



## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI): At the Heart of Student Success

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This dossier was produced with a view to applying as many of the strategies recognized for inclusive communication as possible, both in its linguistic aspects and in its visual treatment.

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# SUMMARY

This dossier features current issues in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) from the perspective of **student success** and highlights **concrete courses of action** for developing the full potential of each student. This dossier is divided into three sections of intervention:

- 1** the creation of an **inclusive environment** to foster perseverance and success in colleges and universities;
- 2** the adoption of **inclusive education**, both inside and outside the classroom, to better meet the differentiated needs of a heterogeneous student population with multiple intersectional realities; and
- 3** the importance of both **inclusive leadership** and **shared responsibility** across all hierarchical levels and sectors of activity.

Finally, this dossier tackles the emerging challenges posed by **the growing use of artificial intelligence** and its potential impact on access to higher education for all.

# BACKGROUND



The concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are at the heart of student success and issues pertaining to access and perseverance. Indeed, college and university student populations have changed considerably in recent decades, requiring that we review our processes to ensure the inclusion of all (El-Hage, 2020). For instance, in the college network, the number of students with self-declared disabilities has increased 16-fold in 12 years (Gaudreault & Gaudreault, 2020). Despite major advances in accessibility to higher education, not everyone has the same chances of graduating from their program of study (Bélec & Doutreloux, 2022). The circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have also highlighted inequalities in the conditions for success (Luster & al., 2021).

Students — whether they are LGBTQ+, with disabilities, from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, first-generation higher education students, etc. — live **heterogeneous realities** and, as a result, have **different needs** when it comes to **support for student success**.

To ensure that as many students as possible gain access to, persevere in and graduate from colleges and universities, higher education institutions need to address the various barriers to academic progress, while taking into account the dynamics of recognition and valuing the uniqueness of each individual student. Colleges and universities are increasingly called upon to move away from the conception of a “typical student” and a standard pathway to educational success (Conseil supérieur de l’éducation, 2022).

In short, a global view of success allows contemplating a wide range of possible educational pathways (*ibid.*).

**Acting for success** thus means **recognizing the diversity** of the student population and **acting in support of equity and inclusion for the different groups** part of it, insofar as not all students experience the same realities, have the same needs or encounter the same barriers to success.

# ISSUES AT STAKE





## ISSUES AT STAKE

# FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

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The concept of “living environment,” although it may be difficult to measure quantitatively (Cachat-Rosset & al., 2019), is a key element to analyzing success in higher education. It refers to the experiences of college or university community members, as well as to the perceptions of students and staff regarding the actions taken by their institution in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion.

These “intangibles” (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019), which may be difficult to report in institutional documents, include:

- The experience of exclusion by marginalized groups, in relation to, among other things, the institution’s past;
- The psychological environment, i.e., perceptions, attitudes and beliefs regarding diversity;
- The behavioral environment, i.e., the way in which college or university community members interact with each other (*ibid.*).

Added to these intangibles are the creation and maintenance of a sense of belonging in a safe space (Herrera, 2021), whether virtual or physical.

# The Importance of a Sense of Belonging

The need to belong and to be recognized is common to all human beings (Samura, 2022). Recognition is both a lever by which the person exists, constructs and reconstructs their identity and the relationship through which they become a person in their rapport with others (Pullen Sansfaçon & Bellot, 2016).

This fundamental need is expressed at key moments of transition in life (CAPRES, 2020): transition between levels of education, coming of age and learning financial independence for younger people, transition to a new professional life, change of life plans for older people or integration into a new country for the immigrant population. Higher education institutions are thus privileged spaces for socialization, where new interactions take place and new affiliations are forged, thereby influencing the construction of identity (Tzoneva & Gulian, 2020).

Being accepted, recognized and feeling part of a learning community is directly related to success in college and university (Strayhorn, 2018). Indeed, people who develop a sense of belonging to their environment and participate in student life are more likely to succeed (Samura, 2022).

Feeling included in one's learning environment helps people meet their fundamental need to belong, while reducing stigmatization and exclusion during their educational pathway. A student who feels part of a community – college or university – can thus develop a better psychological adaptation to their environment (Pittman & Richmond, 2008).

Efforts by higher education institutions to increase the sense of belonging of individuals from marginalized groups would have a positive effect on their well-being and ultimately, their success (Walton & Cohen, 2011). In order to have a sense of belonging to their learning community, these people should be able to recognize themselves not only in teachers and professors, but also in the various technical, professional and administrative staff, to foster a sense of identification which, in turn, breeds a sense of belonging.

Table 1  
**Framework for Inclusion**

	Low belongingness	High belongingness
Low value in uniqueness	<p><b>Exclusion</b></p> <p>The individual is not treated as a member of the organization with a unique value within the working group.</p>	<p><b>Assimilation</b></p> <p>The individual is treated as a member of the organization within the working group when they conform to the norms of the organizational/ dominant culture and minimize uniqueness.</p>
High value in uniqueness	<p><b>Differentiation</b></p> <p>The individual is not treated as a member of the organization within the working group, but their unique characteristics are considered valuable and key to the success of the group/ organization.</p>	<p><b>Inclusion</b></p> <p>The individual is treated as a member of the organization and is also allowed/encouraged to retain their uniqueness within the working group.</p>

Note. Adapted from Shore & al. (2011)

As the previous table shows, individual uniqueness is valued in an inclusive environment, as is the sense of belonging to the organization (Caidor, 2021). The individual is treated as an equal member and encouraged not only to preserve their differences, but to value them.

# Courses of Action for an Inclusive Environment

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## Regarding student life services

- ✓ Develop initiatives that strengthen the **sense of belonging** of the entire student population, with particular attention to those from minority or marginalized groups.
- ✓ Help with the establishment of **student committees** that value identity enhancement, advocacy or support for students who are part of a marginalized group (Doutreloux & Auclair, 2021a).
- ✓ Raise awareness about unconscious biases and prejudice in student life services, including **counselling services** (Magnan & al., 2017).
- ✓ Enhance the **offering for scholarships and tuition waivers** by targeting a student population with non-traditional pathways (Universities Canada, 2019).
- ✓ Ensure a better representation of the diversity of the student population in **communication tools** (Université du Québec, 2021), which should also include the equitable and diverse representation of institutional staff, in particular, teachers and the research community.
- ✓ Conduct **studies** to understand the complex factors that make up the **living environment** in an institution and its effects on students' experience and success, which are not always captured by quantitative approaches (Hansen & al., 2021).
- ✓ **Inform** the college or university community about the services offered and **promote** the resources available, particularly to the populations concerned and the professional teams that help them.

## Regarding institutional governance

- ✓ Continue to **educate** the entire college and university community about DEI, prejudice, discrimination and privilege (Lafortune, 2020; Universities Canada, 2019).
- ✓ Engage in a process involving the iterative, co-constructive **identification of the needs** of people from groups experiencing inequity.
- ✓ Develop respectful training methods to tackle difficult subjects in a **safe environment** (Campbell, 2021).
- ✓ Allocate **human and material resources** to periodic surveys in order to measure the student population's level of inclusion and sense of belonging (ibid.).
- ✓ Strengthen **data collection** to illustrate the diverse nature of the student population and of the various staff categories.
- ✓ Identify **indicators** to measure and monitor the implementation of an inclusive environment, making sure to disaggregate this data based on relevant sub-groups (sex, gender, racialized people, etc.).
- ✓ Promote the involvement of a **diversity of student voices** in the implementation, monitoring and improvement of institutional DEI policies (Cuellar & al., 2022).

## ISSUES AT STAKE

# PROMOTING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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In the province of Québec, several approaches and currents linked to inclusive education have developed over the last twenty years (Potvin, 2014). These approaches were designed initially to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and subsequently to take into account the diverse profiles of the student population attending colleges and universities.

