


(Mis)Understanding Students


Approaches to *Affirming Student Identities*





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CONTENTS

About the Advising Success Network	2
Acknowledgments	3
How to Use This Guide	4
Research Approach.....	5
Overview	6
Focus Areas and Guiding Questions	8
Localized Contexts and Language.....	8
Intersecting and Changing Identities	10
Thriving and Well-Being.....	12
Common (Mis)Understandings and Related Recommendations	13
Race and Ethnicity.....	14
Socioeconomic Status and Social Class.....	18
First-generation Identity	19
Gender Identity	20
Sexual Orientation.....	21
Disability Status.....	22
Religion, Spirituality, and Secularism	23
Immigration and Documentation Status	24
Veteran Status	25
Formerly Incarcerated Status.....	26
Closing Considerations	27
Resources and Tools	28
NASPA Knowledge Communities, Initiatives, and Events	28
Additional Resources	29
Student Personas as a User Design Tool.....	30
References	31



ABOUT THE ADVISING SUCCESS NETWORK

Formed in 2018, the Advising Success Network is a dynamic network of five organizations, led by NASPA–Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, partnering to support educational change and improved student outcomes through a holistic approach to advising, addressing the operational, programmatic, technological, and research needs of colleges and universities in direct support of a more equitable student experience. Partner organizations include Achieving the Dream, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, EDUCAUSE, NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising, and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

The pursuit of equity is fundamental to the network’s mission. A key focus of the network is to help institutions better understand their student populations, and to support students from a wide range of backgrounds and identities through advising and other student services. This includes helping institutions understand what questions to ask students, how to use students’ information ethically, how to create culturally responsive student services, and how to set up and use analytics technologies ethically. Services developed and offered by the network focus on the student experience; support institutions in defining and reaching their equity goals through advising and student support initiatives; and help institutions include perspectives from multiple audiences such as faculty, staff, administrators, student services professionals, policymakers, campus leaders, researchers, and students.

One result of this focus is NASPA’s development of a resource geared toward institutional leaders. This guide synthesizes learnings—from practitioners in the field of higher education—about ways of understanding students and ways to redesign approaches aligned to equitable student outcomes. NASPA’s guide will become one of several resources integrated into the network’s toolkit for providing advising redesign support to institutions. One part of the network’s vision for redesigning holistic student supports is articulating the need for institutions to better understand intersecting social identities.



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*The roles/titles for these individuals reflect the perspectives that they were representing at the time of the interview.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is meant to serve as a resource for institutional leaders whose decisions shape campus culture and systems. As institutions seek to evolve their practices, processes, and policies to better serve students, a holistic lens—one that considers students’ intersecting identities and differences in lived experiences—is required.

Although such changes will come from the entire higher education community, including students themselves, the insights shared here can help senior leaders in their campus-level strategic planning efforts.

Interviews with practitioners in the field of higher education and the student affairs profession inform the guide’s key claims about students enrolled in U.S. institutions. While the guide offers a national perspective, the authors emphasize the importance of investing time and resources to recognize and address local-level needs of students and campus communities. This guide should serve as a primer for further institutional discussions about fostering inclusive systems and what it means to center students and their experiences in decision making. Further, although insights shared here are relevant for understanding students broadly, the research focuses on a limited number of student identity groups (due to limitations in project time and scope of data collected). Thus, recommendations are not comprehensive; the authors do not expect them to be applied without regard for local contexts and regional differences.

The first section examines three areas related to understanding student identities, which require additional institutional attention, and presents questions for reflection. The second section outlines common misunderstandings about student identity groups, outdated language, and suggestions for improvement. Finally, the third section contains a compilation of resources and tools for deeper inquiry into understanding students.



RESEARCH APPROACH

In April 2020, NASPA began researching student subpopulations and ways to think about their identities, mindsets, and motivations. Part of the background research involved a theme analysis of Gohn and Albin’s (2006) *Understanding College Student Subpopulations: A Guide for Student Affairs Professionals*. Additional analysis included desk research and a review of two books published by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition: Schreiner et al.’s (2012) *Thriving in Transitions: A Research-Based Approach to College Student Success* and Baldwin et al.’s (2020) *Promoting Belonging, Growth Mindset, and Resilience to Foster Student Success*.

To examine student experiences and development in relation to student identities, NASPA then conducted semistructured interviews with 37 student affairs professionals. Interviewees include several chapter authors of the *Understanding College Student Subpopulations* book and representatives from 14 of NASPA’s 37 Knowledge Communities; these member-driven volunteer networks support community-curated resources, opportunities to leverage expertise into meaningful initiatives, and development strategies and tactics to advance key higher education issues (NASPA, n.d.-a).

