

# A Supportive Climate

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It takes right *actions* as well as right *reactions* to create an environment for diversity and inclusiveness to flourish.

One example from a diversity plan begins with a statement of *action*: “Encourage faculty and staff to be role models whose actions and attitudes demonstrate tolerance and respect for others.” And the plan ends with a statement about *reaction*: “Respond appropriately and meaningfully to incidents and situations that are inappropriate.”

Leadership is the key. One school took a swipe at its former dean by writing in the self-study: “Historically, the culture has not been conducive to the advancement of women and minorities, but the flight may be halted by the arrival of a new dean.”

In contrast, a large College of Communications has an Office of Multicultural Affairs at the dean level that engages in the recruitment, retention and success of students of color. An ACEJMC team cited “the exceptional job the College has done in its diversity initiatives.”

**Good idea... Monitor the unit’s diversity climate and initiatives through a standing committee.**

Our review of more than 50 diversity plans reveals this committee goes by many names: Diversity Committee, Fair Practices Committee, and Diversity and Outreach Initiatives Committee. The goals of these committees are described in these ways: “To create an open, inviting and comfortable environment for all faculty and staff within the School” and “To ensure compliance with faculty and campus directives intended to make the School an inviting place for women and minorities.”

Of course, these aspirations need to be fulfilled. One department created a Diversity Advisory Board consisting of students, a faculty member and two outside advisers, but confessed that the diversity board “has yet to emerge... Collective student engagement has been difficult to generate.”

It's important to not only cite diversity intentions, but to specify outcomes. Several programs admirably report their monitoring efforts, from conducting diversity climate surveys to analyzing trend lines in minority enrollment.

**Good idea... Devote at least one faculty meeting each year to a discussion of diversity.** This could rotate its focus among student recruiting, faculty diversity, curriculum ideas, and the department’s climate. One department schedules a time for adjuncts and full-time faculty to discuss creative ways in which diversity issues are effectively communicated in the classroom.

**Good idea... Develop a video library that allows adjuncts and regular faculty to draw on teaching materials that provide a focus on diversity.**

**Good idea... Ask students if the department provides a supportive climate for diversity.** If the unit already forms a Student Advisory Board each year, that group can be an excellent vehicle for this conversation.

Monitor diversity,  
from climate surveys  
to analyzing  
enrollment trends

Think about diversity when building an advisory board or planning a panel

**Good idea... Establish a student organization to focus on diversity in journalism and communications.**

**Good idea... Increase the number of women and minority professionals on the unit's Advisory Board.** Women and minority professionals can inform the faculty about diversity issues and can become advocates for the unit in the professional community. One school closely monitors its advisory board diversity, aiming for at least 50 percent of the membership being women or minority professionals.

**Good idea... Sponsor a forum on diversity and the media or similar programs.** This brings the issue to the forefront for faculty, staff, students and professional constituencies.

**Good idea... Think diversity when putting together a panel or welcoming group.** One school realized on the eve of a major event for students that everyone scheduled to speak was a white male. What message would that have sent to the students? By thinking about it in advance, the school was able to tweak the list of speakers to reflect the diversity of faculty and staff that actually existed.

One Southern department designated certain faculty offices as "safe areas" where gay and lesbian students are assured of receiving help and support.

**Good idea... Make diversity efforts a potential part of the annual review of each faculty member.**

**Good idea... Provide faculty and staff a copy of ACEJMC's excellent handbook for JMC educators titled "Diversity: Best Practices."** The handbook provides a history of the diversity standard and statements from educators about curriculum development, faculty recruitment and retention, student recruitment and retention, and campus environment. A "Sources and Resources" section contains excerpts from syllabi and lists of texts, videos and Web sites that contributors recommended.

Consult ACEJMC's excellent handbook for best practices

## Embracing Diversity

By Joann Lee  
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Diversity: How should it be measured? By numbers? By specific examples? By methods of compliance? As we move to fill in gaps, perhaps we can accomplish this with a view toward the end result.

When I asked an Asian American actor once what role ultimately he would like to play, he looked at me and said, "For once, I would like to be the guy next door. I have a house. I mow the lawn. I take my daughters to school. Yet I have never been cast as anything but a gang member or

a martial arts expert." What he was talking about was a pre-conceived sense that Asian males could be cast as kung-fu masters, but not be envisioned as the "guy next door."

As an Asian American woman in higher education for over two decades, it is obvious to me that this "guy next door" phenomenon also exists in academe. Thus diversity, in this sense, exists not only to address disparities, but also to change the landscape of education at various levels: within the classroom, in administration, and in curriculum.

True diversity is about inclusion and the ultimate invisibility of differences -- the guy next door -- seamlessly enriching the culture of learning within a global context. Diversity thus begins with embracing, rather than complying with sets of guidelines.