

Yalley\_Institutional Diversity Statement Analytical Paper

Department of Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership, College of William & Mary

EPPL 637: Social Justice Praxis in Higher Education

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## **Analyzing Institutional Diversity Statements at UNC**

### **Introduction**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) makes a conscious effort to create diverse, equitable, and inclusive surroundings through enacting diversity statements and efforts. In the course of this project and research, the paper will analyze the especially relevant statements when speaking of concrete situations (the creation of the University Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council in 2020), where the institutional practices are constructed, the power is expressed, and the established norms that might favor dominant groups, which usually means that they exclude minorities. The research process is based on academic writings on social justice, campus discourse, and socio-historical settings that shaped diversity in higher education.

### **Process for Analysis**

The process involved reasonable steps for comprehensive and reliable research on the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Diversity Statements (UNC).

**Comprehensive Review:** This step was a detailed analysis of the diversity declaration, plans, and official documents that were available on UNC's website. The goal was to understand the language, remarks, and types of programs that were agreed upon and implemented. With the help of this document, the narrative of how UNC communicates its diversity purposes, and the measurement of its progress becomes clearer.

**Stakeholder Identification:** Acknowledging the different types of actors within the institution was tremendously important. These individuals included the Chief Diversity Officer, members of the DEI Council, and other leaders like Vice chancellors or Deans whose leadership impacts and directs the DEI policies of an institution, Students, Staff and Faculty, Donors and

funding organizations, and Alumni. Following the stakeholders allows them to see the decision-making process and distribute the power and responsibilities within the institution.

Socio-historical context: The analysis of this matter required deep digging into the history of diversity movements at UNC. It included an exploration of the history of diversity policies from the beginning and how they befit modern movements and problems within higher education. This historical lens was the most prominent in understanding the current state of diversity practices and evaluating their improvements and impact.

Literature Review: It was through interacting with research papers that I commenced to understand the criteria used in the UNC diversity statements' effectiveness and reliability. This encompassed both reading academic articles, course materials and books that discuss institutional language in use, the relationship of power between teachers and students, and critiques demonstrating traditional and modern strategies of diversity. UNC's performance was compared not only to other institutions but also to global benchmarks thanks to the literature review. Each of these processes is built on each other, providing a broad perspective on how diversity is attended to at UNC. This led to a critical assessment of the institution's public statements and deeds, along with the impacts on various groups.

### **Naming Institutional Practices**

The Diversity Statement for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) is very visible and contains three key commitments to inclusivity and equity. These resolutions are very important to create a setting that reflects the transition values of inclusiveness. On the other hand, the reality is that such pledges are not detailed, and the actual practices and procedures are not to be adopted for the achievement of the set targets. For instance, the DEI Statement describes the duties of the DEI Council mainly with broad phrases like "proposing initiatives" or

"facilitating strategic planning." Nevertheless, this extract is figurative language, and it simply illustrates the intention rather than specifying the exact actions and results of these efforts.

This innovation is a two-edged sword. On the other hand, it provides room for modifications in implementation, which is helpful during the evaluation of new concepts in rapidly changing educational situations. However, it conceals the specific policies that the institution is implementing, making the work tougher for the people beyond the administration circle- like students, faculty and external shareholders and to measure success effectively (Patton et al., 2019). The absence of specifics can lead to different interpretations of what actual efforts are in advancing diversity and inclusion; this can make some people feel doubtful and irritated by the policies because, in the end, the policies do not bring full positive changes in their lives.

On the other hand, accountable information is a very difficult concept to present without providing explicit details. Stakeholders cannot monitor progress or be sure of the implementation of policies because there are no tangible objectives and no method of operation. This could signal a lack of sincerity or a hindrance to the constructive critique and dialogue needed for the implementation of progressive diversity policies (Harris et al., 2015). This makes UNC's objectives declarative in their framework; however, they need more clarity to guarantee that the promises of equity and inclusivity are turning actions and results measurable.

### **Communication of Power**

In the UNC, communication of power through institutional diversity statements shows that the issue is endowed with intricate aspects. Language is often highlighted to bring about collaboration and inclusiveness, which are very important in building a sense of community and responsible living. But in reality, it is the actual power relationships in the university that show a different picture since the decision-making authority is mostly found at the very top of the

hierarchy among such people as deans of the faculties and vice-chancellors (University Office of Diversity & Inclusion, n.d.).

Such centralized systems may increase the chances of successful policy-making processes as they may imply the consolidation and coordination of decision-making across the university units and schools. Nevertheless, the major threats along with this come with silencing the opinions of the people directly affected by such policies, for example, students and people on a lower level of the staff (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Such groups are mostly likely to be the ones who have direct contact with the campus environment and who are, therefore, the most affected by campus policies, but their say as to the making of those policies is very little.

Moreover, the pyramidal hierarchy of this authority structure may probably unintentionally perpetuate and strengthen predicated disparities. This system by which authority is consolidated at the top may, in turn, cement the status quo and obstruct the larger systematic changes that could favor the underrepresented. Additionally, this scenario not only influences policy development but also changes the way of viewing and administering diversity action. Diversity and inclusion need real structural changes that involve powers more equitably and bring diverse voices into the decision-making processes to engage with not only those who dictate but also those who are targeted and protected by the initiatives (Harris et al., 2015). This endorsement will not only increase the legitimacy of diversity policies but also ensure that they meet the needs of the whole university community.