Beyond their differences, these approaches and currents share an inclusive view of education to ensure that everyone realizes their own potential, while taking into account their experiences and realities (Potvin, 2014).

The United Nations (UN) defines inclusive education broadly as:

**“a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers [to success]”**

(UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p.4).

In the province of Québec, interest in inclusive education has emerged in the craze for “universal design for learning” (UDL), a model born in the 1990s and evolving according to scientific findings and societal realities (CAPRES, 2015; Centre de recherche pour l’inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap – CRISPESH, 2021). The term “inclusive education,” preferred here to “inclusive pedagogy,” emphasizes both what happens inside and *outside the classroom*, whether in terms of learning support measures or the educational pathway itself.

Inclusive education can be seen as a response to the discriminatory treatment prohibited in both the Canadian and Québec Charters of Rights and Freedoms (*ibid.*).

Therefore, adopting an inclusive approach to education means valuing diversity and helping remove barriers to learning in order to support success for all (Fortier & Bergeron, 2016).

## Inclusive Education or DEI in the Classroom



Traditional teaching methods were designed for a “typical student” with a linear pathway. An inclusive approach to education makes it possible to adapt teaching methods to the entire student population, without lowering the level of the skills that need to be developed (Centre de recherche pour l’inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap – CRISPESH, 2021). Consequently, adopting inclusive practices in the classroom aims to provide every student with the same chances of success (Pechard, in Caza, 2019), without compromising on the level of requirements needed.

Inclusive practices are said to be universal, meaning that they are not solutions adapted to each particular case. They are rather a redefinition of the norm to meet the diversity of student profiles (Lorite Escorihuelaz, in Caza, 2019).

The following goals are associated with inclusive education:

- 1 Implementing equitable practices – rather than equal or identical practices for everyone – to promote success for all;
- 2 Recognizing the existence of differences, particularly in educational content, with a view to effecting institutional transformations aimed at justice and fighting discrimination (Magnan & al., 2021).

Here are a few examples of initiatives to help teachers and professors develop their skills in inclusive education:

-  At the college level, the Profil de compétences enseignantes developed at Cégep de l'Outaouais includes a competency entitled "[Recognizing](#)" (Reconnaître) (Doutreloux & al., 2020). This competency was created to develop professional actions that put forward DEI principles and the adoption of inclusive practices that shape our ability to live together and that take into account the experiences as well as the ethnocultural, religious, linguistic or migratory realities of the various student populations, particularly those who are marginalized.
-  At the university level, the Groupe d'intervention et d'innovation pédagogique (GRIIP) working group from the Université du Québec network has produced a [module on inclusive education](#) as part of the *Enseigner à l'université* self-study tool. Among other things, it includes a checklist for adopting inclusive teaching practices in university classrooms.
-  The Centre de recherche pour l'inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap (CRISPESH) is currently conducting a [project aimed at fostering the autonomy of teachers in a context of diversity](#) through the appropriation of a reflexive and metacognitive perspective on inclusion at college level (Russbach & Morin, 2022).
-  The [Centres collégiaux de soutien à l'intégration](#) (CCSI) offer, among other things, a consulting service to support the development of autonomy and the alignment of the practices of public and subsidized private college network institutions in the reception, organization and delivery of services [to the student population] with disabilities (Centres collégiaux de soutien à l'intégration - CCSI, n.d.).



## Promoting Diversified Models

Students from marginalized groups tend to be more successful at university in the presence of diversity in professors and other sources of representative models (Universities Canada, 2019). The presence of diversified models, ideally including models who resemble them, will allow the student to:

- meet their need for security and develop self-esteem (Potvin, 2018);
- have access to models other than those in their family, in the case of students from low-educated backgrounds (Aubin-Horth, 2021);
- navigate the education system with greater confidence without the weight of a social determinant (*ibid.*);
- strengthen their ability to cope with a possible “culture shock” and thus integrate more successfully into the higher education system (*ibid.*);
- increase their autonomy and confidence in their ability to plan and carry out a study project that matches their aspirations and talents (*ibid.*).

The presence of diverse models is particularly important in the classroom, where most of the student experience takes place. A teacher can play a role in a number of ways, which can in turn be leveraged to ensure that the entire student population feels included, represented and recognized in the classroom:

- By becoming a “representative model” (Aubin-Horth, 2021) for marginalized student populations, in particular by recounting their own story and the obstacles they encountered along the way;
- By increasing the visibility of diversified models in the educational content used;
- By prioritizing inclusive communication (Université du Québec, 2021);
- By selecting sources produced by people from underrepresented groups;

→ By inviting people from minority groups into the classroom to promote exchanges and various points of view;

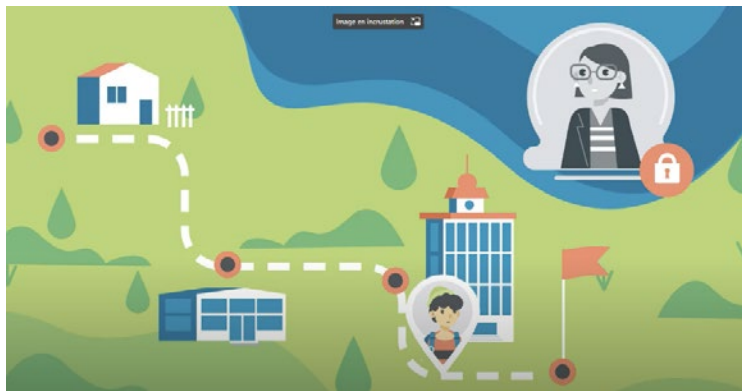
→ By working in interdisciplinary communities of practice to share best practices, etc.



## Video 1

### The importance of representative models

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*Note.* From *Projet interordres sur l'accès et la persévérance aux études supérieures* (2021).

In this respect, the program-based approach — i.e., an overall view of the program with coherence between learning and skills — can provide an anchor point from which a DEI culture can be developed. Indeed, the program-based approach enables teachers in the same program to work together to adapt to the different needs of the student population (Centre de pédagogie universitaire de l'Université de Montréal, n.d.). Known mainly in the college community, the program-based approach was also the subject of the [MAPES project](#) (Modélisation de l'approche-programme en enseignement supérieur), conducted by research and pedagogical intervention teams from the Université du Québec network (MAPES Project, 2014).

## From Integration to Inclusion: the Response to Intervention (RTI) Model

Inclusive education also embraces what happens “around the classroom,” such as learning support measures and services. To support student success, these services have long relied on an integrative perspective, derived from the medical model, which is gradually being replaced by an inclusive perspective, derived from the social model (Centre de recherche pour l’inclusion des personnes en situation de handicap – CRISPESH, n.d.).

The integrative view focuses on the individual’s deficiencies, their inabilities and their need for rehabilitation through integration. On the other hand, the inclusive view focuses on the role the environment plays in the construction of differences, namely disability (*ibid.*). It sees diversity as a social fact that must be taken into account as a prerequisite for any practice aimed at equity. Moreover, this shift from an integrative to an inclusive perspective is linked to the introduction of the concept of “neurodiversity,” which implies taking a different look at the norm by presenting different modes of cognitive or neurological functioning (*ibid.*).

This shift from an integrative view to an inclusive view implies a reorganization of learning support services so that they take into account the diversity of individuals and student backgrounds in a holistic way. To do this, the RTI model can be used as it is suitable for all levels of education (Bissonnette, 2020).

