Leadership Skill

Digital leadership skill is the ability to fully take advantage of the technological capabilities that your organization has. Ask yourself: Do we have a digital engagement strategy for learning, for student development, for alumni, for community? Do we have people who know how to teach inclusively online? Do we have staff who can manage our social media accounts at a high level to reach our students? Do we have multicultural office staff members who can build digital programs to support our students? Finally, how can we leverage our students as digital ambassadors for what we are doing? They are the best in the world at leveraging social media and technology; how can we incorporate them into our work dynamically now, more than ever before? It is important to put our students, faculty and staff at the center of our work.

Quickly Prototype a Multi-Dimensional Plan

Digital leadership capacity results from having strong plan for digital engagement. As a result, one of the most important tips that we can give you is to build your digital foundation. Exhibit 5.2 offers guidance to support your efforts in doing so. It lists potential action steps you can take to lead teams digitally, provide inclusive online education, support retention, implement supplemental and traditional advising, exact digital programming to foster community and belonging, and create digital health and wellness strategies.

DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS - Equipment, Connectivity and Leadership

- Ensure all staff have sufficient technology and connectivity to work remotely.
- Define how to support students who don't have access to computers as we move deeper into the COVID-19 crisis.
- Work with a foundation to identify any donors who would immediately step up to help.
- Purchase a group of cellular and Wi-Fi plans from phone carrier services to help students who are vulnerable and in need.
- Ensure that staff have access to appropriate systems and networks to get up and running from home.
- Develop a back-up telephonic plan, in case the internet goes down at any time.
- Determine who is going to serve as the department's digital activation leader
- Identify someone to serve as the digital facilitator or community manager
- Host a digital orientation session to get all staff up to speed
- Verbalize the importance of encouraging everyone to seek technology help immediately
- Ensure that you have a social media manager for your organizational social media accounts (e.g., LGBTQIA Center Account, CDO Account, etc.) for Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- Develop a social media plan to connect with students, who often do not use email and are now away from campus indefinitely.
- Define the department or division's COVID-19 digital activation team.
- Who are the most digital-savvy individuals that we have in our team, regardless of rank or role?
 - Are student leaders available? Computer science majors?
 - Administrative support staff?
 - Who is really good with social media?

LEADING TEAMS DIGITALLY

- If your institution does not have a web-based team (video meeting) platform, or if you find your to be cumbersome, then set up a free account. We have found [Zoom](#) to be the most user-friendly.
- Host digital staff meetings with your team every morning to spark connection and clarify the path forward.
- Create a digital breakout or check-in room for your staff to convene in every day.
- Establish separate digital meeting rooms for those who need a private room for advising or private conversations.
- Encourage the use of cameras for all meetings to create a more interconnected experience.
- Leverage polling technology at the beginning and end of meetings, to gauge the feelings of the team; word clouds are especially powerful to level-set the conversation.

ONLINE TEACHING

- Extend the terms on any computer loaner programs to support diverse students.
- Leverage polling technology to get a broad view of student perspective without identifying students.
- Model the use of gender-neutral pronouns without forcing students to do the same. You might acknowledge that behavior changes like using gender-neutral pronouns may be difficult at first, but during this time of COVID-19 it is more important than ever to adapt quickly to affirm all members of our community.
- Be transparent. As you teach courses, share a few parts of your identity, values and background with students towards creating social connection and relationship.
- Encourage empathy. Ask students how they are doing and encourage them to do the same and check in on their peers and family members.
- For student engagement, consider virtual poster sessions. Check online student groups working with campus resources to see what they are doing online.

RETENTION AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT

- Create a digital advising web page that allows students to see advisors, schedule sessions and go into the digital advising room.
- Use phone lines to support advising and encourage this as an important action step.
- Ensure that the recording function is turned off when advising students on personal matters in the digital space.
- Each advisor should have their own private digital advising room to support students.
- Use the digital waiting room (e.g., in Zoom) as a feature before letting a student into the advising room.
- Use an online registration system (like [Calendly.com](https://calendly.com)) to schedule online advising and digital tutoring sessions.
- Use the recording function in tutoring sessions to amplify learning and content mastery.
- At the end of each advising session, give students an emergency phone number to reach out.

