

 VIEW FROM THE TOP

The Intersection of SEM and Equity: A Systematized Literature Review

By Keith Connell and Clayton Smith

Educational leaders are increasingly concerned about how colleges and universities impact equity, diversity, inclusivity, and decolonization. This article explores the work of enrollment management in this space. A systematized review goes through a critical analysis and synthesis process to explore the intersection between strategic enrollment management and equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization in postsecondary educational institutions. The researchers provide implications for improving and increasing the enrollment and academic and post-graduation success of members of marginalized communities. The authors suggest topics for further studies about the intersection of SEM and equity in postsecondary educational institutions.

While higher education (HE) often sees itself as a pathway for achieving cultural integration, social mobility, and egalitarianism, others view it as a vehicle for preserving institutional racism (Law 2017). Thomas and Arday (2021) argued that “...those who ignore institutional racism and acts of racial discrimination because they are immune to it, and because of their privilege, are complicit in sustaining and reproducing these inequalities” (15). Therefore, educators, specialists, and critics must continually challenge factors perpetuating oppression and acknowledge the accomplishments of those who effect positive change in HE while also recognizing the challenges and barriers marginalized and

minimalized students (MMS) encounter within campus communities. It has become a vital issue of this time.

Today, many students contemplate whether they should attend higher education institutions (HEI), with rising doubts about whether it is “worth the cost” (Fishman, *et al.* 2017). Matters of equity, diversity, inclusivity, and decolonization (EDI&D) significantly influence the decision-making process of some students, particularly in their choices regarding the selection of college or university and attendance. Unease about these issues, reflected in trending hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and #EveryChildMatters, highlight students’ diverse experiences within

HEI. Consequently, educational leaders have recognized the need to explore the intersection of EDI&D and enrollment management to enhance educational access and the success of MMS populations.

Fostering a dynamic and diverse environment within HEI extends beyond the confines of the United States. Globally, academic entities either adopt enrollment management strategies or fully embrace the strategic enrollment management (SEM) model to formulate their enrollment strategies. While some regions have wholeheartedly embraced this paradigm, others, such as Canada, grapple with the SEM philosophy. In Canada, concerns stem from the notion that SEM may not mirror the country's distinct social, political, and educational context within the HE model. As a result, there is a tendency to selectively incorporate aspects of SEM that align with local values while not necessarily adopting its entire framework (Smith, *et al.* 2022). Nevertheless, countries across the globe are employing this model as a tool to cultivate a more inclusive and open classroom environment that warmly accommodates students from all walks of life, including the MMS.

This systematized review of the related literature aims to investigate how enrollment management strategies support underserved student populations and address the issues of EDI&D and seek to answer the following questions.

- What innovative and successful practices have enrollment managers used to support the achievement of college and university EDI&D goals?
- What are the barriers to successfully implementing enrollment management practices that support achieving college and university EDI&D goals?

The remaining sections of this review are structured as follows: (a) operational definitions to clarify critical terms; (b) the methodology employed for the literature review; (c) the significant findings from the selected papers; (d) the barriers hindering EDI&D in the enrollment management domain; and (e) a discussion on various promising practices. The last section of this article will

serve as a conclusion, where the authors will summarize the findings, acknowledge any research limitations, outline the educational implications arising from this study, and identify potential areas for future research endeavors.

Operational Definitions

It is crucial to anchor the understanding of the concepts of *equity*, *diversity*, *inclusion*, and *decolonization*, using operational definitions firmly grounded in empirical research to maintain clarity and consistency within the context of this study.

Defining these terms commenced with thoroughly examining existing literature and scholarly works. A diverse array of academic sources, prior studies, and credible publications played a pivotal role in constructing a holistic grasp of the concepts under scrutiny. The study's approach, informed by multiple viewpoints, facilitates a nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of the terms. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these operational definitions remain dynamic, evolving in response to emerging evidence and insights from ongoing research and inquiries.

- **Equity:** Equity in education ensures equal access to high-quality educational opportunities and resources for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or characteristics. It goes beyond providing equal resources and seeks to address and eliminate systemic disparities and barriers that might hinder some students' educational success (Clifford Ertle 2018; Kayyali 2022; Spratt 2017; Tamtik 2017; Zhang, *et al.* 2014; Zhang and Wang 2014).
- **Diversity:** Diversity in education encompasses acknowledging and incorporating a wide spectrum of individual distinctions and encounters within student groups, educators, and educational establishments. This acknowledgement includes race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and socioeconomic status. Embracing diversity strives to establish inclusive environments where all individuals are appreciated, esteemed, and empowered to flourish (Kayyali 2022; Palmer 2021; Sutton 2021; Thomas 2021).
- **Inclusion:** Inclusive HE aims to remove systemic and institutional obstacles hindering certain groups

from accessing education or limiting their chances of thriving academically. It goes beyond admitting diverse students and involves creating a supportive and welcoming campus culture that celebrates diversity and promotes equity and inclusion.

■ **Decolonization:** Decolonization in HE refers to challenging and transforming colonialism’s historical, cultural, and institutional legacies within the educational systems (Nagdee and Shaifi 2021; Tuitt and Stewart 2021) while addressing the enduring impacts of colonization on academic structures, curricula, knowledge production, and power dynamics in universities and other HEI.

Method

This study utilized the framework developed by Xiao and Watson (2019), which consists of three stages that align with the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* statements (Denyer and Tranfield 2009; Moher, et al. 2009; Page, et al. 2021), which involved classifying, selecting, analyzing, and evaluating relevant research (Moher, et al. 2009; Page, et al. 2021) to synergize the literature in this field efficiently and to gain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. By adopting this approach and conducting a thorough review of the existing literature matching the described inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study aimed to draw a concise response to the guiding research questions.

A publication age limit of ten years was applied, restricting the search to investigations between 2013 and 2023 to arrive at the most current and relevant studies available. The researchers collected articles from various peer-reviewed journals in the ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Sage Journals Online databases. The core search term used was “strategic enrollment management” or “strategic enrolment management” to accommodate the various spelling conventions of the term “enrollment” with the delimiter of “subject.” The secondary terms “higher education,” “postsecondary,” “post secondary,” “colleges,” and “universities” were applied to focus the research on the target education level. After this process, the database’s thesaurus included the ter-

tiary terms of “diversity,” “equity,” “inclusion,” “decolonization,” and “DEI” to achieve more comprehensive query results. As a result, the term “ethnic diversity” was added to the list of tertiary search terms. The researchers developed additional terms to add a broader scope of results, which included “indigenous students,” “Hispanic students,” “black students,” and “students with disabilities.” Finally, the term “barriers” and “policies” was added, searching all fields in the database.

Although Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975, 1993, 2012) wrote their works beyond the specified ten-year parameter, they are included in the results because their seminal contributions to the research field are significant.

Screening for Inclusion

Initially, the researchers assessed the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the identified publications based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, as outlined in Table 1 (on page 6). This process was then repeated through a cursory review of the body of the papers, with particular emphasis on the conclusion section. This comprehensive approach ensured that the researchers gathered a broad understanding of each study’s content and relevance to the research objectives.