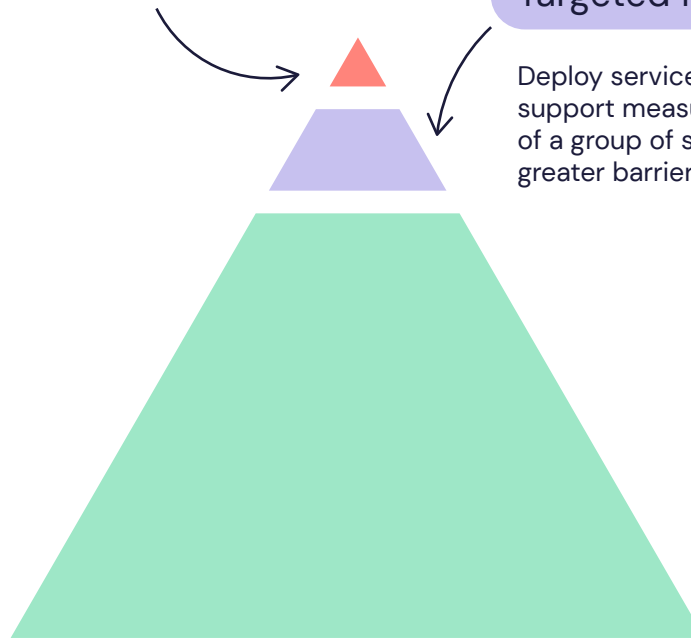
Figure 1  
**Three-Level Intervention System Inspired by the  
 Response to Intervention (RTI) Model**

### Personalized interventions

Deploy specialized services on an individual, personalized and sustained basis.

### Targeted interventions

Deploy services, resources and support measures to meet the needs of a group of students who face greater barriers to success.



### Universal interventions

Deploy inclusive educational practices to address the diverse needs of students.

*Note.* Adapted from Lapointe (2022).

The main advantage of this model is that it enables targeted interventions and swift referrals to services based on specific identified needs (Lapointe, 2022), especially for students facing barriers to education. The challenge of this model lies in the collaboration and concerted action required of all those involved in the institution: teachers, professors and students.

# Courses of Action to Promote Inclusive Education

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## Regarding teaching and learning support services

- ✓ Raise teachers' and professionals' awareness, especially those from minority groups, about their **power to make an impact** as **representative models** (Aubin-Horth, 2021). There are many ways to do this: share your story and your educational pathway, identify the obstacles you have encountered and the challenges you have overcome, etc.
- ✓ Promote the representation of diversity in **educational content** (Lafortune, 2020), for example by offering resources produced by people from marginalized groups or by presenting conferences in which guest speakers come from non-traditional backgrounds.
- ✓ Support **mentoring** initiatives *for* and *by* minority student populations to provide spaces for the development of **social ties** as well as sources of non-hierarchical **models**.
- ✓ Offer the student population a **space to share** (virtually or otherwise) their thoughts on integrating DEI into the classroom (Hartwell & al., 2017).
- ✓ Give priority to **different types of evaluations** and accept the submission of work in several forms (Doutreloux & Auclair, 2021a), for the whole class and not just for those with special needs.
- ✓ Offer students **opportunities to reflect on their experiences** as a member of a marginalized group, especially when the learning process is introspective and requires a certain degree of vulnerability (*ibid.*).
- ✓ Set up work teams to bring together people with different opinions, while establishing **rules of civility** for these virtual or face-to-face exchanges.
- ✓ Organize learning support services from an inclusive perspective, based in particular on the **RTI model**, founded on the collaboration and concerted action of all stakeholders (teachers, professors and students) (Bissonnette, 2020; Lapointe, 2022).

## Regarding governance

- ✓ Continue **training teachers** in the fundamental concepts of inclusive education (Russbach & Morin, 2022).
  - ✓ Recognize and value the efforts of staff already involved in developing a culture of inclusion (committee work, mentoring, etc.) and **avoid over-soliciting** members of minority groups.
  - ✓ Include the application of inclusive practices in teacher **competency profiles** (Doutreloux & al., 2020).
  - ✓ Develop guidelines for **inclusive communication** and provide training in best practices (Université du Québec, 2021).
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## ISSUES AT STAKE

# ACKNOWLEDGING RESPONSIBILITY

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Over the past few years, most higher education institutions have implemented institutional strategies for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), including policies, action plans, commitments and more (Campbell, 2021; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019).

At the present time, institution officials are taking stock of the human and financial resources required to carry out this work in a structured and sustainable way (Campbell, 2021).

Insufficient funding to support DEI initiatives, in particular, is a major barrier to the deployment of action plans in institutions (Universities Canada, 2019). Furthermore, many offices dedicated to advancing DEI in colleges and universities are led by a single person, whereas institutions that have built an actual team are more likely to make specific, proactive recommendations to management (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019).

# At the Heart of the Mission of Higher Education

As spaces dedicated to education and social transformation (Amboulé Abath, 2022), higher education institutions have an “institutional responsibility” (McNair & al., 2020) to apply DEI principles.

Colleges and universities are institutions founded on principles that underpin DEI, including that knowledge advances through the exchange of ideas coming from diverse voices (Campbell, 2021). Higher education institutions also have a responsibility to question existing knowledge (Scott, 2020).

In the province of Québec, higher education institutions must take responsibility for DEI, in line with the values put forth by the ministère de l'Éducation and the ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur in terms of inclusion, openness to the diversity of peoples and needs, universality, accessibility, equity and equal opportunity (Fonds de recherche du Québec, 2021).

As early as 1998, in its [World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century](#), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made its commitment to implementing the mission and function of higher education explicit concerning the ideals of access and equity:

“Access to higher education for members of some special target groups, such as indigenous peoples, cultural and linguistic minorities, disadvantaged groups, peoples living under occupation and those who suffer from disabilities, must be actively facilitated, [...]. Special material help and educational solutions can help overcome the obstacles that these groups face, both in accessing and in continuing higher education” (UNESCO, 1998, p.4).



What should an institutional DEI policy include? Here are some of the areas of intervention and sectors of activity that should be included (Doutreloux & Auclair, 2021b). This list illustrates the crosscutting nature of DEI issues in institutions as well as the need to share responsibilities among its various components.

- **Physical environment:** accessible facilities, safety, etc.
- **Communications:** displays representative of diversity, inclusive writing, inclusive Web standards, etc.
- **Research:** diversified research teams, methodologies that include a variety of viewpoints, useful and accessible spin-offs for minority groups, etc.
- **Student services:** diversified activities, psychosocial services that take into account the diversity of identities, collaboration between services, respect for the duty to accommodate, etc.
- **Employee services:** mentoring program, job placement program, respect for the duty to accommodate, etc.
- **Pedagogy:** teaching and evaluation methods that take into account the diversity of profiles and the variety of needs, etc.
- **Governance:** presence of minority or historically discriminated groups in decision-making positions, including the board of directors, etc.
- **Staffing:** application of the equal employment opportunity program, hiring processes that are free of bias and adapted to the needs of applicants, equitable evaluation grids and aptitude tests, postings that reach out to targeted groups, etc.
- **Admission:** services that can be accessed remotely, support throughout the admissions process, accessible information, accurate placement tests, etc. (Doutreloux & Auclair, 2021b).

The mission of the ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur is to offer to **the greatest number** of students **accessible, flexible educational pathways adapted to their needs**, enabling them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to succeed personally and professionally, and to participate actively in Québec's economic, social and cultural development (ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, 2022).

To that end, this mandate must be seen as a shared responsibility: every college or university community member has a role to play, starting with management. This institutional and structuring view makes it possible to engage everyone's responsibility — managers, teachers, professors, professional and technical staff, students and interns — toward common goals, the main outcome of which is student success.

