

## Services & Programs

Recognize that individuals who come to your office may be dealing with a variety of issues. While it may not be your role to handle all of these issues, you may be a first point of contact for a student—the person with whom the student feels most comfortable making an initial approach.

Have an understanding of campus resources to make appropriate referrals for students, and follow-up to ensure students have access to needed resources. Work with your colleagues to develop a collaborative approach to handling situations in which students present a variety of issues. Apply a diversity lens to programs and projects.

Examples:

- Host inter-office meetings with campus partners about service issues to expand your capacity for referral and advising.
- Use a referral form for increasing inter-office knowledge-sharing and collaboration.
- Develop a publication to list all campus diversity resources.
- Conduct an audit of campus restrooms to achieve spaces that are physically accessible, unisex friendly and suitable for parents of small children. Also attention should be given to appropriate signage.

“We have to learn about various groups in order to work with particular students effectively.”  
AHEAD member

## RESOURCES

Diversity Web: An Interactive Resource Hub for Higher Education. *Association of American Colleges and Universities*. <http://www.diversityweb.org/index.cfm>

Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice. *AWID*. <http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Intersectionality-A-Tool-for-Gender-and-Economic-Justice>

Smith, D. G. (2004). The campus diversity initiative: Current status, anticipating the future. <http://www.irvine.org/assets/pdf/pubs/education/CDIStatusand-Future2004.pdf>

## AHEAD DIVERSITY INITIATIVE

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Diversity Initiative members are a resource for you; please contact us. Further information is available on the AHEAD website ([www.ahead.org](http://www.ahead.org)) and on Facebook (search for “AHEAD Diversity Initiative”).

## Promoting Diversity in Disability Services

**AHEAD** Association on  
Higher Education  
And Disability®

The Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD) is an international, multicultural organization of professionals committed to full participation in higher education for persons with disabilities. AHEAD is a vital resource, promoting excellence through education, communication, and training. For membership information visit us at [www.ahead.org](http://www.ahead.org)

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## WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

AHEAD defines diversity as encompassing the variety of qualities, traits, and characteristics that are inherent to humans, with a focus on the world views, communication styles, and unique ways of “thinking, being and doing” of individuals within our institutions and the communities we serve (entire statement can be found at [www.ahead.org](http://www.ahead.org)).

One way to look at diversity is to employ an Intersectional Framework. Originally founded in feminist legal theory and critical race theory, this framework recognizes that power, privilege, and prejudice affect our way of responding to the world. An intersectional approach appreciates that each person has multiple identities and it is important to recognize them: disability, race, ethnicity, color, culture, national origin, residence, gender, sexual orientation, age, and belief system.

Another framework is the concept of cultural competency. This concept embraces diversity as part of culture, and is another potentially useful framework of inclusivity. For purposes of this publication, however, the term diversity will refer to AHEAD’s definition for it is broad and encompassing.

By including diversity in our philosophical approach to our work, we, as disability service professionals, will be living up to our professional standards.

## — WHAT CAN I DO TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY ON MY CAMPUS? —

### Structure

Ensure that your disability service unit is part of campus-wide committees and initiatives concerning diversity. Be at the table where these issues are being discussed and advocate to include disability within institutional strategic plans related to diversity.

To get started, you may want to conduct an assessment of stakeholder groups on your campus as part of the foundation for developing a strategic or operational diversity plan for your institution. The work that goes into planning will be part of team-building with your colleagues in creating a welcoming campus.

Ensure that your institution’s budget for diversity programming recognizes the importance of systemic work undertaken by your unit.

The most appropriate structural model for your institution depends on your context. The name of the structure may vary as well. For example, Multicultural Affairs or Equity may be the umbrella terms used rather than Diversity.

Examples of diversity structures are:

- A diversity roundtable that meets for monthly luncheon sessions to exchange information.
- An ad hoc committee formed to develop an institution-wide strategic plan on diversity.
- An on-going campus-wide diversity committee which meets regularly to review progress on diversity and discuss mutual projects for collaboration.
- An organizational structure which sets up an Office of Access and Diversity to provide leadership in examining policies, processes, and programs through the lens of diversity. The scope of the office is to work with students of all disabilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

“The more you appreciate diversity within this organization, the more inclusive we become, and the better professionals we will be.”  
AHEAD Member

### Culture

You can help to create a cultural climate in your institution that recognizes that disability is part of the campus diversity community.

Language is important, and the words used should strive to be inclusive and embracing. Ensure that language does not reinforce stereotypes and does not exclude any group. Use the correct and preferred terminology of stakeholder groups; invite individuals from these groups to discuss with you their preferred terminology on your campus.

Also, take care that you put the person before the disability or other dimension. For example, refer to “person with a disability” instead of “disabled person”.

To enhance your comfort level and ability to include diversity in your work, arrange for in-service training or avail yourself of opportunities through AHEAD. You may also want to mentor or connect with another staff member to provide you with support and guidance.

A step towards creating an inclusive culture is to review your materials and literature to ensure that they reflect an intersectional framework. Educational and information sessions should include the diversity perspective, and you can go beyond this to organize special events and activities.

Examples:

- Orientation sessions for new students that begin with an inclusive, intersectional framework and emphasize that all students are welcome.
- An educational activity that involves working with campus partners to create an awareness of diversity services for students.
- Designing a diversity day or week on campus to highlight diversity issues.
- Review the forms you use and ensure that there is space for different gender identities.

“We just had a transgender student who was filling out a form and it didn’t have a place to indicate ‘other.’ So we just realized we need to change our database because it only has F and M.”  
AHEAD Member