After scrubbing the returns for duplicates and applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the returns list was reduced to 54 (see Figures 1 and 2, on page 7). The researchers then embarked on a citation-chaining strategy to ensure the reviewed literature reflected the current literature.

The articles were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) inclusion of various research methodologies such as literature reviews, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods; (2) postsecondary or HE perspective; and (3) relevance to the context of postsecondary educational institutions. Most selected studies utilized the literature review method, including a narrative process ($n=18$, 33.3%), followed by qualitative research methods ($n=17$, 27.8%). Quantitative and mixed-method approaches were less commonly used, accounting for a smaller proportion ($n=8$, 14.8%). These findings suggest that while the selection of research methods varied, literature reviews and qualitative research methods were

TABLE 1 ► Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Domain	Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of Publication	Journal Articles	✓	
	Books	✓	
	Dissertations	✓	
	Conference Papers	✓	
	Reports	✓	
Access	Online	✓	
	Paper		✗
Publication Period	2013–2023	✓	
	Canada	✓	
Place of Publication	United States	✓	
	United Kingdom	✓	
	Europe	✓	
	Rest of the World		✗
Type of Study	Empirical Investigation	✓	
	Theoretical Studies	✓	
Research Methods	Quantitative	✓	
	Qualitative	✓	
	Mixed Methods	✓	

frequently employed. Nonetheless, research methods are influenced by research goals, aiding in addressing research problems and answering research questions.

Literature Review

Serving the Historically Underserved

Even though white males historically dominated the North American HE systems, the systems are pursuing enhanced diversity. This effort benefits students and the curriculum, yet progress is slow, and challenges remain for underserved students. Although no apparent philosophical arguments against diversity exist, and expanding access aligns with justice and social mobil-

ity principles, there are gaps in how these philosophies are reflected in enrollment practices (Michalski, *et al.* 2017, 66–67). Collaboration between teams like SEM and EDI&D fosters support and retention strategies and ensures equity throughout the student journey and a fair higher education system.

Students of Color

In HE, the categorization of “students of color” refers to the classification or grouping of students based on their racial or ethnic backgrounds. This categorization is often used for data collection, analysis, and reporting purposes to understand and address racial diversity, equity, and inclusion issues on college campuses. The most common racial or ethnic categories used in categorizing students of color in HE may include, but are not limited to, Black, Hispanic or Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and international students of color.

Based on data from the National Center for Educational Statistics, the distribution of degrees conferred in the academic year 2018–2019 showed disparities among the different racial groups. White students received 61.2 percent of the degrees awarded,

while Black students accounted for 11.33 percent; students of Asian descent received 8.725 percent; Hispanic/Latinx students earned 15.33 percent; and Indigenous students received only 0.58 percent of degrees, including associate, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate degrees (NCES n.d.).

Black Students

Affirmative action, emerging in the United States in the mid-20th century, aimed to address historical inequalities and foster diversity, including in HE, as newly introduced policies attempted to break barriers for people of color, like Black Americans, at historically white institutions (Ford, *et al.* 2023, 54). Some states