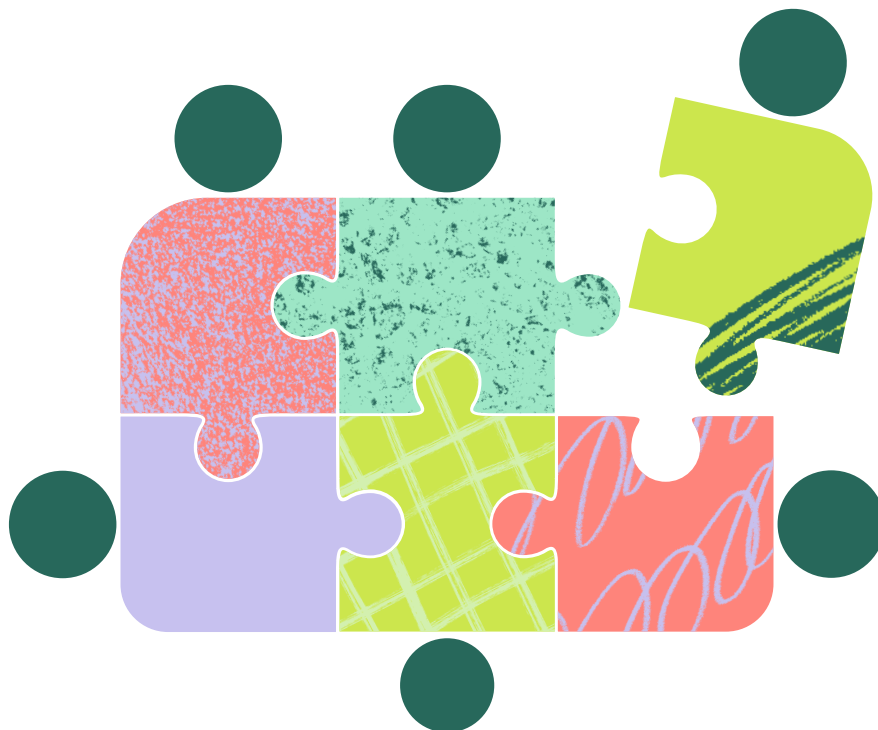
Higher education institutions must ensure that, as part of their educational pathway, each individual receives the resources and the means to create the right conditions for success, while respecting their rights, identities, experiences and needs (Amboulé Abath, 2022).

Therefore, all staff and students must be involved in the cultural changes linked to DEI policies. However, even leaders with the best perspectives may end up failing without the support of community members, especially those from marginalized groups (Barnett, 2020).

# The Importance of Inclusive Leadership: the Necessary Involvement of those Concerned

In order to fully shoulder their institutional responsibility, the administration of educational institutions must assume a leadership role capable of mobilizing their college or university community (Magnan & al., 2018).

Figure 2  
**Inclusive Leadership**



Note. ORES (2023).

Inclusive leadership means co-constructing institutional DEI strategies with certain groups that make up the student population. Dialogue is not just part of the process; it is a crucial element of inclusive leadership (Roper, 2019). When leaders ignore the importance of collaboration and co-construction in the implementation of DEI, many people see themselves as invisibilized (McCauley & Palus, 2020).

Adopting a dialogue-based approach allows for a better understanding of the nature of the problems and inequalities experienced as well as of the particular issues at stake in terms of recognition. For instance, members of the First Peoples express how uncomfortable it can be to be included as a marginalized group among many others, irrespective of their legal status and history of colonization (Table de travail sur les réalités autochtones de l'Université du Québec, 2022).

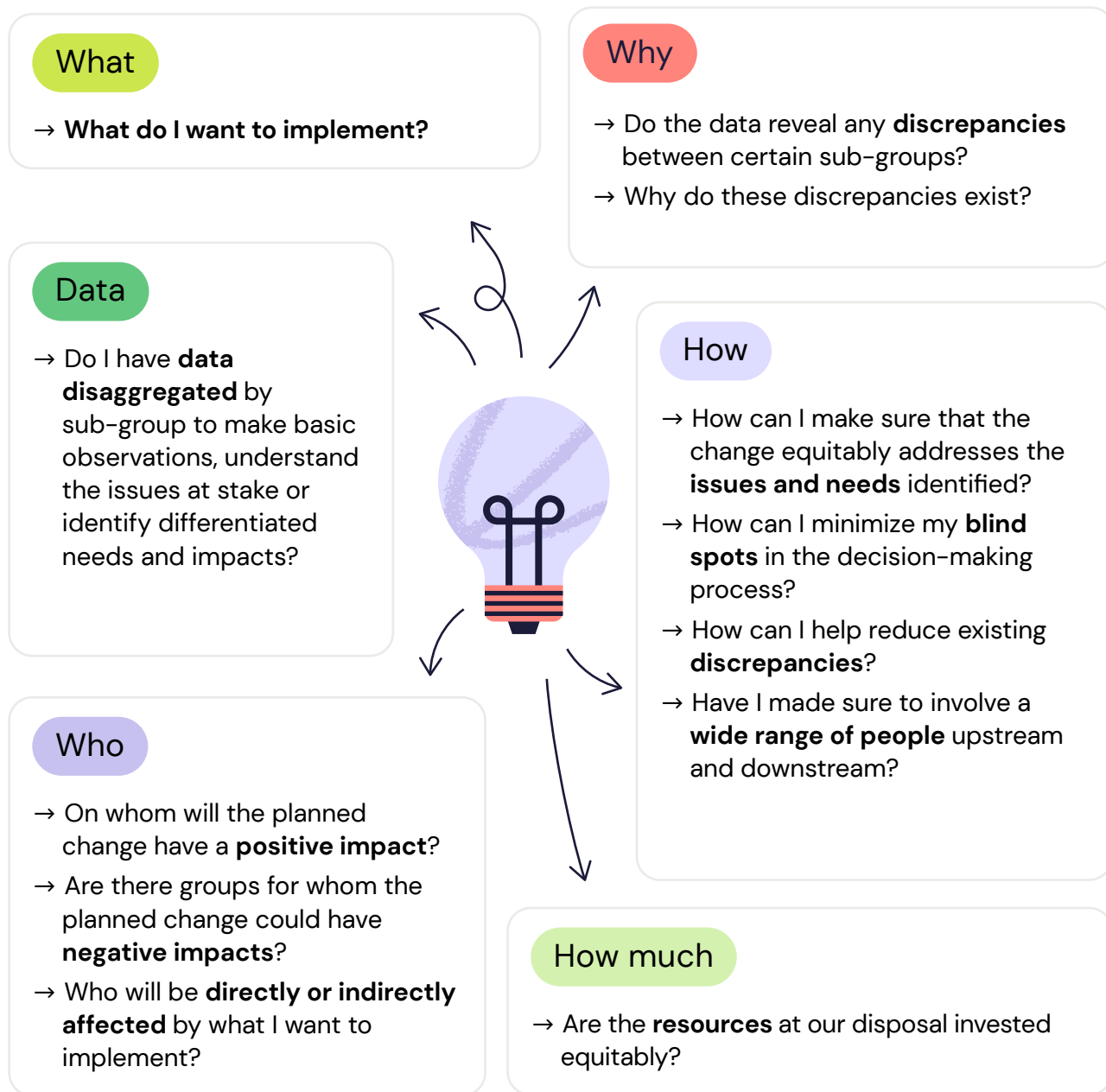
Inclusive leadership can also have a transformative reach beyond the organization, by suggesting social changes aimed at social justice and deep-seated structural transformations (Doutreloux & Auclair, 2021a). This type of leadership recognizes the need for an organization to fundamentally redefine its identity, vision and strategies in order to co-construct new, more inclusive structures and processes (Hansen & al., 2021).

Inclusive leadership also possesses a self-critical capacity for introspection: do current governance structures contribute to maintaining inequalities in higher education (Hansen & al., 2021)? Do the actions undertaken hide structures that perpetuate inequalities in access to higher education (Scott, 2020)? Are the preferred DEI initiatives based on “ready-made solutions” observed in other large organizations, regardless of the particular institutional context (*ibid.*)?