Interviews explored the following topics:

- trends in the field’s understanding, over time, of different student identity groups;
- ways the field has moved toward holistic approaches to understanding student identities;
- current gaps in the field’s understanding of student identities; and
- key principles for serving students and learning about their social identities.

Insights are from interviewees’ perspectives as individuals—they do not speak on behalf of their employers—and findings should not replace efforts by senior leaders to understand their own students. Rather, this guide should act as a *primer* for further institutional discussions about fostering inclusive systems and what it means to center students and their experiences in decision making. Although insights here are relevant for understanding students broadly, this research focuses on a restricted number of student identity groups (due to limitations in project time and scope of data collected).



OVERVIEW

College students are not a monolith; there is no single student experience, and the unique combination of every individual's identities, motivations, and goals is complex and fluid. Institutional leaders who are committed to creating student-ready campuses must deepen, update, and challenge their knowledge about who today's students are and how to best serve them (McNair et al., 2016). Students indeed have some common needs; however, not accounting for student differences can lead to ineffective one-size-fits-all solutions. A thorough understanding of institutional context ensures that support services advance equitable outcomes and reach intended students at scale.



This guide is meant to serve senior-level administrators whose decisions are critical to shaping equitable learning environments, campus culture, and systems. As institutions seek to change their practices, processes, and policies to better serve students, a holistic lens—one that considers students' intersecting identities and differences in lived experiences—is needed. A holistic approach requires intentional planning and integration of support services into a seamless, timely, and personal experience for every student (Achieving the Dream, 2018).

Interviews with practitioners in the field of higher education and the student affairs profession inform the guide's key claims and insights about students enrolled in U.S. institutions. This framework will help inform institutional approaches to learning about students and socially and culturally constructed identities—namely race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, social class, first-generation status, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, immigration and documentation status, veteran status, and involvement with the carceral system. The considerations and data presented here can help senior leaders recognize systems and practices that cause harm for students and campus communities.



A holistic approach requires intentional planning and integration of support services into a seamless, timely, and personal experience for every student.



This guide first examines three areas that need additional institutional attention. These focus areas include: (1) localized contexts and language; (2) intersecting and changing identities; and (3) thriving and well-being. Questions for reflection and discussion accompany each area. The guide then outlines common ongoing misunderstandings about student identity groups, outdated language, and suggestions for improvement. Finally, the guide presents a compilation of resources and tools for understanding students. This guide complements the work of network partners, forming a holistic package of resources for institutions seeking to understand their students.



FOCUS AREAS AND GUIDING QUESTIONS



Localized Contexts and Language

Over the past few years, the field of higher education has emphasized the need for colleges and universities to become *student-ready*, which is what McNair et al. (2016) described as “. . . strategically and holistically advanc[ing] student success, and work[ing] tirelessly to educate all students for civic and economic participation in a global, interconnected society” (p. 13). As institutions look inward, leaders must conduct ongoing assessments of how systems align with local campus and student contexts. The field’s knowledge about and understanding of students is evolving and must be continuously updated at the local level.

Many of the early student development theories were largely based on the experiences of college students who were middle or upper middle class, predominantly White, Christian, cisgender males who enrolled in school full time. Today, students seldom fit into such narrow categories. Norms, values, and systems of

higher education have historically been determined with a “traditional” student experience in mind. As college students have become increasingly diverse, the field is thinking more critically about its model for delivering higher education and its approach to serving students. Today’s tactics focus more and more on the strengths of students and how an institutional environment impacts student life.

Terminology about students and their socially and culturally constructed identities is now more inclusive and nuanced than in the past, but it is still changing. Referring to students as kids is largely considered outdated, as the field has become more aware of the prevalence of older students returning to college or starting their education later in life. The practice of including pronouns in introductions by students, faculty, and staff who are cis, trans, and nonbinary or gender nonconforming is now more standardized than in previous decades (Ryan, 2014). Shifts in language reflect updates to research scholarship, legal

definitions, media coverage, leadership philosophy, and levels of advocacy by students about how they would like their identities to be named and communicated.

Not all students with a shared identity will have the same preference about language. Words can carry different weight, meaning, and connotations for different individuals. Language preferences can vary among students across and within institutions. The field is becoming more aware of the importance and implications of imprecise or deficit-framed language about identities and student experiences. Increased understanding about intergroup distinctions also highlights the need to account for greater data disaggregation.