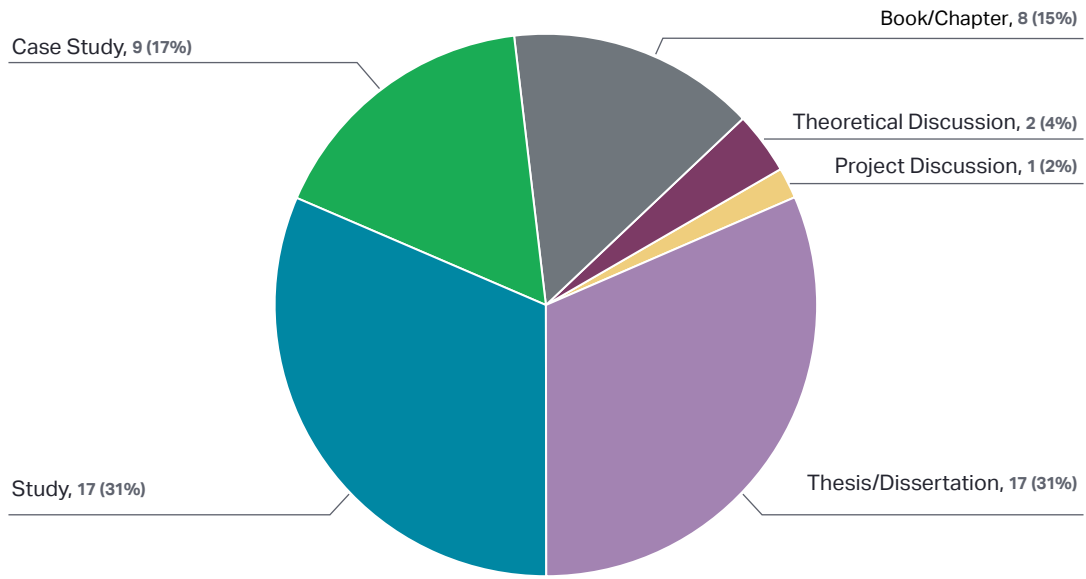


FIGURE 1 ► Texts by Type of Publication

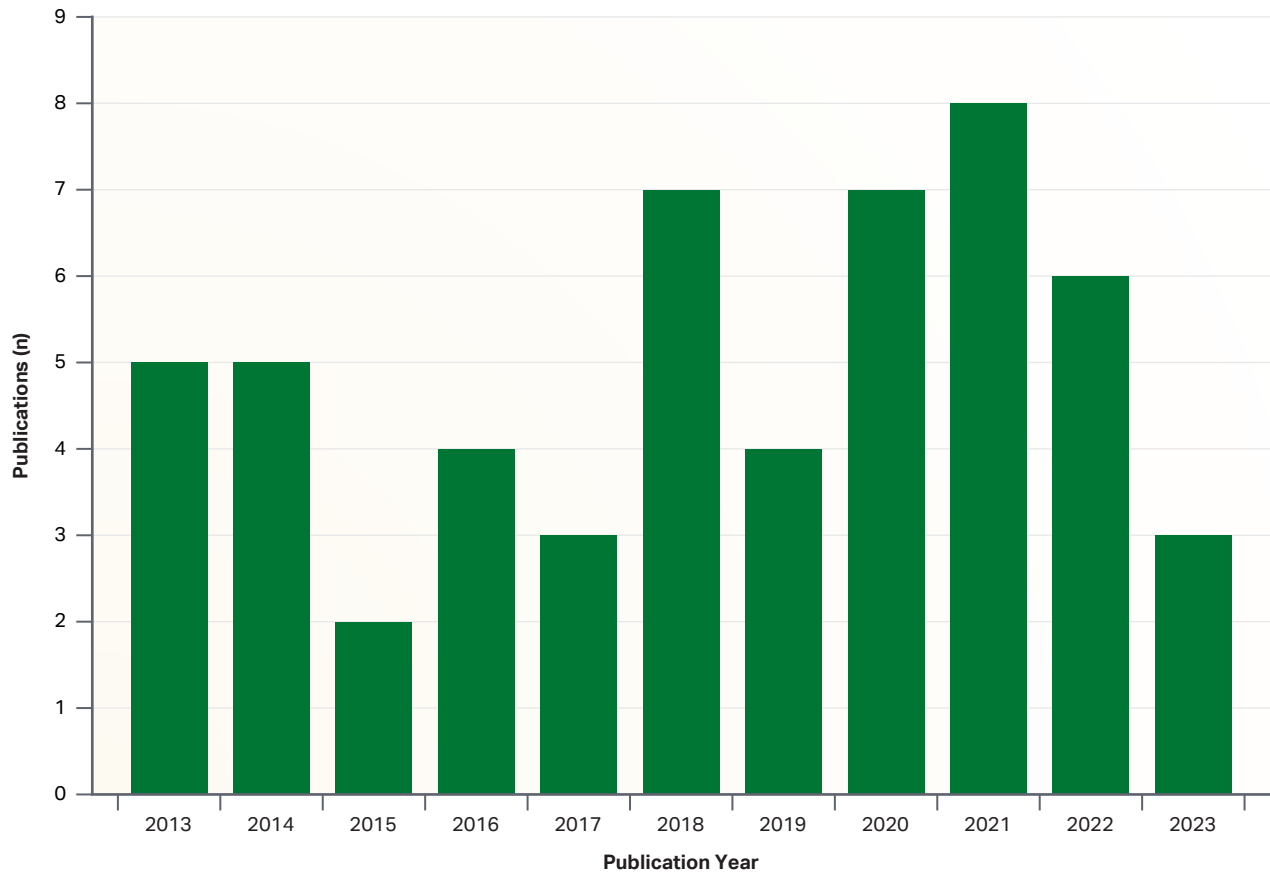


FIGURE 2 ► Texts by Publication Year

like Texas, Florida, and California implemented programs that targeted marginalized Black students, resulting in predatory recruitment strategies using a *percent plan* approach. Texas introduced the “Top Ten Percent Law” in 1997, which guaranteed automatic acceptance to any student graduating in the top ten percent of their high school class despite their school’s state or national ranking. Many students require significant financial resources to complete their HE pursuits, which results in decades of student debt with no guarantee of success at the HE level (Mustaffa and Dawson 2021, 9). Studies highlight concerns for these students, as many struggle with completion challenges due to inadequate secondary school preparation for postsecondary education (Jimenez 2021; Mustaffa and Dawson 2021; Robson, *et al.* 2018). A *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* survey demonstrated that only one in 20 Black students were rated as “college-ready” in English, reading, math and science, where white students were seven times as likely to be prepared in all four categories (*The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 2014, para. 3) due to students from marginalized school districts lacking support and funding for success (Mbekeani 2017).

Hispanic or Latinx Students

Within the Hispanic population of 2017, the largest subgroup was Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano students (62.7 percent), followed by Puerto Rican (9.3 percent), South American (6.3 percent), Central American excluding Salvadoran (5.6 percent), and other Hispanic groups (Espinosa, *et al.* 2019, 37). Despite representing 19.8 percent of the U.S. undergraduate population in 2016–2017 (57.9 percent female, 42.1 percent male), Hispanic and Latinx students, some of which were undocumented, often navigated marginalized high schools with limited funding (Espinosa, *et al.* 2019, 44). However, challenges persist as Hispanic students faced a greater than 50 percent dropout rate between HE enrollment and graduation in 2017 due to racism, cultural isolation, immigration status, and economic factors. Economic factors within this group drove the students to secure significant loans, worsening their future economic outlook (Espinosa, *et al.* 2019,

8; Kantamneni, *et al.* 2016). While their representation among undergraduates increased from approximately 30 percent in 1995–1996 to around 45 percent in 2015–2016, Hispanic and Latinx students tended to enter the community college system rather than the more prestigious state institutions. Research indicates that unique challenges continue to be an issue for undocumented students, affecting postsecondary preparation, faculty representation, cultural adjustment, and communication (Glass and Westmont 2014; Knight-Manuel, *et al.* 2019; Saltos 2023)

Asian Students

Like any other student group, Asian students encounter distinctive obstacles in HE that can impact their academic performance, social integration, and overall well-being. Recognizing the diversity within the Asian student community is crucial, as their experiences vary based on nationality, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and individual circumstances. Regrettably, much of the research on race and ethnicity in HE has predominantly focused on the Black-white dichotomy, leaving Asian Americans with comparatively less attention.

A recent analysis of mean SAT scores by race highlights intriguing trends. While Asian students encounter challenges both inside the classroom and within their communities, their SAT scores consistently demonstrate superiority in mathematics (with a 64-point advantage) and writing (18-point differential) over white students and trail solely in critical reading, where Asian students are four points behind white students (Jaschik 2017, para. 9). These results perpetuate the stereotype of Asians excelling academically. As the students struggle with the stereotypes, they also grapple with preconceptions of linguistic limitations and reserved classroom behavior, leading to communication breakdowns with peers and educators.

Indigenous Students

Indigenous students face compounded challenges from systemic biases and socioeconomic disadvantages within the education system. According to research by the Postsecondary National Policy Institute (2022),

Indigenous students accounted for 0.6 percent of all HE enrollment in the fall of 2020 in the United States. However, enrollment has steadily declined since the fall of 2010, seeing an enrollment decrease of 40 percent ($n = 107,000$) students (2022, 1). The research further presents that 42 percent of first-time Indigenous learners in the United States finish their four-year degree within six years, compared to the national average of other racial representation of 64 percent (2022, 2).

When Indigenous learners enroll in HE, they often experience feelings of being separated from their homes, families, and cultures, resulting in displacement and homesickness. Additionally, research indicates that, much like other marginalized students, Indigenous learners find that financial struggles hinder their ability to navigate HE and complete their chosen programs (Conroy 2013, 71). Another barrier to their success is academic preparedness, which varies geographically. Many Indigenous students report difficulties connecting with the curricula, as it often fails to resonate with their experiences and may be rooted in colonized content.

International Students of Color

Komissarova's study (2021) unveiled the dual significance of international students within educational settings. Beyond their role in enhancing institutional diversity, her research illuminated a tangible effect on MMS enrollment numbers. Notably, Komissarova's data spotlighted a compelling correlation: for every ten international students enrolled in a U.S. university's M.B.A. program, two domestic female, and MMS also enrolled (2021, 38). However, while this trend underscores positive growth, the challenge remains centered on retaining international students. By ensuring their continued presence, these students can persist in providing a multifaceted perspective and a constructive influence within the classroom environment.

In their seminal student dropout model, Spady and Tinto (1971; 1975) found a sense of belongingness crucial for student persistence and academic success. Extensive research has consistently supported this theory, particularly emphasizing the significance of a student's connection to their educational institution, regardless

of their unique needs or status (Glass and Westmont 2014). Zhou, *et al.* (2021) argued that international students often encounter cultural disparities, language barriers, systemic racism, and microaggressions. These obstacles significantly impede their academic progress, leading to a notable disconnect between international students and their domestic counterparts. Consequently, international students may hesitate to participate in class discussions or group work, ultimately impacting the success of international students, which can lead to voluntary withdrawal, transferring to other institutions, or even expulsion due to academic underperformance (2021, 82).