### **Maintenance of Norms Benefiting Dominant Groups**

The diversity initiatives at UNC-Chapel Hill, including those that advocate for harmony and community cohesion, are a common way to promote this. It is obvious that a positive framing of the settings is beneficial and can be a strong factor in creating an agreeable

environment. Yet, such a strategy may lead to more misconceptions, which further obstruct the true process of diversity and inclusion (Squire et al., 2019). When a lot of time and energy is invested into such trivial celebratory events and sweeping generalities that emphasize unity, the danger of glossing over the deeper and systematic problems, which require appropriate dissection and reforms, is possible.

This system frequently continues the status quo that favors dominant groups who hold the majority of power and influence—many of whom already tend to be well-positioned and well-represented within existing institutional structures (LaForge, 2020). Such things are evident in practices that ensure cultural celebrations and heritage months, which, while important, are not enough to deal with the deeper issue with representation of faculty, inequities of student admissions and everyday micro aggressive experience of students from underrepresented backgrounds.

While the superficial diversity efforts actually divert attention from the immediate need to tear down the deep-rooted prejudices and structural injustice that lie in the university documents and operations, they appear to be the more urgent issue (Patton et al., 2019). For example, while awareness-raising events are undoubtedly necessary, the event must be seen as much as the tough talks, followed by recruitment practices, curriculum content, and the institutional culture that perpetuates inequalities and marginalization.

To move beyond the role of UNC, which is simply to sustain norms favorable to dominant groups, divergent cultures must be incorporated, and robust, concrete actions should be taken to banish and reverse these structures. This calls for the switch from diversity to be accepted as a series of activities to diversity as constant, persistent institutional introspection and improvement.

### **Recommendations for Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion at UNC**

To appropriately handle the assessed diversity and inclusion issues of the school of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), it is necessary to provide an effective set of primarily actionable recommendations. These strategies, however, aim to provide more transparency, redistribution of power, challenging conflicts, and offering lifelong education (LaForge, 2020). In every recommended solution, a new institutional approach to diversity is brought forward with the aim of an actually integrated setting.

**Increase Transparency:** UNC must ensure transparency by precisely identifying planned actions, timelines, and accountability procedures. This includes not only enumerating the objectives of the plan but also elaborating on the courses of action and the tasks for each particular role, as well as on how the progress will be measured. Exact and continuous reports should be published, which will outline both the successes and the barriers (Squire et al., 2019). Such transparency will create a suitable environment where the university stakeholders, including the students, will track progress, participate in discussions, and ask for accountability whenever their commitments are questioned.

**Decentralize Power:** It is vital to make decisions to capture the varied perspectives and needs of the whole community; hence, decentralization of power is a must. This can be accomplished by the systematic creation of inclusive committees and forums that comprise a diverse group of stakeholders, especially from marginalized groups who are usually disenfranchised in the decision-making process (LaForge, 2020). Through these platforms, they should influence the development and implementation of policies alongside other entities; diverse voices are also not just listened to but are involved in policy formulation.

**Critical Engagement with Conflict:** Instead of shying away from the messy and disturbing realities of effective diversity campaigns, UNC ought to decisively lead this effort. Thus, there is a need to establish platforms for dialogue, be it through setting up forums, conducting workshops, or forming discussion groups where taboo topics can be discussed freely (Sensoy & Diangelo, 2017). This means they should be tailored to deal with the conflicts and disputes that come up during these processes, offering reflection and solving issues that may stall the goal of inclusiveness.

**Continuous Education and Training:** Enduring change feeds on sustained efforts; thus, UNC must be equipped with constant education and regular training programs for all members of the university. Bonding programs of this kind should be aimed at subduing structural inequalities and uncovering unconscious biases. Training needs to be conducted regularly and should be in constant accordance with the new findings and best practices on the topic of diversity and inclusion. Therefore, these educational initiatives should be made as mandatory as possible for any level of university personnel, including top administrators and students, so that there is a common understanding and the whole institution is committed to inclusivity (Squire et al., 2019). Through the implementation of the above step, UNC can see real progress that goes past verbal statements about diversity and inclusion to create a climate where these values are the core of campus life for every single member. These steps are vital for creating an equitable and accepting UNC; rather than the UNC talking about equality, it must also give a platform for it to thrive through its practices and systems.

### **Conclusion**

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) has revealed a stance on diversity, equity, and inclusion through its formal statements and impending initiatives. On the



other hand, the assessment points out a number of things that can be improved if the words of the commitments are not just spoken but actually become actions. Education, neutrality in actions, devolution of power, involvement in internal tensions and continuous training are some critical actions we need to take to reach real advancements. By following these guidelines, the UNC can go further than mere symbolic actions of inclusivity; it can also create a setting in which diversity is a living and breathing part. Through such measures, UNC not only agrees to meet but even surpasses its goals and brings up a model of inclusion where every member of the community can prosper in a setting where they are supported and in an egalitarian manner.

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