

Michael Godard Diversity Statement

In 2020, the pandemic brought to light many of the health inequities and disparities based on race, class, and socio-economic status which students, faculty, and staff faced in campus communities. During the same timeframe, we watched national and global protests against inequitable and unjust treatment which frequently targeted particular minoritized communities. Many of these incidents required institutions of higher education, and their leaders, to recommit their efforts to examine institutional structures, policies, and practices which presented barriers to the success of many of these historically marginalized groups. This has provided us with an opportunity to create a culture where equitable institutions create diverse and inclusive environments where a community of learners share unique perspectives and respect one another's individual needs. We need to help people reach their full potential without unnecessary barriers. This type of culture is one that many will want to learn in and grow in as students, staff, and faculty. If we can demonstrate and model this culture in higher education than there is hope that other parts of society will learn and grow as well, but we must lead.

As a leader I place a high value and an expectation on the campus community that diversity is celebrated, and different opinions are welcomed. It is essential that everyone feels comfortable having respectful discussions and debates that are necessary for learning and growth to occur. I believe that it is imperative to create a campus community which values academic freedom for faculty and freedom of expression for everyone, respectfully and responsibly, while also creating an environment which is safe, welcoming and where diversity, inclusion and equity are valued and advanced. I have been committed to eliminating equity gaps for historically underrepresented students and I will continue to lead in this effort. Continuing to learn from each other and more specifically experts and colleagues who are committed to this work will be paramount for our ongoing collective improvements.

Institutions of higher education have not historically looked at student success and degree completion through an equity lens. We must look for equity-minded approaches to ensure that we close and eliminate the opportunity gaps for historically underrepresented and underserved students, who are now the American majority. If we don't support completion and graduation initiatives that advance access and academic quality, then our society suffers and, most importantly, people suffer. Access is not only a moral imperative, but also as a matter of workforce preparation, economic development, and international competitiveness. I have led several efforts that have successfully eliminated retention gaps and have resulted in significant increases in completion rates.

One initiative that I have led at my current institution, as part of our curriculum review process, assesses the impacts of any course/program change on our diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) initiatives. Specifically, academic programs must identify how the changes will positively impact the learning opportunities for our students, and better engage them in diverse ways of thinking and acting/reacting to situations and issues. Additionally, we are creating unit level DEIB plans to ensure that we take a holistic approach to how we recruit and retain students, faculty, and staff.

I believe leaders must constantly be thinking about actions that will result in meaningful change to ensure that barriers are removed, and that each student has a pathway to success. These barriers can be transactional barriers, or they can be cultural barriers that are affiliated with our curriculum, assignments, or assessments; barriers where we are putting students either at a disadvantage or less than optimal position. As a leader I strive to be consistent and strategic with how I communicate expectations with those on my team, which is critical to ensure that a culture is established and built upon that will benefit our students' ability to be successful in life and work.