Students with Unique Needs

Students with unique needs encompass individuals who require specialized support and attention due to various disabilities or coming from foster care backgrounds. These students possess diverse abilities, challenges, and experiences that necessitate tailored educational approaches to ensure their success and well-being.

Students with Disabilities

Among all enrolled students, those with disabilities are at a higher risk of not completing their academic pursuits. Approximately 14 percent of students with disabilities who apply to HE programs withdraw within one to three years, compared to 8 percent of applicants without disabilities (Ferguson 2017, 2). Negative attitudes from faculty, administration, and peers regarding their unique needs contribute to this lack of persistence (Hong 2015; Wolbring and Lillywhite 2021), resulting in limited social and academic engagement due to insufficient understanding and negative perceptions (Ferguson 2017), which supports Tinto's interactionist theory on persistence as discrimination affects identity formation, hindering social integration (Hong 2015; Wolbring and Lillywhite 2021).

Students Currently in or From Foster Care

Students from foster care enrolled in higher education face numerous barriers impacting their academic and emotional success. A significant challenge is the lack of

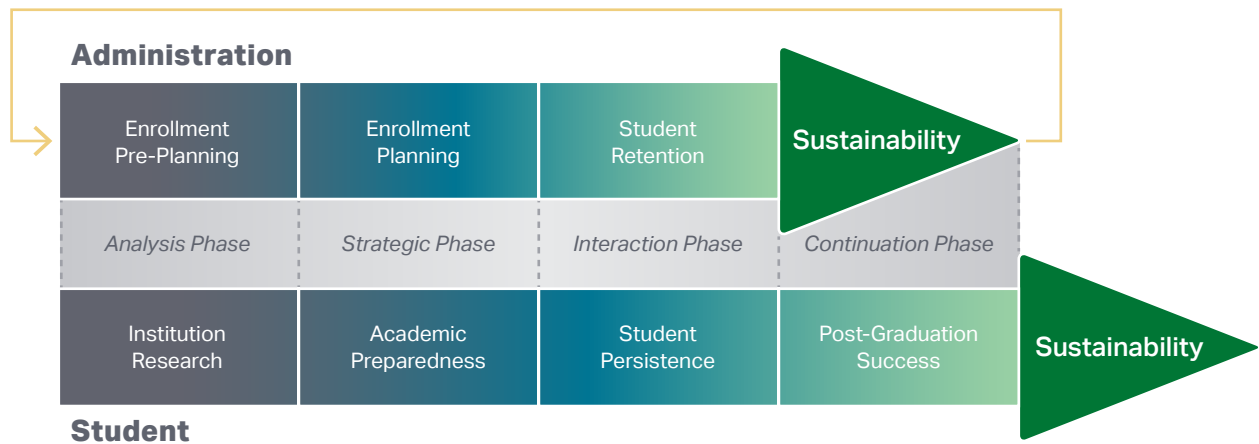


FIGURE 3 ▶ The Four Phases of the Enrollment Planning Cycle (Administration and Student)

Note: The continuation phase for the institution represents developing sustainable growth strategies for enrollment, while this phase represents economic sustainability for the student. Administration-level model is considered an iterative process.

familial stability and support, leading to frequent school changes and a disrupted education (Elliott and FitzGerald 2023, 62). Trauma from their foster care experiences can result in mental health issues that affect academic performance (Leibson 2016, 1), and financial constraints hinder their progress, as many lack the support networks their peers experience (Elliott and FitzGerald 2023; Ferguson 2019; Leibson 2016).

Promising Practices

Achieving the desired results in enrollment development necessitates establishing a unified framework and fundamental guiding principles to direct all associated promising practices. These can be organized into four pivotal phases of the administrative/MMS journey: the analysis, strategic, interaction, and continuation phases. Their primary objective is to promote sustainable growth within the institution's MMS population while simultaneously providing essential support to each individual.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the categorical phases exhibit a longitudinal nature closely mirroring both the institutional and student trajectories. These paths begin to diverge toward the end of the cycle. However, since

higher education administration must continually seek the evolution of practices, the institutional path becomes cyclical. In contrast, the MMS path remains linear, as students typically pursue their goals and transition into their careers.

- **Analysis Phase:** In this initial phase, groundwork is laid before enrollment commences. This involves critical tasks for HE administration, such as forecasting, resource allocation, and defining enrollment objectives. Simultaneously, MMS engage in seeking information about various institutions' programs and evaluating the feasibility of their enrollment.
- **Strategic Phase:** This phase focuses on the administration's strategies and tactics to attract and recruit MMS students effectively. From the MMS perspective, this phase involves assessing their academic readiness and seeking support to equip themselves for their educational journey better.
- **Interaction Phase:** Once students are enrolled, it becomes crucial to ensure they receive the requisite support and resources to thrive and persist toward their academic objectives. This phase plays a pivotal role in fostering organizational success. While there is considerable overlap in this phase, the student

must access institutional and social support to ensure they persist in their studies until completion.

■ **Continuation Phase:** During this phase, the institution develops practices that support sustained institutional enrollment growth among MMS and revisits the analysis phase to adapt to the evolving needs of the student population. Adequate practices are put in place to assist students in securing gainful employment and achieving financial independence from their student debts.

Analysis Phase

Enrollment Pre-Planning

Institutions could establish a mission aligned with academic and strategic plans (Brock and Slater 2021; Complete College America 2022; Ferguson 2017; Kayyali 2022; Law 2017). Identifying historically-marginalized student segments is vital in the initial planning phase. Complete College America suggests assessing current and potential student populations to address enrollment gaps, including underrepresented groups like Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, Pacific Islander students; unique needs; and diverse familial backgrounds (2022, 5). The effectiveness of pre-planning involves tailoring attraction strategies, including unique narratives and attending concerns of each community, as well as demographic segmentation aids in understanding distinct requirements, even among smaller groups.

Identifying the Strategic Plan

Existing research has acknowledged the importance of state-level governing boards but lacked investigation into their influence on EDI&D initiatives and racial dynamics within HE leadership (Rall, *et al.* 2022, 2). Leadership teams could align the strategic plan with sustainable growth and the diverse needs of the institution. The U.S. Department of Education encouraged governors to advance college completion through focused policies, potentially linking funding to outcomes like graduation rates of nontraditional students (Berry, *et al.* 2018, 263). This strategic planning encompasses all facets of the HEI, enhancing effectiveness and shaping a

holistic future vision. Achieving this vision necessitates leadership to bridge divides between recruitment and diversity offices, ensuring that the student and faculty composition mirrors the community and aligns with the school's envisioned trajectory.