In this regard, the “equity lens” model (Suarez & al., 2018) allows relevant questions to be asked throughout the decision-making process:

These introspective questions can guide the co-construction of institutional DEI strategies with college and university community members who belong to marginalized groups.

Figure 3  
 Questions for the Adoption of an Equity Lens



Note. Inspired by Suarez & al. (2018) and questions from Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) (Government of Canada, n.d.).

## Courses of Action for Shared Responsibility

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The courses of action identified below are part of a structuring view aimed at a shift from mandatory accountability (required in particular by federal research funds) to taking responsibility in higher education communities, where all members have a role to play.

### Regarding the management of DEI offices in institutions

- ✓ Assign **clear, realistic mandates** to those responsible for developing and deploying DEI action plans.
- ✓ Increase the number and ensure the **sustainability** of human and financial resources dedicated to implementing, monitoring and evaluating DEI action plans (Campbell, 2021).
- ✓ Focus on the creation of “communities of practice” for teachers and professors, enabling the **sharing of resources** as well as facilitating the transfer of knowledge and DEI best practices.
- ✓ Create an institutional guide on the meaning of key DEI terms to establish a **common understanding** (*ibid.*).

### Regarding the evaluation of practices

- ✓ Set up **mechanisms to monitor** the implementation of action plans (Fonds de recherche du Québec, 2021).
- ✓ Allocate human, financial, time and material resources to develop a space to share DEI **best practices** (Universities Canada, 2019).
- ✓ Adopt a **cautious attitude** when choosing monitoring indicators and targets to avoid them being designed and determined solely by the majority group and contributing to the reproduction of inequalities (Scott, 2020).

## Regarding governance

- ✓ Consider the team responsible for rolling out the DEI action plan as a **major partner** in the decision-making process (Hansen & al., 2021).
- ✓ Appoint a member of the senior **management** team with the explicit mandate to oversee the development of institutional DEI strategies.
- ✓ Diversify **decision-making bodies** in terms of ethnocultural origin, gender, socioeconomic background and more (Barnett, 2020) so that solutions do not just reflect the vision of people from the majority.
- ✓ **Involve** all stakeholders in the valorization of DEI, including managerial staff, professors/teachers, professionals, technicians and students (Mercer-Mapstone & al., 2021).
- ✓ Leverage institutional services, such as libraries, as well as administrative, pedagogical, material and financial services, in the development and adoption of **inclusive practices** (Fonds de recherche du Québec, 2021).
- ✓ Prioritize certain actions based on institutional contexts and realities (e.g. regional or urban) to give the plan **greater relevance** and ensure better **mobilization**.

## Regarding human resources

- ✓ Review **staffing and human resources** management processes: Is the hiring process (how resumes are sorted, the use of evaluation grids and aptitude tests) free of bias and prejudice? Do hiring conditions exclude certain people from the outset? Are certain groups systematically absent from applications, and if so, how can this be remedied through more proactive measures (Doutreloux & Auclair, 2021b)?
- ✓ **Prioritize** the hiring of people from minority groups in **decision-making positions** to diversify processes, ensure proper management and engage in dialogue.
- ✓ **Directly target** certain minority groups when posting jobs and hiring, in accordance with applicable laws and programs.
- ✓ Allocate **professional development** resources for all staff to ensure a basic understanding of DEI issues (Hansen & al., 2021).

## Regarding future research

- ✓ Document how the DEI plans were **designed, implemented and welcomed** by the different groups that make up the college or university community (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019).
  - ✓ Document the **evaluation and impact** of DEI measures and practices (Tzoneva & Gulian, 2020).
  - ✓ Improve **intersectional data analyses** by disaggregating institutional statistics according to different marginalized groups (Universities Canada, 2019).
  - ✓ Continue researching the relationship between institutional DEI strategies and **student access, perseverance and success**.
- 





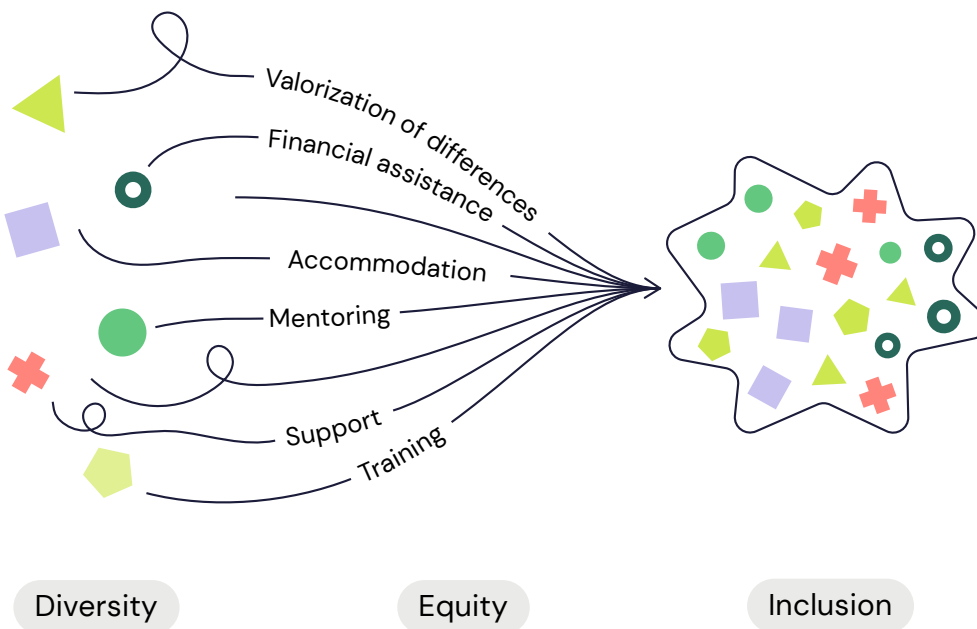
# KEY CONCEPTS

## KEY CONCEPTS

# WHAT DO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION ACTUALLY MEAN?

Equity is not diversity and diversity is not inclusion (Doutreloux, 2022). The goal of this section is to help the reader understand and distinguish each DEI component.

Figure 4  
The DEI Pathway



Note. ORES (2023).

# Diversity: a Fact of Life

It is now recognized that the student population has changed considerably in recent decades (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2022; Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec, 2020):

Diversity refers to the conditions, modes of expression and experiences of different groups defined by age, level of education, sexual orientation, parenting status or responsibilities, immigration status, Indigenous status, religion, disability, language, place of origin, ethnic origin, culture, socioeconomic status and other attributes

(Université du Québec à Montréal, n.d.).

Diversity is a term used to define a wide range of human qualities and attributes (Collège Ahuntsic, 2022). In higher education institutions, students' identities not only multiply, but also intertwine. For instance, a student may be from an immigrant background, with dependent children, while at the same time living with a disability.

In a recent [framework document](#) (2021), the Réseau de recherche et de valorisation de la recherche pour le bien-être et la réussite en contexte de diversité (RÉVERBÈRE) explains that the diversity of people can be defined from three different representations:

### 1 Individual

This representation is part of a “category-based” approach, i.e., one that situates the person in relation to a norm. It would hinder well-being and learning for all, in addition to creating a risk of stigmatization (Borri-Anadon & al., 2021).

### 2 Contextual

This representation refers to the concept of special educational needs. It questions the category-based approach while promoting the concept of barriers to education. It also questions the role of the educational institution and the learning required (*ibid.*).

### 3 Social

This representation, which is based on a social construction of differences, assumes that diversity is constructed in social relationships, through unequal processes that isolate certain groups (*ibid.*). The practices associated with this third representation are in line with the goals sought through inclusive education and question representations of diversity in students to build a fairer society.