Terminology and data categorizations—given their implications for how equity goals are determined, measured, and understood—must be relevant to the campus context and to students themselves. For example, the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) classifies “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” as White (n.d.). Although counted as belonging to the same group in IPEDS data, Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African (MENA) students make up a community that is treated differently than European-descendant White students in a variety of ways. Campuses that use data that conflate these groups can fail to consider Arab and MENA student experiences and needs when making programming and funding decisions. Racial and religious differences are especially salient for understanding the Arab and MENA community, and assessments should include the level of detail needed to account for these distinctions. How an institution labels and defines its students can have consequences. Such categorizations influence how messages are framed; how progress is measured; who is at the center of programming, policies, and practices; and who has access to certain campus resources.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is your institution’s local history, and how are you addressing its connections with current practices and inequities?

- What are the implications of this history for understanding the students on your campus?
- How is your campus reifying systems of oppression?

What are your institution’s various on-campus microclimates—described by Brown-Glaude (2009) and Siegal (2020) as localized norms and practices—and which students do they uplift or marginalize?

How is your institution collecting and leveraging local- and institution-level data to enhance your students’ campus experiences and to inform decision-making processes?

How are definitions of diversity and of student identities/subpopulations localized and understood in your institution’s systems, policies, processes, and practices?

- How might these definitions change in various contexts?
- How is your institution incorporating language that your students prefer and that resonates with them?

What systems are in place to gather and respond to student feedback about language?

- How is your institution adapting language so that it is affirmative and inclusive of all students?
- Does your institution have a system or process in place to remove negative and outdated phrases?

How are you and your institution continuously updating knowledge about who your students are and adapting/amending systems accordingly?



Intersecting and Changing Identities

A networked tactic, rather than an approach of identity segmentation, can better acknowledge the complexities and multiple layers of a student's identities. Students come to an institution with a unique mix of privileged and marginalized identities that can intersect with or compound each other in different ways. Critical to unpacking and understanding student experiences is recognizing the simultaneity of identity. Institutions must understand and address how multiple oppressive forces—such as racism, ableism, sexism, colonialism, and more—show up at the intersections of students' identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Bringing visibility to the multiplicity of identities and the ways systems can affect experiences is key to augmenting how the field serves students.

Additionally, some aspects of a student's identity are central and unchanging; others may shift over time and during key transition periods in life. More can be done in the field to evolve from an awareness of the need to serve students and their intersecting identities to having a critical consciousness of its policies, practices, and systems—and who they are designed to benefit and marginalize.

As the field has moved toward unpacking intergroup dynamics and complexities, multicultural and identity-based student centers have increasingly taken on more responsibilities and are often described as “mini-institutions.” Students transitioning into college benefit from networks of support with campus community members—students, faculty, and staff—who share with them similar identities, experiences, and affinities. For some students, these centers offer a space to feel welcome, build a sense of belonging at the institution, and access relevant programming and services. Different centers at an institution may be located near one another so that students are conveniently served at the intersections of their identity.



Although many centers cater to specific identities, students may choose not to access identity-related supports for a variety of reasons. For one or several aspects of a student's identity, a center may serve as an affirming space, but that same space may be oppressive and marginalizing for other aspects. For example, LGBTQIA+ students of color may not feel comfortable visiting the LGBTQIA+ resource center on campus because they may consider it a heavily White space. In this case, a center may not be a welcoming space for all members or students living at the intersection of multiple identities. Other students may choose not to publicly self-identify due to concerns about stigma or safety, or they may be shedding one identity for another.

Identity-based centers have immense value but are not a catchall: Institutions should work to serve students in multiple ways across the entire campus and throughout each of their educational journeys. Compartmentalizing supports by a student's presenting identity is largely an oversimplified approach, and representation without meaningful engagement can have a tokenizing effect (Kanter, 1993). All aspects of a student's identity should be reflected within the fabric of an institution.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What is the balance between providing tailored services and recognizing that some students choose not to publicly self-identify?

How can the field balance addressing the need for identity-based services, while also moving away from labeling students or serving a single identity?

In what ways is your institution serving students' multiple, intersecting identities?

In what ways is your institution broadening the diversity of student experiences and identities represented on campus?

- What systems are in place to ensure that scholarship, policies, processes, and practices do not include a deficit-based representation of students who have historically marginalized identities?
- How are student identities being represented visually and digitally?

How is your institution meaningfully engaging with students who have historically marginalized identities, while also avoiding placing the burden on those students to be educators?

What processes are in place for students, faculty, and staff to address being targeted with overt racism and instances of hostile or derogatory behavior, messaging, policies, or practices?

Thriving and Well-Being

Focusing on completion and retention rates can frame the field's understanding of success as the extent to which students are able to "survive" college—rather than whether students are *thriving* on campus (Schreiner et al., 2012). Over time, the field seems to have expanded basic needs and academic success-centered models into more comprehensive and holistic approaches. Meeting all aspects of well-being means helping students flourish spiritually, financially, socially, psychologically, academically, and in their careers. Schreiner (2010) found that students who thrive have more positive mindsets and satisfactory college experiences. Understanding student success based on level of thriving and positive mindset is an emerging focus for the field.