Data and Trend Identification

When crafting a strategic enrollment policy, diverse data sources offer valuable insights. For instance, Titus suggested using national data, including the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, and the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, to review institutional policies and their efficacy (2021, 20–21). The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study fosters an understanding of marginalized students needing financial assistance. State-level surveys like the National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) database illuminate marginalized student trends and finance. SHEEO's comprehensive postsecondary student unit record systems provide data on student academic journeys, aiding policymakers. Integrating these datasets, SHEEO informs HE policies, enhancing effectiveness and affordability. Additionally, prioritizing recruitment campaigns for marginalized communities involves specific metrics, employee training, tailored websites, and access programs. This approach encompasses Indigenous students, international students, and underrepresented communities, promoting EDI&D and ensuring an inclusive educational landscape (Tamtik and Guenter 2020, 48).

Equity-Based Recruitment Strategies

Adopting ongoing and adaptive onboarding and recruitment processes is essential to address the underrepresentation of MMS in STEM, finance, and health sciences. Complete College America recommended implementing an equity-based recruitment strategy to create a critical mass of students and faculty of color (2022, 16). By fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment, institutions can challenge and dismantle stereotypes over time, promoting a more balanced representation of ethnicity and benefiting from the richness a multicul-

tural community brings to HE. This approach ensures the gradual depletion of the barriers preventing Black and Latinx students from accessing these fields, leading to increased diversity and representation in STEM, finance, and health sciences.

Current Infrastructure Analysis

Educational institutions increasingly acknowledge the significance of cultivating inclusive and equitable learning environments that embrace diverse student groups, including historically-marginalized communities. They could proactively assess their infrastructure to bolster EDI&D initiatives, which encompasses ensuring physical spaces are accessible, with features like ramps and elevators for individuals with disabilities and optimizing digital platforms to meet accessibility standards. Scrutiny of institutional policies aims to uncover biases and systemic barriers within admissions, financial aid, and academic support. The University of Leeds highlighted the need for cultural competence training to enhance inclusive classrooms and leadership and faculty levels. As a result, the school experienced significant increases in the representation, experiences, and success of MMS and minoritized or marginalized leadership teams (Law 2017, 6).

Opportunities for Satellite Locations

Creating satellite campuses in Indigenous communities offers transformative enrollment recruitment potential. This approach addresses Indigenous students' persistent challenges with educational access due to geographical and cultural barriers in pursuing HE while providing localized and culturally-relevant learning within or near these communities, ensuring quality education without disconnecting from their culture, which promotes community ownership and empowerment, spurring more Indigenous students to pursue HE and enriching the academic landscape with their perspectives. The University of Saskatchewan introduced the NORTEP program, which focused on teacher education provided through northern satellite community campuses. The program has graduated 192 northern community members, predominantly indigenous students,

with an 80 percent employment rate in their communities (Malatest 2002, 40). Collaborative engagement with Indigenous leaders can also lead to tailored programs specific to local needs, fostering an environment that respects and celebrates traditions.

Additionally, these campuses serve as knowledge exchange and cultural preservation hubs, incorporating Indigenous languages and traditions into curricula to rejuvenate cultural heritage. Graduates, linked to their roots, become agents of change, further developing their communities and empowering future generations. Establishing satellite campuses in Indigenous communities exemplifies a progressive and inclusive enrollment approach, contributing to educational, cultural, and socioeconomic advancement.

Further, by creating satellite campuses within the marginalized communities, the students can reduce the general cost of their education while staying in their existing districts. These benefits are twofold: a) students can remain closer to home and establish culturally-significant relationships with their peers, and b) the institution can promote recruiting culturally-specific and industry-relevant community leaders into faculty roles. Having marginalized and minoritized community leaders serve as faculty will also encourage potential students to consider postsecondary education (Miller, *et al.* 2018).

Community Outreach and Awareness

Community outreach and awareness programs are vital in promoting student enrollment success for HE diversity. These initiatives are essential for reaching out to underrepresented communities and informing them about the opportunities and benefits of pursuing HE. By engaging with local schools, community centers, and cultural organizations, HEI can raise awareness about available scholarships, financial aid, and supportive resources tailored to diverse student populations. Such outreach efforts foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging, making HE feel attainable and relevant for students from different backgrounds. Moreover, community outreach programs help dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding HEI, especially in communities with lim-

ited access to such information (Holliday and Anderson 2022). By providing accurate and accessible information, these programs empower students and their families to make informed decisions about their academic futures, thus increasing enrollment rates and promoting diversity within HEI.

In addition to outreach efforts, awareness programs highlight the value of diversity in HE. These strategies can include seminars, workshops, and panel discussions emphasizing the benefits of diverse perspectives and experiences in academic settings. By showcasing success stories of students from diverse backgrounds who have excelled in HE, MMS become inspired and motivated to pursue their educational dreams.

Strategic Phase Enrollment Strategies

Planning for inclusion is crucial to creating a diverse and equitable learning environment. Inclusive education aims to accommodate the diverse needs of all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or learning styles. Enrollment planning involves considering various factors, such as identifying the specific requirements of students with disabilities, linguistic diversity, or other unique needs. Schools must collaborate with families, educators, and specialists to develop personalized support plans and ensure appropriate resources are available to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment. By implementing comprehensive enrollment planning strategies, educational institutions can embrace the principles of inclusion, foster a sense of belonging for every student, and lay the foundation for their academic success and personal growth.

Affirmative Action Recruiting Practices

Affirmative action practices for hiring HE professors aim to enhance faculty diversity to advance an inclusive and dynamic learning environment. Colleges and universities should actively seek and recruit candidates from underrepresented groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities, addressing historical disparities and creating a faculty that mirrors the diverse student body (Complete Col-

lege America 2022). This tactic brings various perspectives, expertise, and teaching styles to the classroom, enriching the educational experience for all students and serving as positive role models, encouraging underrepresented students to pursue higher education and achieve their goals. Prioritizing diversity in student enrollment within higher education yields numerous benefits, promoting collaboration, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding, and exposure to diverse viewpoints enhances critical thinking and problem-solving skills, preparing students for a diverse world. A diverse student body fosters community and belonging, and improves academic performance, retention rates, and student success (Glass and Westmont 2014).

Advocates of affirmative action believe that this policy plays a crucial role in rectifying the deep-rooted inequalities that have persisted in education for marginalized students. Historically, various racial and ethnic groups have faced systemic discrimination, which has translated into unequal access to quality K–12 education, advanced coursework, and other resources critical for college preparedness. As a result, many MMS find themselves at a disadvantage when competing for college admissions spots against applicants from more privileged backgrounds. Affirmative action can address this imbalance by acknowledging the additional hurdles these students face. By offering a modest preference in the admissions process to applicants from underrepresented backgrounds, colleges and universities are able to adjust the playing field and create a fairer opportunity structure.

Financial Assistance

A recent study by Fishman, *et al.* found that 57 percent of respondents preferred government funding for HE (2022) due to rising living and education costs that hinder marginalized students' attendance, with most participants in the study highlighting the fact that they feel federal and state governments underfund public community colleges and universities (2022). To ensure student success, schools should offer merit-based and need-based financial assistance as they recognize academic excellence and talent, motivating focused study,

while need-based aid addresses economic challenges, ensuring equal access to education (Jiménez and Glatert 2020). Designing financial aid without jeopardizing the future financial security of the student is paramount, and institutions could prioritize sustainable options such as grants and low-interest loans to attract marginalized students (Brooks and Parker 2023).