DIGITAL PROGRAMMING TO FOSTER COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

- Use virtual field trips as a way of connecting students to experiences that help to spark community.
- Encourage students to leverage this technology to foster online study groups and work sessions.
- Create a digital “Welcome Space” that is always open, where people can just drop into the space for students to interact and engage.
- Establish or activate your email groups to connect with students who tend to use your office or services and to give them guidance and updates.
- Establish an online event—concert, talent show, cultural show, poetry slam—to connect with your student leaders.
- Graduations are key life milestones. Host an online graduation event to encourage celebration of events for diverse communities; this community could be especially meaningful and important.
- Send online acknowledgements to students to affirm diverse students for the work that they have been doing.

DIGITAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- Get every student to develop a “grit” plan to help navigate the COVID-19 challenge (Exhibit 3.5).
- Encourage your students, faculty and staff to check your campus site, the CDC and the World Health Organization to get regular updates on COVID-19.
- Create digital mental health counseling and support opportunities for individuals.
- Establish topic-based drop-in digital rooms to discuss key topics like managing financial challenges, transitioning back to home, completing your courses online, graduation with no ceremonies, etc.
- Establish a 24-hour community-building hotline line to allow students to get live support.
- Create a live chat function on your website to connect with students.

DIGITAL STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

- Create a paid student digital-leadership team and pay them to lead on digital strategy, communication and community building.
- Identify a student digital social-media manager.
- Hire students to develop and host online digital programming events.
- Hire students to serve as digital tutors and peer mentors.

BUILD DIGITAL COMMUNITY

This period can serve as a catalyst for us to understand the full power of technology to empower and build community. Technology has allowed us to do this to some extent, but now is the time to innovate and create. For schools, this could mean hosting virtual town-hall meetings, setting up online advising and counseling forums, setting up digital office hours and scheduling, and encouraging student leaders to develop GoFundMe accounts and host virtual rallies to support themselves and their peers through these difficult times.

Activities that traditionally happened in the face-to-face environment like multicultural resource centers concert halls, or in academic advising units, now need to occur in the virtual environment. How can we fully translate this experience to a digital connection?

Some quick activities might involve (Exhibit 5.2):

- Hosting a regular digital happy hour with colleagues and team members to connect socially.
- Hosting a digital graduation video archive, asking seniors to develop a quick video that talks about their college experience and posting it for others to see.
- Hosting a digital poetry slam, concert or lecture.
- Encouraging students who are in ethnic and racially diverse Greek-letter organizations to have online probate or crossing shows.
- Consider crowd-sourcing original artwork and creating a digital art gallery that can be posted to social media and gamified by participating.

Distance/remote/virtual learning has been the solution nearly all colleges and universities are tapping to substitute for in-person instruction—yet this tool is also going to have to serve the purpose of engaging our students and communities. The question is how can we draw connection from a screen? How can we connect interpersonally with each other in groups and

one-to-one? This situation will require regular efforts as well as innovative new ideas and even a bit of thinking outside the box.

The Power of Student Leaders

Students are often the savviest digital leaders that we have on campus, and now is the time to bring them to the forefront of co-leading in this environment. Many students that we spoke with in preparing this brief talked about being worried about losing their part-time jobs. Departments should think creatively about hiring students to serve as a digital strategy team to help manage this crisis with you. Hire them as social media managers; allow them serve as digital peer mentors and coaches to drive new ways of engaging with their peers. Academic departments could even identify capable graduate and undergraduate students and pair them with faculty members who are uncomfortable with operating their courses online.

APPLY INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM PEDAGOGY VIA TECHNOLOGY

Most students are continuing with synchronous learning during this time but may also experience times of asynchronous learning or alternate. In this space, the culture of students significantly impacts their motivation and overall satisfaction. It is unrealistic and short-sighted to assume that culture does not matter in the online space. Ignoring differences in behavior, thought and interpretation is a risk that no one should take. Culture influences learning, and instruction decisions in the online environment need to consider these. Students should feel valued and respected in any online learning environment.

There are several simple strategies you can take to encourage a diverse and inclusive online classroom:

Be Transparent. Acknowledge your challenges with technology and emphasize that it is okay for students to need help with technology.

Set Expectations. Take time to reestablish expectations of behavior around respect for others and diversity of perspectives. Classroom management is different in the online space and needs to be treated as such.

Be Sensitive. Avoid using culture-centric terms, ideas or phrases. Students in the classroom could be international or from a different culture or part of the United States and your point would be missed.