Holistic approaches also recognize that all services and supports could influence a student's identity development and well-being. Tending to a student's separate identities through isolated solutions is not a holistic approach. For example, supporting a student's religious identity requires more than creating a space for that student to pray. A student's culture can influence the form of religious practice or expression of spirituality and may relate to multiple aspects of that student's college experience (McIntosh & Schreiner, 2013).

To serve students more holistically, perspectives from administrators with various expertise areas and lived experiences should be included in cross-campus decision-making processes. Organizational structures that proactively support and amplify these voices in more spaces must be in place. Collaboration can help direct attention to unnoticed opportunities or underlying tensions related to identity development. Moreover, disparate levels of funding can determine the degree to which departments can offer a holistic model of support. For example, if an office or center has a small staff serving many students, that space may be able to prioritize only basic core functions or need-based supports. Resources and leadership are necessary to expand capacity to engage in more expansive identity development and well-being programming.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Does your institution support and assess student success across multiple aspects of well-being?

Does your institution include representation and engaging multiple perspectives in decision making?

Does your institution consider student identities in decision making?

Does your institution adequately invest resources to support work at identity-based and cultural centers?

Do your institution's budgets and organizational structures support engagement with multiple perspectives and cross-campus collaboration?

How many steps does it take for students to find resources relevant to them on your institution's website?

Does your institution offer digital spaces where students feel comfortable and safe expressing their identity?

Understanding student success based on level of thriving and positive mindset is an emerging focus for the field.

COMMON (MIS)UNDERSTANDINGS AND RELATED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following discussions about terminology (mis)use, (mis)understandings, and recommendations are in the context of higher education and mostly reflect a Western and U.S.-centric understanding of experiences. Recommendations are based on a synthesis of insights from interviews as well as a considerable, though not exhaustive, examination of existing scholarship. The information here is not universally agreed upon, as no group of students with a shared identity is a monolith. The list that follows is categorized for the purposes of providing a snapshot of common *microaggressions* experienced by groups of students and highlighting ways that senior leaders can provide supports that validate and recognize student differences. Sue et al. (2010) defined microaggressions as the “everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership”¹ (p. 3). Language applications and preferences evolve over time, and institutions should also acknowledge the intersectional nature and continuum of identities across contexts. This list should also not preclude deeper reflection about the history and complexities of language and preferences, or about institution-level definitions of students’ racialized and social identities.




Employ terms and categories that students themselves use.

There should be some level of verification or self-identification from students about the demographic-related terminology and language they use to describe themselves. Preferred or commonly used terms or categories related to various identities, such as race or ethnicity, can vary by region, over time, and within

identity groups. Demographic labels can also vary by context and who is communicating. For example, students may describe themselves in ways they do not want repeated by others or that may differ depending on the formality and audience of the communication (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.-a). Broad federal categorizations of demographics are often not specific enough to account for meaningful differences among students; exclusively relying on them without additional detail at the campus level can contribute to systemic oversimplification of students’ identities.

¹Note that microaggressions are complex, occur at the intersections of multiple systems, and thus can be defined in more than one way (Harris, 2017).



Institutions should continuously review the history and meaning of demographic categorizations and adjust them to accurately reflect how students describe themselves. Students should be involved in the review and decision-making process of key changes made for how institutions try to understand their experiences on campus (Allen et al., 2019).

Recognize time and energy students give to inform campus efforts.

Students should be compensated for their time and effort spent informing campus efforts. Although institutions must listen to students and gather localized understanding of their needs, they should not place the burden on students of any specific group to represent the perspectives of all students who share their identity(ies). A variety of resources exist—such as national, state, and local databases and relevant scholarship—as well as educational tools and experts in the field with which institutions can engage as part of ongoing learning efforts.

Use asset-based language and approaches.

Leaders should prioritize asset- or strengths-based approaches that recognize a student’s abilities and knowledge. Students should not be defined by the challenges they face. For example, instead of referring to students as *underserved* or *under-resourced*, emphasize the level of resources in their environment as a result of the underfunding of a system. Institutions should also reflect on ways staff, administrators, faculty, and systems may intentionally or unintentionally be denying or dismissing student experiences, concerns, and values that are different from those of the dominant culture. Deficit framing can result in students being treated like they are inherently flawed or wrong when they merely do not fit socialized norms.

Consider both macro- and microclimates at an institution.

Even with institutionwide inclusive policies and practices in place, some spaces on campus may foster unwelcoming microclimates—described by Brown-Glaude (2009) and Siegal (2020) as localized norms and practices.