Interaction Phase

Student Retention

Retention stands out as paramount among the array of opportunities within the university landscape. For most MMS, their primary apprehensions upon entering HE encompass financial considerations, feelings of isolation, demanding academic environment, availability of academic support, and preparedness for their future careers. Piedmont University conceived an inventive summer bridge initiative discussed in Rettig's paper named SAIL, an acronym representing "start, achieve, impact, lead" to help new students overcome their concerns (2022, 39). This pioneering program developed through the school's retention vortex targets specific student demographics: those from underrepresented backgrounds, first-generation students, and individuals displaying early academic potential based on their high school records. Experienced peers who underwent specialized mentorship training paired up with these aspiring students as student navigators. The program's inception involves an intensive three-day camp preceding the start of the fall semester, followed by regular activities spanning the academic year. This strategy has proven extremely successful and has expanded the university to include an admissions vortex.

Tinto's foundational research (1975) highlights the importance of strong academic and social connections within institutions to deter students from opting for alternative paths, such as different institutions or employment. Subsequent studies, including McInnis Brown, and Starett (2017), validate this notion, revealing a notable correlation between student-instructor interactions and student success, particularly among commuter students, with 94 percent acknowledging this link (para. 3). Alongside faculty-student relation-

ships, Loewen (2016) advocated for peer mentoring programs as influential contributors to student success and persistence, creating a valuable peer support network. Faculty members also recognize the impact of personal rapport on student engagement, with one noting, "[i]f I don't establish a rapport with my students, they will not pay attention to what I have to say...Students will not value your input until they realize that you genuinely care about them" (Smith and Gotheil 2021, 95). Significant research underscores the need for targeted support strategies for marginalized communities, including early alerts, community-based content delivery, and robust financial assistance, as tuition costs remain a substantial barrier for minoritized students entering North American postsecondary systems (Brock and Slater 2021; Charbonneau n.d.; Chiwandire and Vincent 2019; Reyna 2021; Sutton 2021; Tamtik and Guenter 2020). Recognizing the transformative impact of these strategies, institutions strive to cultivate an inclusive environment that nurtures success throughout students' academic journeys.

Classroom Supports

A strong correlation exists between classroom support and the curriculum. Complete College America advocated meta majors for underserved students to access higher education, regardless of high school courses (2022, 16). Micro-credentials gain importance; Kazis and Leasor stated that credential holders could earn around \$15,000 more annually than non-holders (2021, 5). Ontario committed \$59.5 million (OCUFA n.d., 2), while British Columbia developed 130 micro-credentials (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills n.d., para. 6), catering to relevant training via diverse methods and supporting indigenous community needs. Relevance in course content is vital. Student responses to the "Why is My Curriculum White?" video highlighted the curriculum's dominance by white authors and perspectives, sidelining marginalized students (Arday and Mirza 2020). Power imbalances in institutions hamper self-advocacy for students with disabilities (Ferguson 2017, 3) and other MMS, and hiring advocates and staff focusing on underserved students addresses this; Dal-

housie University appoints advisors for Indigenous and Black students (Tamtik and Guenter 2020). In the UK, movements advocate universal HE access while providing additional support for students with disabilities, fostering inclusivity (Chiwandire and Vincent 2019). Nieman and Maruyama (2005) emphasized recruiting faculty mirroring student diversity to bridge interactions, as white faculty engage differently with white and marginalized students (Complete College America 2022). Despite mounting evidence challenging its efficacy, affirmative action remains a contentious issue that U.S. HEI grapple with regarding hiring practices. While the policy was initially introduced to redress historical inequalities and promote diversity, critics argue that it can inadvertently perpetuate biases, undermine the meritocratic principles of selection, and even lead to feelings of resentment among certain groups. This ongoing struggle reflects the complexity of addressing deeply ingrained disparities in representation and opportunities and the broader societal tensions surrounding notions of fairness and equality (Liu 2017). Affirmative action may not necessarily address the root causes of underrepresentation, and alternative approaches, such as investing in educational opportunities and mentorship programs, might yield more effective results. Despite these criticisms, proponents of affirmative action emphasize its importance in breaking down systemic barriers that have historically-disadvantaged marginalized groups and argue that achieving true diversity and inclusion in various sectors is necessary.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

HEI could explore ways to enhance or adapt its scholarship to draw a larger MMS student population. According to Brooks and Parker Field (2023) findings, this revised approach has yielded remarkable results at the University of Oregon. In 2000, the university's MMS student representation stood at 15 percent, surpassing the statewide average of 13.8 percent for marginalized or minority populations in Oregon (2023, 11). However, by implementing alterations to the scholarship framework, the university has experienced a substantial transformation. By the latest count, the institution now boasts

an impressive 35.7 percent of students who identify as MMS, showcasing the efficacy of the modified scholarship strategy in fostering greater inclusivity and diversity on campus (2023, 12).

To bolster EDI&D, adapting HE curricula to cater to the MMS unique needs and cultural relevance is crucial. A practical step involves infusing diverse perspectives into the curriculum through inclusive readings, case studies, and examples. This strategy promotes empathy, critical thinking, and a richer learning environment, allowing students to explore culturally-relevant topics while enhancing engagement and academic achievement for all students.

Flexible Delivery Modalities

Flexible delivery modes, including hybrid or online courses, accommodate time constraints and disabilities, ensuring equitable access. Inclusive practices like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) accommodate various learning styles. Utilizing a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) model fosters a more comprehensive and profound comprehension within a diverse classroom, considering the challenges faced by students who have not had the educational advantages typically associated with predominantly white communities (Almeqdad, *et al.* 2023). Faculty development is essential as it equips instructors with skills for inclusive teaching, anti-bias education, and understanding MMS needs. Ongoing dialogue among faculty fosters best practice sharing and teaching improvement, and through these measures, HEI creates an environment where MMS thrive and reach their potential.

Creating Customized Learning Strategies and Mentorship Programs

Further, customized learning strategies help to support programs and mentorships that aid marginalized students in overcoming challenges and achieving academic success. Through thorough infrastructure examination and adaptation, educational institutions can foster an environment valuing diversity and equipping students for a globally interconnected world (Tamtik and Guenter 2020, 42).

Continuation Phase

Post-Graduation Success Strategies

Implementing effective retention and success strategies is crucial to address disparities and promote equitable student opportunities. By focusing on targeted support, mentorship programs, and culturally-responsive teaching, educational institutions can create inclusive environments that foster a sense of belonging and empowerment for students from diverse backgrounds (Knight-Manuel, *et al.* 2019, 36). Moreover, investing in the success of these communities not only benefits the individuals involved but contributes to a more diverse, equitable, and enriched society where all individuals can reach their full potential and contribute meaningfully to their communities. These strategies help improve retention rates, reduce achievement gaps, and enhance the overall academic success of students from underrepresented communities (2019, 51).