Be Aware. If you have to adapt your assessments for the online space, make sure to use examples that are diverse and inclusive. Do not stereotype roles with genders. Be aware of your own biases.

Trust Students. Realize that things like microaggressions are not going to look the same in the online space. Be open to the fact that you are not going to be able to observe everything in the online space. Trust the perceptions of your students.

Offer Support. Do not make assumptions about students in the classroom. You might think that because a lot of these new online learners are of the traditional college age that they are great at using technology, they may not be. Affirm them to reach out for help and support.

Be Vulnerable. When you show your multiple identities and your doubts as well as your strengths, students will also feel comfortable being more vulnerable in the classroom.

Be Welcoming. Encourage students to use their cameras. You can't make this a requirement because you don't know what bandwidth is for students, but it can create a more welcoming environment.

Foster Connection. Create opportunities for social connection outside the synchronous classroom session. Make sure that students know expected behaviors there.

Be Adaptable. If a student has not technology access, and you cannot resolve the situation, work with them to create an independent plan to support them as COVID-19 crisis resolves.



Microaggressions are not going to look the same in the online space.

LIMITATIONS: DIGITIZING IN TECHNOLOGY DESERTS

We know technology is a facilitator, a wheel-greaser, not the product itself. Yet it can also be a limitation in conveying the real product. For example, proposing a virtual learning schedule or a virtual event assumes that all students have equal access to the Internet and a device. But lower-income and rural students are more likely to live in technology and Internet deserts than their urban, suburban and middle- to upper-class counterparts. Accessing the digital world via their phone, not a tablet or laptop computer, may not allow them to effectively complete their assignments. This situation too pushes us to think bigger. How might students use gaming devices to complete assignments? Have we considered disability plans and accessibility dynamics as we encourage students online? No stone should be left unturned.

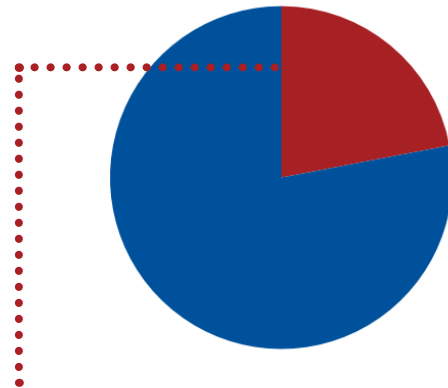
A March 13 [Huffington Post article](#) highlights the plight of a community college student who lacked a laptop and usually worked from the school library Wi-Fi. With the school's physical closing, he wonders about access to his classes. Colleges with a large commuter population will likely see this challenge. The article cited a 2019 survey

of more than 10,000 community college students, “Student Needs Are Academic Needs,” that noted that while 78% of students said they had reliable access to a “computer, laptop or similar device,” more than 70% said they would like to be able to borrow computers. And, even with 78% having reliable access to a computer or laptop, that leaves 22% who don’t—not an insignificant number (Exhibit 5.3). For those who do have computers, depending on their location, Internet coverage levels could be an issue. Technology can be the great equalizer, *when everyone has access* to said technology.

As we complete this framework, we encourage you to partner with your development office to identify high-capacity donors that may be able to provide strategic resources to support technology purchases to keep students connected and engaged. We must identify those who will struggle to get online and work with vendors to not only ensure that students have computers and tablets, but high-speed internet services as well. Indeed, The College of New Jersey has done just this, purchasing cellular service for their students who were without that capacity once they left campus. These and other solutions will continue the community and education these students signed up for, even as they physically separate.

Exhibit 5.3

Student Computer Access



22% of students do not have reliable access to a computer

Source: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/corona-virus-college-remote-learning_n_5e6bb5cdc5b6dda30fc8568c

SECTION 6

Closing Thoughts and Action Steps

Given the significant changes in daily life in the face of the potentially deadly consequences of spreading COVID-19, a continued commitment to inclusive excellence is more vital now than ever. We can win this challenge by caring for our entire community as we make these momentous decisions, by working to ensure that all students can enjoy the full benefits and privileges of the collegiate experience, and by ensuring the safety and support of all members of the campus community, whether they are physically on campus or not.