Institutions should examine the individuals, groups, and/or structures that may perpetuate systems of oppression through overt discrimination or more subtle microaggressions in certain spaces on campus. Ensure that all members of campus know how to report harmful instances—and how they will be addressed.

Race and Ethnicity

Race is a fluid, socially constructed notion and, thus, identities have been racialized; however, racial designations are relevant and currently function as meaningful identities. Allen et al. (2019) noted that racial and ethnic categorizations are “informed by historical social, political, and economic contexts” and “dependent on those with the power to create them” (p. 15). In higher education, how these categories are understood and defined is critical to both decision making and policy shaping.

Despite often being used interchangeably, the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are distinct. *Race* refers to groups of people who are categorized by physical characteristics that groups or cultures consider socially significant; race is not a universal concept for which everyone has the same understanding. The term *ethnicity* denotes a group of individuals with shared cultural characteristics such as ancestry/heritage, language, beliefs, and practices (APA, n.d.-b; Northwestern University, Searle Center for Advancing Learning & Teaching, n.d.). Ethnicity cannot be assumed based on a person’s racial identity.

Disaggregate racial and ethnic data that reflect intergroup diversity.

Reducing large populations into a single racial category can hide important insights about varying outcomes and differences within a given group. For example, data about Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) in the aggregate can perpetuate the “model minority” assumption that all individuals within that population are successful. This misrepresentation ignores the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, immigration patterns, and educational attainment outcomes within this community. For example, Bhutanese, Laotian, Cambodian, and Hmong students, among other



subpopulations, are largely underrepresented in higher education and may face distinct barriers to completion. The AAPI designation combines a highly heterogeneous group of people who trace their origins to more than 40 countries, states, jurisdictions, and/or diasporic communities (Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, n.d.).

Although the AAPI government classification may have once been viewed as part of a political coalition-building strategy, institutions must have a more nuanced understanding of intergroup differences. Disaggregating AAPI student data can help institutions better discern distinctions in educational outcomes and varying areas of need for ethnic subgroups. Data should be detailed enough to measure across intersecting demographic identities and account for the diversity within any given population. Additionally, when institutions disaggregate racial and ethnic data, they should also ensure that all student populations are still statistically accounted for and supported, despite small sample sizes (Allen et al., 2019).

Avoid using the word minority to refer to students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The term *minority* tends to refer to non-White racial or ethnic groups and may be viewed as pejorative (APA, n.d.-b). The term can be isolating for students, and its framing, which centers Whiteness, can have a marginalizing effect. The term *underrepresented minority (URM)* is sometimes used if referring to a subgroup with characteristics different from those of the majority population. Bensimon (2016) called for an intentional unlearning of URM in higher education, for three reasons: (1) URM is degrading and dehumanizing to the communities it describes; (2) it circumvents the examination of critical race questions and ways in which race is embedded into everyday practices and experienced by fully formed racial and ethnic groups; and (3) it is a form of malpractice that hides significant inequalities across groups. Use of URM can have harmful implications for how the field makes meaning from data comparisons across student groups.

People/students of color or *racially minoritized students* are currently more culturally significant and relevant descriptive terms; however, *people/students of color* raises criticism for centering Whiteness as the standard or default, in that it refers to people in relation to whether they are White. Considering that the White population is a minority worldwide, the terms *students of the global majority* or *global majority students* are less deficit ways to frame student subpopulations and have gained some traction (Columbia University School of Social Work, n.d.; People of the Global Majority in the Outdoors, Nature, & Environment, n.d.).

Capitalize names of racial and ethnic groups.

Racial and ethnic groups are proper nouns and should be capitalized (APA, n.d.-b). The field has reached some consensus that *Black* should be capitalized when referring to people of the African diaspora; however, *White* is capitalized inconsistently. One school of thought is that capitalizing *white* can inadvertently empower white nationalists who capitalize the term, and that capitalization is an undue benefit for White people. Others make the case that lowercase white enables White people to separate themselves from the legacy of Whiteness and how it currently operates as an identity from which they benefit (Painter, 2020). According to APA (n.d.-b) style guide rules, both *Black* and *White* should be capitalized.

Do not hyphenate national origins.

Including a hyphen for identifiers such as African American or Cuban American implies that such person or group is less American than others.

The terms Black and African American are not always interchangeable.

American people of African descent may prefer either *Black* or *African American*. The term *African American* should not be used when referring to Black people who do not identify as American and/or African.

The terms Latinx/a/o and Hispanic are not always interchangeable.