According to Borri-Anadon and colleagues (2021), who wrote the RÉVERBÈRE framework document, these representations of diversity are not static; they evolve with experience. They provide a backdrop for understanding the concepts of well-being and success.

The more the representation of diversity is based on a pre-established norm that is not questioned (the first category), the more success and well-being are conceived as phenomena that rest solely on the responsibility of individuals (*ibid.*). On the other hand, in the third representation, diversity is a social fact and an added value for higher education institutions.

# Inclusion: an Adaptive Environment

Inclusion refers to the means of expressing the full potential of diversity.

Inclusion refers to the action of creating an environment respectful of diversity that fully integrates all the members of its community, accompanying them and offering them support measures to promote well-being and fulfillment. It is a sustained commitment to welcoming, integrating, accompanying and supporting marginalized groups

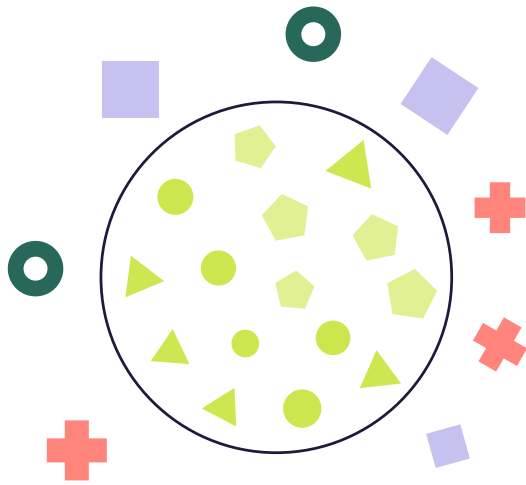
(Réseau québécois pour l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion - RQÉDI, n.d.).

In other words, creating an inclusive environment first requires recognizing the diversity of the people who study and work there. According to the inclusive perspective, it is up to the environment to adapt to this diversity, and not to the different student populations or staff members to adapt to their educational or work environment.

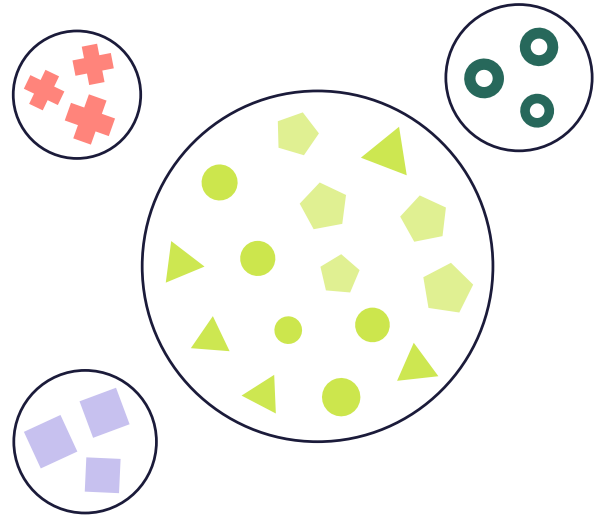
The inclusive perspective fosters the expression of each person's uniqueness and authenticity. Communities like colleges and universities, where members have the opportunity to be authentic in a safe environment, can do better, go further and be more innovative (Nishii, 2019 in Université du Québec à Montréal, n.d.), insofar as it is the richness of diverse contributions that is the organizational driving force.

Therefore, the "added value" of inclusion lies in a positive relationship with diversity in all its forms.

Figure 5  
Conditions for Living Together



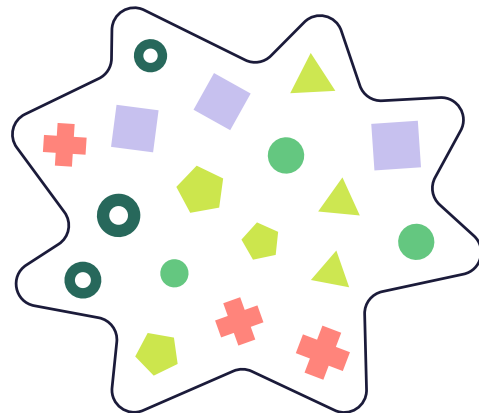
Exclusion



Separation



Integration



Inclusion

Note. Adapted from Aehnel (2013).

# Equity: What is Fair

Although we live in a society characterized by equality in law, equality in fact has not been achieved for many social groups. Equity can be understood as a means of supporting the achievement of real equality, as a goal (Solar, 2019). Therefore, the implementation of equity practices ultimately aims to achieve equality in fact, by taking into account the obstacles encountered at first.

By way of illustration, a person with a disability would not be able to study where they wish if the place of study is not accessible. As stated by the [Réseau québécois pour l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion - RQÉDI](#) :

Equity refers to the process of correcting existing historical disadvantages among groups. For instance, as defined by UNESCO, gender equity means a differentiated treatment, aimed at restoring the balance between women and men in order to compensate for the historical and social imbalance that prevents them from participating actively and equally in the development of their society.

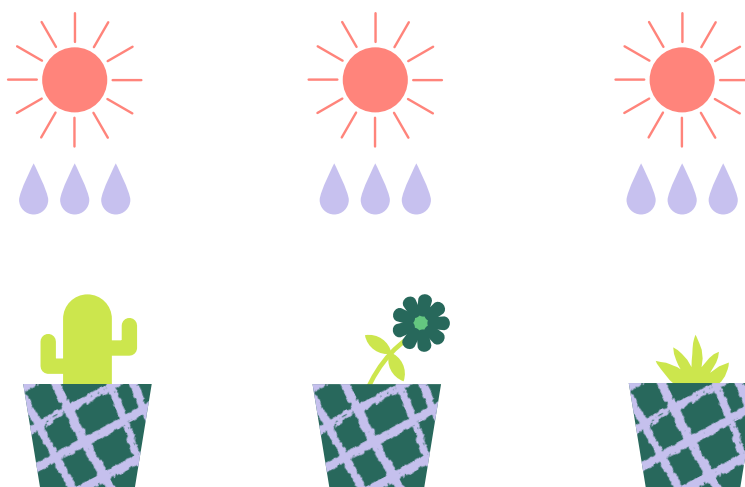
(Réseau québécois pour l'équité, la diversité et l'inclusion - RQÉDI, n.d.).

Such fair treatment is not necessarily the same for everyone: it must take into account different realities to enable all people (e.g., the entire student population) to benefit from the same opportunities.

Equity does not mean treating all people in the same way (equal treatment), but rather taking their differences into account and providing the means to reduce barriers or meet their specific needs.

Figure 6  
The Difference Between Equality and Equity

Equality



Equity



Note. Adapted from Virginia Department of Education (2020).

Consequently, equitable measures and practices ensure that all people have access to opportunities and resources that meet their needs (Collège Ahuntsic, 2022). Allocating resources to historically disadvantaged groups is one possible measure, while ensuring that resource allocation and decision-making mechanisms are fair to all and do not introduce or maintain discrimination on the basis of identity (Université Laval, 2022).



## KEY CONCEPTS

# WHAT DOES INTERSECTIONALITY MEAN?

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The concept of “intersectionality” can shed new light on multiple student realities, by transforming the perceptions and understanding of current issues (Fauteux, 2017).

In the literal sense, *inter*-sectionality is the point at which an individual’s identities intersect. It is not a matter of identities being added up. It is about social categories, such as gender, being part of a racialized group or social class, intersecting or intertwining (Harper & Kurtzman, 2014; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2020).

For example, a student of Haitian origin with a learning disability will encounter obstacles not only because of their ethnocultural background OR disability, but because of the intersectional nature of these multiple identities.