In closing, we suggest these action steps to make best use of this report:

- We ask that you freely share this complete resource guide (or the Executive Summary) with anyone who you think could benefit from any of its contents. Discuss its ideas and brainstorm further.
- You also have permission to post this guide in its entirety wherever it may prove helpful.
- Please check back at our website at InclusiveExcellenceAcademy.org/DElandCOVID19 for new information and additional resources. We will update it regularly.
- Do send us any resources and examples that you have discovered or created yourself that you feel would be helpful to your colleagues nationally. We will collect these resources and make them available to others on the web page noted in the previous bullet.
- Please use this citation in reference to this paper:
Williams, D. (2020). The COVID-19 DEI Crisis Action Strategy Guide: Recommendations to Drive Inclusive Excellence. Atlanta, GA: Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership & Social Innovation.

To let you know where we are: In response to all these new issues, we are developing a new Inclusive Excellence Digital Accelerator program to help you more quickly get up to speed with these issues. In addition, the National Inclusive Excellence Leadership Academy (NIXLA) 2020 program in July/August will now offer a major focus on COVID-19 DEI readiness to support you. Please consider joining us for this this four-week online leadership program.

Finally, thank you for your extraordinary efforts in these changing times. Your dedication and efforts to reach out to improve your ability to serve your students, colleagues and institution, all while managing your own collection of STUFF and physical separation—these efforts are seen and deeply appreciated.

In Service,



Dr. Damon A. Williams

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Innovation Fellow, Wisconsin's Equity and Inclusion Laboratory (Wei LAB), UW-Madison

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Common COVID-19 DEI Academic Policy Issues

How do we create the best environment for our students to engage in? That is a policy question as well as an operational one, and in this COVID-19 situation, many policies will need to be bent, extended or even broken and rewritten—anything that is taking a toll on students academically, financially, socially and emotionally must be addressed. It is wise to start these policy and process conversations by considering those who are the most vulnerable, make that process work, then move to the less vulnerable.

Build a Multi-Unit Team

For new issues that cut across schools at a university, focusing with a single cross-functional committee made up of decision-makers will create faster, more effective results than each school dealing with the issue in their own way, for example, changing meal-plan and residential systems policy and operations. Ask IT to create a central intranet page to track the issues, responsible parties and their progress.

Check in with Students Regularly

Get feedback on their process and experiences. There are many apps and platforms for polling (we use [PollEverywhere.com](https://www.poll Everywhere.com)). You can both feed the poll results back to them as they take the survey, so students can connect with each other over their shared experiences and remain in community. Or you can use the feedback to find issues you may have overlooked or to discover where more communication is needed.

Focus Areas for Policy Consideration

REFUNDS FOR HOUSING, TUITION AND FEES. With the shift to online classrooms, parents and students are questioning whether they are receiving the same-

quality academic experience that they signed up for, and many are asking for refunds, a challenging, multifaceted topic.

MEAL PLANS. At a smaller place such as Beloit College, the meal plan is built into the whole tuition package, but at a large place like UW-Madison, students populate their meal cards with money and use them at their own budgetary discretion. With students not able to dine in and then leaving town, how will you manage plan policies or issue refunds?

COURSEWORK, CLASS COMPLETION. This complex issue requires rethinking letter vs. P/F grades, drop deadlines and withdraw policies. Pre-health students might need letter grades.

OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING. Most students are living in independent off-campus situations. We have heard of landlords treating students as threatening, as possible carriers of the new coronavirus. Students who move home must break leases, or they may choose to stay to protect their older parents or ride this out where they feel at home, yet many have lost their jobs. Do any of those students need meals or other services?

SECTION 504 DISABILITY. Accommodation in this new environment is a challenge, as is helping folks understand that adjustments may need to be put into place, especially around those students who are granted 504 exceptions to standard school policies. Not every exception will translate well to online instruction. In a virtual environment, new inequities may emerge. For example, students who are challenged with language acquisition in a normal

environment may be taking American Sign Language to fulfill a language requirement; yet this may be hard to learn with a flat-screen medium. Learning disabilities in mathematics, computer science, chemistry—what do accommodations look like in these spaces and to what extent do we provide an exemption to the educational space?

SOCIALLY-VULNERABLE STUDENTS. Students with social capital and means are leaving right away, yet vulnerable students who lack a background of cultural capital may simply need to stay. Being on a college campus is one of the most stabilizing things they have, whether it's fulfilling basic needs, providing a non-abusive environment, ameliorating homelessness or addressing food insecurity. How do we support them?