Post-Academic Supports

Despite limited scholarship programs, many disadvantaged students still graduate from HEI burdened with substantial debt, creating a financial crisis for students in these communities, as interest accumulates on loans regardless of their employment status or participation in financial assistance programs. Disturbingly, expensive for-profit schools in the United States actively target the enrollment of Black and Latinx students, despite research indicating that these students are less likely to complete their studies. As a result, they become saddled with a financial obligation that they may struggle to repay due to their unchanged employment or economic status (Jiménez and Glatert 2020, 142). Considering that these students encounter racism in the workplace, including lower pay for equal work, upon completing their studies, the repercussions of this situation lead to increased debt through collection activities, the possibility of a wage garnishment, and ultimately higher borrowing costs for other necessities (2020, 145). Therefore, postsecondary institutions should consider providing no-interest financial assistance tailored to individual

student's financial needs. Moreover, establishing strategic partnerships with organizations that are likely to offer scholarships will enhance opportunities for these students, thereby increasing successful enrollment enrichment (Brooks and Parker 2023, 6).

Sustainability of EDI&D

Ensuring the sustainability of EDI&D programs in HE is essential for creating lasting and impactful change, and these programs should address deep-rooted systemic inequities, foster inclusivity, and challenge educational institutions' historically Eurocentric and colonial underpinnings. To achieve institutional sustainability, these principles must be integrated into HEI's core values, policies, and practices. This process requires a dedicated, long-term commitment, including allocating sufficient resources such as funding, staff, and infrastructure to support the successful implementation and continuation of these initiatives (Complete College America 2022). Furthermore, ongoing professional development and training for faculty, staff, and administrators are essential to cultivate a deep understanding of the issues and equip them with the necessary skills to effectively implement inclusive and decolonized practices.

Additionally, the sustainability of these programs demands regular assessment and evaluation to gauge their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This approach involves collecting data on various metrics, including student experiences, graduation rates, representation in leadership positions, and other relevant indicators to track progress and identify disparities (Brock and Slater 2021; Complete College America 2022; Kayyali 2022; Reyna 2021; Sutton 2021). Engaging with diverse communities and stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and local communities, is essential to ensure their perspectives are valued and their needs considered throughout the development and implementation of these programs. By fostering a collaborative approach and continuously refining these initiatives based on feedback and evidence, educational institutions can create sustainable and transformative change that leads to more equitable and inclusive HE environments.

Barriers to EDI&D

As discussed, the significance of nurturing EDI&D within HEI has garnered notable recognition. Drawing from existing scholarly discourse, the existing perceptions of barriers concerning MMS tend to instill a predisposed sense of potential failure within HEI. Holliday and Anderson assert that beyond comprehending the hindrances that MMS encounter, developing outreach and intervention strategies is paramount in successfully attracting a more inclusive MMS populace (2022, 39). These practices aim to create fair, inclusive, and just environments that value the contributions of diverse individuals while challenging oppressive systems. However, despite the growing recognition of their significance, numerous barriers exist that hinder the progress of these practices (Charbonneau, n.d.; Chiwandire and Vincent 2019; Clifford Ertle 2018; Complete College America 2022; Jorgenson, *et al.* 2018; Malatest 2002; Niemann and Maruyama 2005; Smith and Gotheil 2021), making it essential to understand them to address and overcome them effectively. These barriers are broadly categorized into institutional and social barriers to success.

Administration Level

Institutional barriers are systemic challenges within HEI structures, policies, and practices. These barriers can significantly impact the progress and effectiveness of EDI&D strategies, and addressing institutional barriers becomes crucial for creating inclusive and just educational environments.

Lack of Representation and Leadership

The lack of diversity in leadership roles within HEI, including marginalized communities, is a significant barrier (Clifford Ertle 2018; Jorgenson, *et al.* 2018; Law 2017; Reyna 2021). A non-diverse leadership team creates power imbalances that hinder meaningful changes for all students and an inclusive environment (Ferguson 2017), potentially overlooking marginalized perspectives, experiences, and needs. Diverse leaders offer insights and lived experiences crucial for addressing marginalized challenges while enabling strategic decision-making,

considering diverse stakeholders, advocating for inclusive practices, challenging barriers, and ensuring the institution hears and responds to underrepresented voices. Diverse leaders also serve as mentors, inspiring MMS (Miller, *et al.* 2018) and, thus, dispelling stereotypes. Institutions must prioritize EDI&D in senior leadership recruitment to address underrepresentation, nurture underrepresented talent, and offer advancement support. Institutions should establish accountable and transparent leadership processes while continually evaluating representation and reporting progress to stakeholders (Law 2017).

Biased Policies and Practices

Institutional policies and practices can perpetuate bias and discrimination, creating significant barriers to EDI&D. For example, admissions criteria that favor privileged groups or disciplinary policies that disproportionately impact MMS can reinforce existing inequalities. Further, curricula that overlook diverse perspectives and contributions can marginalize certain groups and perpetuate the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge. Addressing these biases and implementing equitable policies and practices are essential to dismantling institutional barriers.

Resistance to Change

Resistance from leadership poses a significant barrier to effective EDI&D policies. This resistance may deny systemic biases and hinder comprehensive initiatives, silencing marginalized voices and impeding progress toward inclusivity. Its presence in HEI can maintain or encourage discriminatory practices, further perpetuating disparities. Moreover, leadership resistance results in insufficient commitment and resources for diversity efforts. Without support, initiatives lack funding, infrastructure, and lasting impact, leading to token gestures.

Limited Resources and Funding

Insufficient resources pose significant barriers to implementing EDI&D initiatives. HEI, facing budget constraints or funding cuts, may struggle to provide support

services, training programs, or resources needed to foster inclusive practices. Adequate allocation of resources and sustained funding are crucial for overcoming this barrier, as these efforts enable the hiring of diverse faculty and staff, the development of inclusive curricula, and the provision of support services that meet the unique needs of MMS.

Inflexible Structures and Systems

Institutional structures and systems that are inflexible and resistant to change can impede progress in EDI&D. Rigid curriculum frameworks may limit the inclusion of diverse perspectives or hinder the adoption of culturally-responsive teaching practices. Hierarchical decision-making processes lacking student or community input opportunities can marginalize those voices. Institutions must review and revise their structures and systems to ensure they are responsive to the evolving needs of diverse populations and promote EDI&D.

Lack of Accountability and Evaluation

Another institutional barrier is the need for accountability and evaluation mechanisms for EDI&D practices. Without clear metrics and assessment processes, measuring progress, identifying gaps, and holding institutions responsible for their commitments to EDI&D becomes challenging.

Lack of Cultural Competence

A lack of cultural competence within an institution's leadership can impede progress in diversity and inclusion policies. When leaders lack an understanding of diverse cultures and experiences, they may struggle to address unique needs, potentially resulting in misguided policies that perpetuate inequality. This deficiency can inadvertently foster stereotypes and microaggressions, creating unwelcoming environments for diverse members. Moreover, inadequate cultural competence hampers effective communication and collaboration, hindering the incorporation of valuable perspectives and innovative solutions.