## An Indivisible Experience

According to the intersectional perspective, different realities are not hierarchical: a student's experience of racism is just as valid as another student's experience of homophobia. Moreover, while anti-discriminatory actions often focus on a single form of discrimination (e.g., sexism experienced by female students), an intersectional perspective takes into account the fact that several forms of discrimination (such as homophobia, racism, sexism) can be experienced at the same time in a person's life (Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2020).

The emergence of intersectional thinking dates back to the turn of the twentieth century, when the complexity of systems of oppression on the African-American population was revealed (Harper and Kurtzman, 2014). However, it was at the turn of the 1990s that the term "intersectionality" was used to illustrate the situation of African-American women and emphasize the *indivisible* nature of a person and their experience, on the basis of the interdependence of social categories (gender, class, disability, etc.).

In the province of Québec, twenty years later, the concept of intersectionality has been revived to reflect women's different experiences (Bilge, 2009; Juteau, 2010). For instance, an educated white woman does not live the same reality as does an immigrant woman.

# A Tool for Analyzing Inequalities

In addition to being an interdisciplinary theory, intersectionality is an analytical tool (Lépinard & Mazouz, 2021) that allows better understanding how identities (e.g., gender, social class, age, ethnocultural origin, disability) overlap and interact simultaneously to produce and maintain inequalities (Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2020).

Therefore, an intersectional view sees inequalities as the product of the intersection of different social situations, power relations and experiences (*ibid.*).



## Vidéo 2

### Intersectionality

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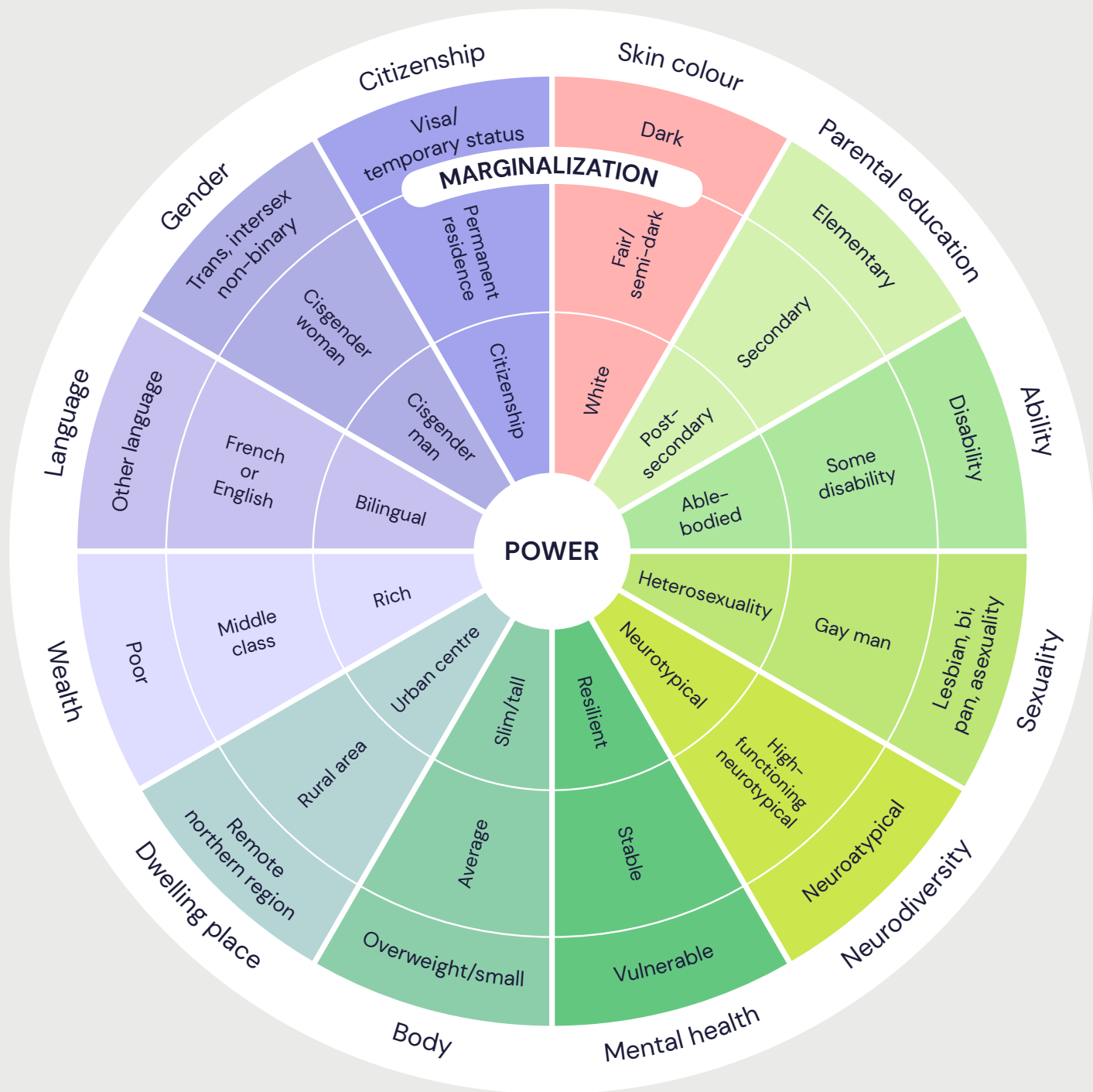


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*Note.* From the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue YouTube page [[@uqatinformation](#)] (2020).

Since it allows going beyond the one-dimensional explanation of inequalities, the intersectional approach can be used to analyze a whole range of social and cultural issues. In that respect, it is a powerful analytical tool for integrating issues of diversity, equity and inclusion (Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2020).

Figure 7  
**The Wheel of Intersectionality**



Note. Adapted from Duckworth (2020) and from Le Dispensaire (n.d.).

The concept of “privilege” (see The Wheel of Intersectionality) refers to an advantage granted to a person or group of persons based on their identity or status in society and the value placed on it (e.g., sexual orientation, presence or absence of disability, membership to a majority or minority group) (Collège Ahuntsic, 2022).

The intersectional approach operates on two levels:

- 1 Microsocial:** by questioning the effects of inequalities on individual lives, as well as the unique configurations arising from the interaction of identity affiliations;
- 2 Macrosocial:** by looking at the ways in which systems of power, such as economic, religious and governmental institutions, laws, policies and the media, contribute to the (re)production of inequalities (Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 2020).

The intersectional analysis can go further by taking into account four dimensions of social life:

- 1 Organizational,** referring to social, political and economic organizations;
- 2 Intersubjective,** referring to interpersonal relationships in formal or informal situations;
- 3 Experiential,** referring to the subjective experience of people, the way they perceive themselves and their attitudes toward others;
- 4 Representational,** referring to the frame of reference from which individuals and groups see themselves and the world (*ibid.*).

## The Capacity to Act

The intersectional approach is of interest to professional and intervention teams in higher education institutions as it sheds light on the diversity of the entire population targeted for inclusive education (Bauer & Borri-Anadon, 2021).

In terms of a sense of belonging, sharing experiences helps connect people and build solidarity (Fauteux, 2017). Indeed, the intersectional perspective includes the ability of people to develop common strategies and show solidarity on the basis of their identity experiences (Pagé, 2014). This capacity for mobilizing action, despite the weight of obstacles and discrimination, is at the heart of the founding principles of intersectionality: African-American women have been leaders in their communities by creating movements to take back power (Harper, 2013).

Intersectionality is a concept as well as an analytical tool that can be used to better understand the different forms of inequality experienced by students. It can also be used to better understand how sharing these experiences can lead to the creation of common strategies for equity and inclusion.