Latino or *Latina* generally refers to a person of Latin

American origin and descent who can be of any background or language; the gendered suffixes *-o* and *-a* that follow the *Latin* prefix reflect the gender-binary roots of the colonial Spanish language. The term *Latinx* is popularly used in higher education scholarship as a gender-inclusive term for the identity in a way that acknowledges gender nonbinary people of Latin American descent and origin (Salinas, 2020).

That said, *Latinx* is not widely accepted by all people of Latin American descent. For example, the term can be seen as linguistically exclusive for people of descent from Latin American countries that are not mostly Spanish- or English-speaking (Salinas, 2020). The Quechua language does not have the letter *X* in its alphabet, and Portuguese speakers can pronounce the *X* in several ways. Additionally, outside of the higher education context, the term *Latinx* can be interpreted as having connections to languages of Indigenous communities of the lands in Mexico.

The scholarly understanding of the term *Hispanic* is that it refers to people from primarily Spanish-speaking countries (Salinas, 2020). Both *Hispanic* and *Latinx/a/o* refer to ethnicity, not race. *Hispanic* can be problematic given its implied assumption that those who are Hispanic are also Spanish-speaking, when this is not always the case. Assumptions about whether a student is Hispanic or Latinx/a/o should not be based on name, appearance, or whether that student speaks Spanish, and terms used by an institution should be clearly and consistently defined.

Arab and Middle Eastern are not always interchangeable.

Some students who identify as Arab may also identify as Middle Eastern; some may not. In the United States, definitions of *Arab* and *Middle Eastern* have fluctuated over time, and the terms are now understood to have different meanings depending on a person's country of origin as well as other political factors. Although inconsistent and shifting understandings and definitions about *Arab* and *Middle Eastern* identifiers remain, typically the term *Arab* is used as a cultural identifier for



those who have origins in a country or territory within Asia and Africa where Arabic is the official or one of the official languages (Middle East Policy Council, n.d.). Students who are from a predominantly Arabic-speaking country may be part of an ethnic group that does not speak Arabic, and some groups who speak Arabic may not consider themselves Arab.

The *Middle East* is generally understood as a geopolitical term that refers to 22 countries in South Asia and Africa, although this number can range depending on the definition used. The Middle East is not an ethnicity, nor is it a religion, and it should not be assumed that all Arab or Middle Eastern people are Muslim (Eldanaf, n.d.). Some Arab countries may not be considered part of the Middle Eastern region. For example, although Iran might be considered as part of the Middle East, Iranians would not be considered Arab. The challenge of classifying diverse populations of students using Westernized geographic labels speaks to a broader issue experienced by many international students of color. Institutions should ensure that experiences of various racial and ethnic groups within Middle Eastern and Arab populations are accurately reflected in data-informed programming and policy discussions.

Use the term Indigenous Peoples as an inclusive way to broadly describe the political identity of Native American students.

Language used for Indigenous identity can vary across contexts and is up to students themselves to define (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Institutions should defer to an Indigenous student's self-defined identity, nation, community, or

tribal affiliation and recognize that this chosen term may change depending on context and audience.

Recognize and support multiracial students through assessment and programming.

Students who hold more than one racial identity can experience unique microaggressions that result from institutional monoracism and monoracial paradigms. Johnson and Nadal (2010) defined *monoracism* as “a social system of psychological inequality where individuals who do not fit monoracial categories may be oppressed on systemic and interpersonal levels because of underlying assumptions and beliefs in singular, discrete racial categories” (p. 125). Monoracism can appear in institutionalized practices; it also can be reified by monoracial communities and internalized by multiracial individuals (Harris, 2017).

One common microaggression is when a multiracial student is forced to select a single race/ethnicity in campus surveys. In addition to having more inclusive data collection practices, institutions should ensure that they are using data about multiracial students to inform tailored programming and supports for them. A lack of visibility and affirmation of the reality multiracial students face can leave them with limited language and knowledge about how to talk about their identity in a structure that tends to categorize race monoracially. Multiracial students may not feel like they belong or are welcome to race-based events, or they may feel that attendance reduces them to one race/ethnicity (Harris, 2017). Institutions should encourage different race-based groups and support centers to host shared events and recognize the existence of multiracial identities in programming.

Recognize that decolonization of higher education involves the divestment of colonial power.

