

"The chief object of education is not to learn things but to unlearn things."

GILBERT CHESTERTON

As a member of the entering class of Stony Brook University, you are likely to be among the majority of people today who believe that all people should be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their skin color, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, etc.



What is Diversity?



Diversity can be defined in different ways. It refers to, at its most basic level, the myriad of differences that exist among peoples and groups in our society and in the world.

Beyond that, when we discuss the concept of diversity at Stony Brook University we are referring to the positive value of both exploring our differences and discovering our common humanity. To do so, we commit to creating an educational working atmosphere that honors and respects all individuals regardless of race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, national origin, culture, or age. We acknowledge that because of our history, exploring diversity requires openness, awareness, and willingness to learn about various groups' experiences, struggles and achievements. We seek to participate in society as fully valued members of the community.

Why Does Diversity Matter?

At the beginning of this chapter, the quote by Gilbert Chesterton suggests that education's purpose is primarily to "unlearn things" as opposed to "learning things." Though you might think this is an extreme position, if you consider what we've discussed so far in this chapter, in some ways, education must play a significant role in giving all of the members of society an opportunity to evaluate what's been handed down as assumptions; to determine the truth, and consider the nature of the world that we now want to live in. As you continue your higher education, you will have the chance to stop and become aware of the many preconceptions that we've incorporated into our personal viewpoints without even our awareness. College gives us the opportunity to explore and discover the broader and richer reality of the world.

As you begin your higher education, you will have the chance to become aware of the many preconceptions that we've incorporated into personal viewpoints without our awareness. Your college experience provides the opportunity to explore and discover the broader and richer realities of the world. Regardless of which field(s) you go into after graduating, you are likely to find yourself working and interacting with people from various countries, cultures and backgrounds.

- In a study conducted by Kochan et al (2003), it was found that "racial diversity had a positive impact on business portfolio growth in financial services".

Kochan, T., Bezrukova, K., Ely, R., Jackson, S., Joshi, A., Jehn, K., Leonard, J., Levine, D., & Thomas, D. (2003). The effects of diversity on business performance: Report of the diversity research network. *Human Resource Management*, 42, 3-21.

- "Far from being just another feel-good initiative, diversity in the workforce has become a competitive advantage for manufacturers."

Selko, A. (2008) The Business Case for Diversity. *Industry Week*.

Why is Diversity Important at Stony Brook University?

Since its founding, Stony Brook University has been a leader in bringing together a wonderfully diverse group of students. Recognizing the critical role that students play in enriching the learning experiences of their peers, the University seeks to ensure that the campus provides a realistic learning environment which reflects the "real world" that graduates will experience in their careers.

Students, staff, faculty, and administration strive to fulfill the University's Mission:

- to provide comprehensive undergraduate, graduate, and professional education of the highest quality;
- to carry out research and intellectual endeavors of the highest international standards that advance knowledge and have immediate or long-range practical significance;
- to provide leadership for economic growth, technology, and culture for neighboring communities and the wider geographic region;
- to provide state-of-the-art innovative health care while serving as a resource both to a regional health care network and to the traditionally underserved;
- to fulfill these objectives while celebrating diversity and positioning the University in the global community.

College Prowler rates Stony Brook University as an "A" in the area of diversity. This rating reflects "the presence and acceptance of students of different ethnicities, native countries, economic backgrounds, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. Grades are based on student ratings of the diversity of the student body as well as their personal circle of friends in the following areas: economic status, ethnic heritage, national origin, political affiliation, religious background, and sexual orientation. Student reviews of the acceptance of the campus community to different groups of minorities are also factored in. Statistics that represent how diverse the student body is in regards to race, national origin, and state of residency are also a contributing factor."

What Role Can You Play?

Get to know your peers! As a first year college student in a new environment, you have an opportunity to get to know more about the lives and stories of your fellow students who may have very different backgrounds from you. These interactions will not only help you form lasting friendships, but can help you understand more about how members who identify as part of different groups experience the world. This can serve as the first step in "unlearning" assumptions about people of different races, religions, sexual orientations, ability levels, and other characteristics. It can also help you recognize privileges you may never realized you have. Conversations with your roommates and classmates after class, late at night, at programs, and in the dining halls can be remarkably constructive as long as you challenge yourself to get to know people from different backgrounds. Consider joining clubs that will give you even broader experiences in areas you are interested in. **This is your education.** Share your experiences and background, and take this opportunity to learn, increase your awareness, ask questions, and seek to expand your horizons.