Student Level

Social Barriers to Success

Social barriers profoundly impact MMS in HE, impeding their academic success and well-being. These barriers arise from deeply ingrained prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices within society and HEI. MMS often face exclusion, microaggressions, and biased treatment, creating a hostile and unwelcoming learning environment. The lack of representation and visibility of their identities within the curriculum, faculty, and leadership further reinforces feelings of alienation and erases their diverse perspectives. Moreover, socioeconomic disparities and limited access to financial resources can limit MMS' opportunities to pursue HE, perpetuating cycles of inequality. These social barriers significantly affect their mental health, self-esteem, and sense of belonging, making it more challenging for them to succeed academically and reach their full potential.

Stereotypes and Bias

Stereotypes and biases encourage social barriers that hinder MMS success in HE, as negative stereotypes based on race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status create hostile learning environments, leading to self-doubt, imposter syndrome, and academic struggles. Studies show that biases influence educator interactions, lowering expectations and support. These biases may also impact grading, recommendations, and research access, worsening disparities and limiting growth.

Limitations and Future Research

The research on EDI&D conducted solely by white researchers enjoying privilege has inherent limitations that must be acknowledged. First and foremost, the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities directly impacted by these issues become inadvertently overlooked or inadequately represented. The lived experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds, particularly those facing discrimination and exclusion, are essential to understanding the true complexities of these topics. Exclusionary research can create a narrow, homogenous viewpoint that fails to

capture the full spectrum of challenges and needs faced by marginalized individuals.

Furthermore, restricting the initial investigation to only English sources can significantly limit the data collected. By excluding research and perspectives from other languages and cultures, this work may have missed valuable insights and expertise that might exist within non-English-speaking communities. This exclusion leads to a Western-centric bias, further marginalizing voices from different nationalities and limiting a comprehensive understanding of these critical issues.

Research on EDI&D in HE policies, recruiting practices, and hiring strategies is crucial to foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Here are some ideas for future research in this area:

- **Long-term Impact Assessment:** Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives on students, faculty, and staff in HEI. Analyze retention rates, career outcomes, and overall campus climate over time to determine the effectiveness of current policies.
- **Intersectionality in Recruitment and Hiring:** Investigate how intersectionality, the interconnected nature of social identities (*e.g.*, race, gender, sexuality, disability), affects recruitment and hiring processes. Examine whether institutions are considering and addressing intersectional factors in their strategies.
- **Inclusive Curriculum Development:** Examine approaches to developing inclusive curricula that reflect diverse perspectives and histories. Investigate how these curricular changes impact student engagement, academic achievement, and critical thinking skills.
- **Policy Analysis and Comparative Studies:** Conduct cross-institutional and cross-country comparative studies to analyze equity, diversity, inclusivity, and decolonization policies and practices. Identify best practices and learn from successful initiatives in different contexts.
- **Microaggressions and Campus Culture:** Investigate the prevalence and impact of microaggressions on campus culture and student experiences. Develop

strategies to create a more respectful and inclusive environment.

- **Culturally-Responsive Support Services:** Research the effectiveness of culturally responsive support services and resources in addressing the unique needs of diverse student populations. Assess how these services impact student success and well-being.

Conclusion

The imperative to balance change in EDI&D recruiting and hiring practices for members of marginalized communities in HE begins with the SEM department. SEM practices play a pivotal role in this transformation. This article has illuminated the deeply entrenched disparities that persist within academic institutions, hindering the full realization of their potential as centers of knowledge, innovation, and societal progress. Embracing diversity is not merely a token gesture but a critical step toward dismantling systemic barriers and creating a truly inclusive learning environment that empowers individuals from all walks of life to thrive. Recognizing the unique perspectives, talents, and contributions that members of marginalized communities bring to the table is not just a moral obligation; it is an investment in the enrichment and transformation of the entire academic community.

To foster real and lasting change, institutions must proactively engage in comprehensive reforms that address biases, expand outreach efforts, and implement evidence-based strategies for recruitment and hiring. This change criterion entails creating transparent and accountable selection processes, prioritizing diversity as a core value and actively challenging the status quo. Equitable access to opportunities, robust support systems, and inclusive policies will empower members of marginalized communities to overcome historical disadvantages and achieve their fullest potential. The SEM department's strategic actions can significantly contribute to this mission, aligning enrollment management practices with EDI&D goals and driving meaningful progress toward a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

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About the Authors



Keith J. Connell

Keith J. Connell, M.B.A., a Professor of Design and Visual Arts at Georgian College in

Barrie, Ontario, has an extensive background in both academia and the corporate world. Prior to his current role, he served as a program coordinator for business, marketing, computer studies, and interactive media web design. Throughout his tenure in these roles, Connell gained invaluable insights into the unique challenges and remarkable resilience possessed by marginalized and international students in Canada.

Connell's academic journey is enriched by the diverse roles he played

during his careers. His robust corporate background has equipped him with a wealth of knowledge facilitating the ability to teach in various disciplines, including digital content creation and strategy, big data, computer studies, and business. This multifaceted expertise enables him to provide a well-rounded educational experience to his students.

Currently pursuing a Ph.D. in educational leadership and policy at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Connell is focused on making significant contributions to the field of education. His research spotlights the experiences of international students and their resilience and choice to persist in higher

education. With a strong commitment to promoting equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization within the classroom, he aims to develop best practices that enhance the educational landscape.

Connell's dedication to lifelong learning and growth reflects his philosophy: "It's a great day to learn something new," seeing himself as both teacher and student. He holds two diplomas, one in advertising marketing communications and another in computer studies, both earned from Georgian College. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from York University and an M.B.A. from the University of Fredericton, specializing in leadership and innovation.



Clayton Smith

Clayton Smith, Ed.D., is Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor

and Associate Faculty at Royal Roads University where he teaches in the Graduate Diploma in SEM program. Dr. Smith previously held senior enrollment management positions at the University of Windsor, the State University of New York College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill, Tallahassee Community College in Florida, and the University of Maine at Augusta.

Known for his focus on comparative enrollment management, Dr. Smith has performed collaborative research into the distinctive qualities of enrollment management in the United States and

Canada that has allowed educational leaders from both countries to compare and share best practices. Dr. Smith has, with research colleague Susan Gottheil, co-edited *SEM in Canada: Promoting Student and Institutional Success in Canadian Colleges and Universities (2011)* and *The Effectiveness of SEM in Canada: Reflections from the Field (2022)*. His recent research focuses on the faculty role in SEM, how change management impacts successful SEM institutional implementation, and Canadian enrollment leaders' reflections on the effectiveness of SEM in Canada.

Dr. Smith is a leader in the field of enrollment management, with special emphasis on the areas of institutional

SEM readiness, implementing SEM, enrollment planning, change management, international student affairs, and student success and retention.

Dr. Smith holds a B.A. in political science from the University of Southern Maine, an M.A. in political science from Drew University, an M.P.A. in public administration from the University of Maine, and an Ed.D. in higher education from Florida State University. He is a senior consultant with AACRAO Consulting and currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly*.