Decolonization is not a metaphor for social justice or the general dismantling of oppressive systems (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The recognition that colleges and universities are on land stolen and appropriated from Indigenous populations is important, but such acknowledgment

is not interchangeable with decolonization. Rather, decolonization requires a long-term process of returning stolen land and life to Indigenous peoples (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Examples of common phrases with racist origins include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Tribe/spirit animal:** Both terms are appropriations of pieces of Native American culture (DiversityInc, 2019).
- **Pow wow:** The term is defined as a traditional and modern sacred gathering or ceremony involving one or more tribes; therefore, using it as a verb or as a way to describe a business meeting or social gathering outside the Native American culture is inappropriate (DiversityInc, 2019).
- **Long time no see:** This phrase was originally used to mock Chinese immigrant or Native American speech patterns in English (University of California, Riverside, Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, n.d.).
- **No can do:** This phrase was originally used to mock Chinese immigrant speech patterns in English (University of California, Riverside, Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, n.d.).
- **Cakewalk/Takes the cake:** Before the Civil War, cakewalks originated as an elaborate dance by enslaved people performing for their enslavers for a chance to “win” a cake. The dance became popular during 1970s-era minstrel shows, which portrayed Black people dancing and aspiring to be like White people (Algonquin College, 2020; Gandhi, 2013).
- **Peanut gallery:** In vaudeville theaters, the peanut gallery was the name of a section, usually the cheapest and worst seats, where mostly Black people sat (Robinson, 2012).
- **Hold down the fort:** In the United States, the phrase has a historical connotation, referring to guarding against Native American “intruders” who were perceived as enemies (Robinson, 2012).
- **Sold down the river:** During slavery in the United States, enslaved people in the North were sold down the Mississippi or Ohio Rivers to plantations where chattel slavery labor conditions were much harsher (Gandhi, 2014).

Socioeconomic Status and Social Class

Socioeconomic status and *social class* are often linked but are not the same. A student’s socioeconomic status is typically determined by either individual and/or family income, level of educational attainment, and occupation (Northwestern University, Searle Center for Advancing Learning & Teaching, n.d.).

Socioeconomic status can play into a student’s sense of identification in a social class group (e.g., working class, lower middle class, upper middle class, owning class). However, socioeconomic status and attributed or self-identified social class are not always aligned. Social class is a broader concept that may include measures of socioeconomic status and the relationship with power, referent groups, cultural expectations, and socialization (NASPA, n.d.-b; Soria, 2018). A student may have a relatively high socioeconomic status based on family income but may identify or be perceived as being part of the working class due to differences in other forms of cultural capital.

Understand that a student’s socioeconomic status is an incomplete measure for social class.

There is a need to have a broader and more nuanced understanding and assessment of social class beyond a student’s family income and/or Pell Grant recipient status. A student may self-identify with a certain social class that is different from the social class group that others perceive them to be in. Ways to assess social class may include accessing data about whether a student and/or their family owns or rents their home or car; the highest educational attainment of a student’s parent(s)/guardian(s); neighborhood poverty levels; and the occupational prestige of a student’s parent(s)/guardian(s) (APA, 2020).

Make the timing of office hours or socialization opportunities flexible.

Not all student are on campus during the “traditional” hours of 9 to 5. Offices or services open only during this timeframe limit access for students who work during the week or have care responsibilities during daytime hours. Flexibility with evening, early morning, or weekend hours is preferable.

Avoid correcting a college student's grammar, accent, or dialect.

Colleges and universities should avoid overemphasizing writing and speaking in Standard English, as this privileges upper middle class value norms (Flaherty, 2013; Kamm, 2015). Devaluing a written application because of grammatical errors can deny students opportunities for scholarships or other forms of recognition (NASPA, n.d.-b). Linguistic capital—the intellectual and social skills attained through a communication background in more than one language or style—is a form of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Multiplicities in expression, linguistic style, and vernacular dialects should be welcomed and valued by institutions. African American Vernacular English, for example, should be understood and treated as a different dialect from Standard American English rather than as a deficit. Other forms of communication, such as oral storytelling, should be incorporated into curricula.

Create an institutional fund to pay for voluntary student leadership opportunities.

Student leadership opportunities should not advantage students with more resources over others. For example, if spending on student government campaigns cannot be institutionally funded, a cap should be placed on the resources a campaign can spend (NASPA, n.d.-b).

Understand that technology ownership and online access varies among students.

A student's access to technology or reliable Wi-Fi should not be assumed (Messiah University, n.d.). Some students might not own their own laptops and rather rely on public libraries or campus labs and facilities for technology access. Computer labs and libraries on campus should offer flexible hours to provide students with broader access to these facilities. As a policy, last-minute assignments that require a computer or internet connection should be avoided. Additionally, some situations might require students to utilize technology when they are off campus. Institutions should offer programs that give students necessary technologies such as laptops, hotspots, and software.

First-generation Identity

First-generation is federally defined as students whose parents have not attained a 4-year college degree (Higher Education Act of 1965, 1998). This definition is not universally shared by all institutions, and definitions can even vary across an institution's departments and programs (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2017). Some institutions may define *first-generation* as students whose parents or guardians have no education after high school, or whose parents completed a 4-year degree at an institution outside the United States (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2017). First-generation identity can also contribute to a student's sense of social class identity.