WORK-STUDY JOBS. Students who are employed in work study are dependent on that income, yet many units can no longer employ student workers. Nor can these students organize their economic life off campus, with their two or three jobs gone or reduced. This period will be difficult for them to manage the checks and resources until they figure out the next move.

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AND CAREER ADVISORY. Advising and seminars must shift to virtual, for example for career development seminars, shadowing or coaching. How do we set up these virtual sessions, virtual office hours and more to continue supporting the success of these hardworking students? A customized 10- to 18-month plan can help.

TUTORING AND MENTORING. All academic mentoring and tutoring must also shift to a virtual space, yet these are often high-touch processes based on personal relationship. Going online may be a challenge.

Additional Ideas to Consider

- Work with a foundation to set up a special fund for students in vulnerable situations.
- Consider helping students get home. For students who could not afford airfare, Stanford allowed them to use the university account to order tickets home.
- Open instructional space for academic support or meetings. Let your team work the issue where they are and innovate. This is a time for great innovation.
- Donate your unused dorm space to help the crisis response. At UW-Madison, the city is considering using empty dorms as overflow beds for the hospital.
- Finally, as we reviewed in Section 4, there's no such thing as overcommunication in a crisis. As you answer questions for yourself, create FAQs to distribute. Jump into a video and provide a quick guide for students. Set up hotlines to both identify and respond to students in distress. Keep communicating with parents. Keep communications clear and short.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Damon A. Williams, PhD



About the Author

Damon A. Williams, PhD, is a scholar, leader and educator passionate about making organizations inclusive and excellent for all, creating equitable educational outcomes, and activating learning and leadership in transformative ways that inspire new possibilities.

Dr. Williams is a widely recognized expert in strategic diversity leadership, youth development, corporate responsibility and organizational change. He is currently Chief Catalyst for the Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation in Atlanta, Georgia, and a Senior Scholar and Innovation Fellow at University of Wisconsin-Madison's Wisconsin Equity and Inclusion (Wei) Laboratory.

Considered a global thought leader, Dr. Williams is one of the original architects of the Inclusive Excellence concept in American higher education and authored the best-selling books *Strategic Diversity Leadership: Activating Change and Transformation in Higher Education* and *The Chief Diversity Officer: Strategy Structure, and Change Management*. He has worked with more than 1,000 colleges and universities, Fortune 100 companies, nonprofits and government agencies as keynote speaker, strategist, educator and social impact leader.

In 2017 he was granted the University of Michigan's highest honor she celebrated her 200-year anniversary: the Bicentennial Alumni Award, given to 20 trailblazing leaders who represent the best of the University's leadership, research and service values. That same year, he became the youngest person and first African American to receive the Waring Price of Leadership from Western Reserve Academy, the nation's 26th oldest private secondary school. The Waring Prize is the institution's highest honor for leadership and service to humanity.

From 2013-2017, Dr. Williams led a \$250 million social impact portfolio for the world's largest youth development company, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, representing the interests of nearly four million diverse youth globally, as the Senior Vice President for Programs and Chief Education Officer. In this role, he led the national program strategy for BGCA's strategic outcome areas—academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles—with a focus on strengthening the daily Club experience and creating a new generation of leaders to expand the pipeline into higher education.

Prior to joining BGCA, he served for five years as Associate Vice Chancellor, Vice Provost, Chief Diversity Officer and member of the educational leadership and policy analysis faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has authored or co-authored dozens of books, monographs and articles that have influenced thousands worldwide.

ABOUT THE

NATIONAL INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The [National Inclusive Excellence Leadership Academy \(NIXLA\)](#) is a real-time, five-week online leadership development program designed for experienced leaders who are responsible for thinking strategically about their institution's change agendas. The Academy helps participants enhance their strategic diversity leadership, skillfully disrupt the status quo at their institutions, and become innovative game-changers around issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Our vision is to build an outstanding cohort of leaders across the country who will collectively transform the higher educational landscape.

More than a one-off intervention, the Academy's goal is to build a sustainable movement of change—not just during the program itself, but for decades to come. Our change-makers collectively challenge each other to go further than they ever expected. The community you build while at the Academy will continue to enhance your career long into the future and provide a supportive network for your ongoing work in the diversity and inclusion field. The program does require a significant investment of both time and effort; it is a 5-week intensive commitment to yourself, your own professional development, and the other members of the NIXLA learning community.