**PROSPECTIVES**

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# DEI AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ONGOING DIALOGUE

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Artificial intelligence (AI) in colleges and universities is best known for its pedagogical monitoring mechanisms: intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive and personalized systems targeting different student profiles, dashboards and prediction for success (Collins & Marceau, 2021).

While automated AI systems are often perceived as neutral and objective, they rely on choices made upstream by design teams that are not neutral, nor necessarily fair and equitable (Université de Montréal & IVADO, 2021).

The introduction of AI in higher education brings new challenges for all students in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). It also raises questions about accessibility for marginalized student populations.



# AI and the Admissions Process: an Example of Biased Data

The decision-making algorithms used in college and university admissions processes are based on data that can be biased.

As a result, AI systems can reproduce, and even amplify, certain biases and stereotypes already present in society (Cachat-Rosset, 2022), which in turn can lead to discriminatory decisions (Noiry, 2021) toward certain people who belong to marginalized groups.

The reproduction of biases in AI systems could lead to limited access to higher education for certain student populations.

The representativeness biases present in AI system databases stem, among other things, from the composition of the design teams (Collins & Marceau, 2021; Gaudreau & Lemieux, 2020). This is a predominantly male environment, where the representation of women and sociodemographic minority groups (e.g., racialized people) is very low (Observatoire international sur les impacts sociétaux de l'AI et du numérique – OBVIA, n.d.).

## Representation on AI teams:

- AI professional staff: 24% of women in Canada and 22% worldwide (Ravanera & Kaplan, 2021);
- Women and men who reported belonging to a visible minority were less likely to work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) than their counterparts who did not report belonging to a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2019, in Ravanera & Kaplan, 2021);
- Less than 3% of full-time Google employees are black. This percentage rises to 4% at Microsoft (West & al., 2019, in Ravanera & Kaplan, 2021).

## What is a bias?

A bias is a deviation from a result that is supposed to be neutral (Bertail & al., 2019). There are two main categories of bias:

### Cognitive biases



Refer to incorrect reasoning or errors of judgment or perception that deviate from logical thinking. Often unconscious, they may be linked to emotions (e.g., fear, anger) or long-acquired habits of thought (Gauvreau, 2021).

One of the most widespread cognitive biases is the **confirmation bias**, which consists in favoring information that supports our opinions, beliefs or values, and ignoring or discrediting information that contradicts them (*ibid.*).

The **essentialist bias** is associated with prejudice against members of certain social groups, whose characteristics are perceived as immutable (*ibid.*).

### Representativeness biases

Refer to a mismatch between:

-  On the one hand, the data used to design a decision-support algorithm (e.g. from people enrolled in a study program);
-  On the other hand, the target data on which the algorithm will be deployed (e.g. from candidates in a program).

Indeed, AI works by “learning”: algorithms are created to extract data, analyze it, identify trends and make predictions. If certain student groups are underrepresented in the data, exclusion is reproduced (Ravanera & Kaplan, 2021).

Thus, the absence of people from a marginalized group in a dataset aimed at creating a decision-support algorithm in admissions processes may constitute a representativeness bias (Bertail & al., 2019).

# Algorithmic Discrimination

Such a lack of diversity within design teams can increase the presence of bias toward certain marginalized groups, who are also part of the student population in higher education institutions. These people run the risk of not having a voice, of being excluded from systems (Gaudreau & Lemieux, 2020) and of remaining invisible because they are not represented in the data or because their needs are not deemed a priority (Gentelet & Lambert, 2021).

As a result, an AI decision-support system based on biased data can lead to a **discriminatory decision** (Université de Montréal & IVADO, 2021).

## A Bit of History

Attention to the reproduction of biases and discrimination is not new. In the 1970s and 1980s, a medical school in the United Kingdom used a computer program to select applicants. It rejected applicants of female gender having non-European names because the algorithm was based on previous data from accepted applications, and these applicants were poorly represented (Ravanera & Kaplan, 2021).

More recently, still in the United Kingdom, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of end-of-year exams in high schools. An alternative method in the form of a grading algorithm (A-Level) was designed to determine students' grades for the 2019–2020 school year.

The publication of the results was widely criticized, particularly for the effect of the grading algorithm. Indeed, the grades of students who attended public schools were lower, while the results of private school students improved. This imbalance can disadvantage students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby reducing their access to higher education (Poirier, 2020).



## Video 3

### Algorithmic Discrimination

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Note. . From the Sorbonne Université YouTube page [[@SorbonneUniversite](#)] (2021).

## Toward Inclusive and Responsible AI

It is crucial that the integration of AI into higher education systems be made by considering issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), including the biases and discrimination that can arise as a result (Observatoire international sur les impacts sociétaux de l'IA et du numérique – OBVIA).

### Questions that need to be answered

- Do design teams integrate expertise representative of diversity (e.g., ethnocultural, gender, social class) when developing AI technologies? (Collins & Marceau, 2021)
- Are design teams trained in the biases and potentially discriminatory decisions of AI systems? (Cachat-Rosset, 2022)
- What are the best practices for identifying and mitigating biases and discrimination in AI systems? (Université de Montréal & IVADO, 2021). Are they being implemented?
- Should information on how algorithms work be made accessible in public sectors where sensitive data is used (e.g., education, healthcare)? (Gentelet & Lambert, 2021)

Anchoring AI-related issues in a framework founded on DEI and justice (Collins & Marceau, 2021) makes it possible to consider technological development at the service of people – and not the other way around – and would promote inclusive and responsible AI (Castets-Renard, 2019).

To that end, it is necessary to fight this obligation to take the digital turn at any price and at any speed in order to avoid going off course. The only urgent need to consider is to slow down and create the right conditions for citizen participation. In this way, it will be possible to find inclusive alternatives to digital issues that remain above all of a social nature (Gentelet & Lambert, 2021).

It was in response to these concerns that, in 2017, the Université de Montréal drafted the [Montréal Declaration for a Responsible Development of Artificial Intelligence](#) to guide the development of AI in an inclusive manner. The Declaration includes ten principles: well-being, respect for autonomy, protection of privacy and intimacy, solidarity, democratic participation, **equity, diversity inclusion**, caution, responsibility and sustainable development.

Some of UNESCO's (2019) AI recommendations below also point in this direction:

- Facilitate the development of standards and policies for improved openness and **transparency** in AI **algorithms**;
- Reduce digital divides in access to AI, particularly those related to gender, by establishing **independent monitoring mechanisms**;
- Strive for **gender equality and ethnocultural diversity** as well as for **the inclusion of marginalized groups** in multi-stakeholder dialogues on AI issues;
- Evaluate the **algorithmic discrimination** of historically marginalized populations.

Efforts are underway to consider solutions that mitigate the discrimination and invisibility of groups marginalized by biased AI systems (Gentelet, 2022).

One of the keys to identifying potential discrimination is to study the results of an AI model under development to flush out the underlying discriminatory mechanisms (Université de Montréal & IVADO, 2021).

Best practices to mitigate biases when modeling AI include:

- 1 Assessing the diversity of the design team's composition right from the start of the project;
- 2 Understanding the purpose, the stakeholders involved and the potential consequences of applying the AI model in development;
- 3 Examining the provenance of datasets;
- 4 Ensuring that the AI model developed is truly in line with responsible practices (*ibid.*).

This last step involves validating whether the people targeted by an AI system's decision are prejudiced (e.g., the student population belonging to marginalized groups).

The introduction of AI regulatory mechanisms should move in this direction: in the event that a decision based on an AI system adversely affects a student, who would be held responsible (Gentelet & Lambert, 2021)? The fact that a higher education institution can be held accountable for a discriminatory decision alone justifies AI systems being designed with equity, diversity and inclusion in mind at the beginning of their creation.



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Would you like to learn more about this subject?

See additional resources [available online](#).

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