Our world-class program provides individualized support within a powerful group environment. It is designed to benefit senior leaders, faculty members, chief diversity officers, deans, diversity committee chairs and members, multicultural affairs officers and department chairs. It will also benefit those administrators and seasoned professional staff working in business affairs, department of finance, enrollment management, institutional advancement, legal affairs/general counsel, marketing and communications, academic affairs, and student affairs.

A recent class of 100 executives hailed from over 50 institutions and included presidents and executives from MIT, Fordham, Motlow Community College, Whitman College, Ohio State, University of Michigan, Cal Poly Technical University, Miami of Ohio and RPI.

The NIXLA experience will help you demonstrate competence, pursue new opportunities, command compensation, and illustrate your personal commitment to diversity and inclusion. The Academy is a powerful journey for those committed to making real and meaningful change in their own lives, their organizations, and their wider communities.

The next program will run from July 6 to August 7, 2020. All learning materials will be delivered and strategy groups introduced to one another approximately three weeks before program launch, to facilitate group integration and team building.

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP & SOCIAL INNOVATION

The [Center for Strategic Diversity Leadership and Social Innovation](#) (CSDLSI) was founded in 2017 by Dr. Damon A. Williams. Serving as the center's Chief Catalyst, Dr. Williams is an award-winning scholar, educator, speaker, strategist, consultant and social-impact leader with over 22 years of experience working with more than 1,000 colleges and universities, corporations, nonprofit and government agencies. By leveraging evidence-based resources and best practices, validated research instruments and scales, and cutting-edge technology, the center has positioned itself to be a catalyst for change across all sectors.

CSDLSI's mission is to empower leaders, produce results and help corporations, organizations and institutions to create a more inclusive environment and community. The CSDLSI's work is guided by the principle of Strategic Diversity Leadership—the evidence-based approach to leading diversity, equity and inclusion centered strategy, leadership development, change management and research. The center works to strengthen organizational infrastructure and develop strategic planning capabilities by adhering to the center's principles: always begin with “why”—using questions to guide its approach when developing project methodology; apply culturally relevant approaches; and search for and curate excellence, always working to reapply the best solutions. The center achieves its goal by bringing academic credibility and a pragmatic focus to all its projects. Dr. Williams and the CSDLSI team uses design thinking to create new possibilities that can accomplish real and meaningful change in organizations and communities. THE CSDLSI specializes in and offers the following services:

UNIVERSITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Such as organizational climate and culture research, campus climate and field studies with formal written evaluations and mass survey instrument development and administration.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING CONSULTATION

Including leading organizational redesign and change management efforts; designing vertical and lateral diversity structures; diversity planning in higher education; chief diversity officer (CDO) role design; developing diversity accountability strategies; establishing strategic faculty and staff hiring and retention programs; and developing general education diversity distribution requirements.

CORPORATE AND EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION

- Executive Education and Coaching
- Thought Leadership Strategy and Development
- Leadership Development and Executive Coaching Training Program Design

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING PROGRAMS

Offering both in-person and online courses designed to focus on capability building, strategic diversity leadership development, and diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) research and best practices. Each summer, the CSDLSI offers the National Inclusive Excellence Leadership Academy (NIXLA), a five-week, online, team-based training and professional coaching and development program. Some of the topics featured during the NIXLA are:

- Strategic Diversity Leadership
- The Inclusive Excellence Model
- Higher Education and Shared Governance
- Expanding Access to Higher Education
- Faculty and Staff Diversity, Recruitment and Retention Strategies and Best Practices
- Increasing Women and Underrepresented/ Minority Student participation in STEM
- Diversity Planning and Implementation
- Understanding the Centennial Generation
- Youth and Leadership Development
- Accountability and Incentives
- Diversity Crisis Response
- Assessing and Improving Campus Climates
- Managing Your Organizational/ Institutional Diversity Brand
- Fundraising for Diversity and Inclusion

CLIENTS INCLUDE

- BSE Global, Inc
- NCAA
- FedEx Ground
- American Airlines
- OHM Advisors
- TFA-South Carolina
- National Black MBA Association, Inc.
- Kellogg Community College
- Cal Poly University
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Florida Gulf Coast University
- Syracuse University
- Georgia State University
- Agnes Scott College
- University of Denver



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Connecting Leaders | Sharpening Vision | Innovating Change

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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