Do not consider first-generation identity status as a proxy for low-income status.

First-generation college students have complex, intersectional identities, but it is a common misconception to equate being a first-generation college student with being low-income. Although supports for these two identities may overlap, campus leaders should recognize the distinctness of these identities. For example, both first-generation and low-income students may benefit from programming about navigating campus systems; however, it is critical to name first-generation, low-income, and social class as separate identities, to prompt deeper student discussion about the ways lived experiences can be different and yet intersect (Goward, 2018).

Proactively and consistently define the term first-generation college student.

The term *first-generation college student* is often first learned in the context of college or university, and so it may be unfamiliar to many students. Potential confusion about first-generation status may also be due to differences in how programs and departments at a single institution define it (Center for First-generation Student Success, 2017). If a first-generation college student is being asked to self-identify for the first time within an application to an institution, they may not fully understand the definition or why they are being

asked to share this information. When requesting this information, institutions may consider hyperlinking to a page specially about first-generation students, to explain why sharing this information matters.

Avoid higher education jargon.

First-generation college students are often met with an abundance of new terms when entering higher education spaces. This jargon—*add/drop*, *office hours*, *syllabus*, *satisfactory academic progress*—can be one more barrier that first-generation students must overcome. Also, it can perpetuate feelings of impostor syndrome. Connect first-generation students to resources and supports early; give them tools and knowledge about where to find help or ask questions.

Gender Identity

Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of self along a spectrum of gender that is expressed differently by each person. *Gender expression* can relate to the way a person externally communicates their gender identity and is influenced by societal and cultural expectations and definitions typically associated with being feminine or masculine (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). *Sexuality* and *sexual orientation* are different from *gender identity* and *expression*. Gender identity is not the same as a person's romantic or emotional orientation. Gender identity may not align with the gender a person was assigned at birth, their legal sex, or how their identity is physically presented to others.

Do not assume or qualify a student's pronouns.

Assuming a student's pronouns (he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs, ze/zir/zirs, etc.) based on physical appearance can reinforce harmful cultural stereotypes about gender expression. A student's pronouns reflected on official documents should also not be assumed to be correct, especially if the institution includes only binary gender options on forms (Ryan, 2014). Additionally, a student might not be able to afford the costs of legally changing their name. If you do not know or have not asked for a student's pronouns, opt for nongendered

or gender-neutral language. When respectfully asking students to share their pronouns, avoid the phrase *preferred pronouns*, as it incorrectly implies that a student's pronouns are suggestions (University of California, Davis, 2020). Similarly, the term *self-identified* in the context of gender can invalidate a trans student's gender identity (Dupere, 2015).

Know that student pronouns are not always static, and comfort levels with sharing them can vary.

Not all students will feel comfortable being asked to share their gender pronouns (Manion, 2018). Students may also prefer to be called by their names only and have pronouns avoided. Asking a student to share their pronouns should be done with care and thoughtfulness. Faculty and staff can proactively share pronouns with students and include these pronouns in email signatures and nameplates to help promote a climate of inclusion. Pronouns may change depending on context; this variance may be due to safety reasons, stigma, or the comfort someone feels with sharing part of their identity in certain situations (University of California, Davis, 2020). Pronouns may also change over time, and this too should be respected.

Avoid gendered language and terminology.

Use of gendered language can be marginalizing for students with nonbinary gender identities and should be avoided when possible. The phrase *ladies* and *gentlemen* is an example of exclusive-gendered language. Or, rather than *freshmen*, use *first-year students*—a nongendered alternative. Nongendered or gender-inclusive terms are always preferable (Tandet, 2019). Institutions should review and adjust the use of exclusive he/she pronouns on websites and marketing materials so that these texts recognize the fluidity of gender and the existence of gender nonbinary students on campus. Not only should institutions audit instances of harmful language or depictions of gender nonbinary students, they also should create space to engage with these students to improve supports for them and celebrate gender diversity on campus.



Create a process that enables transgender and gender nonbinary students to update their names and/or genders in campus records and documents.

Institutions should ensure that the genders and first names of transgender and gender nonbinary students are accurately reflected across all campus systems, records, and official documents. Institutions should consider how to make the change processes as simple as possible—regardless of whether the change is made legally—given the administrative and financial burden of legally changing one’s name in the United States. Consistently applying the corrections or changes across all forms and systems is critical to ensuring that trans students are not inadvertently forced to “deadname” themselves (i.e., use a former name that invalidates their identity and with which they no longer associate).

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation relates to heterosexuality, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and other nonmonosexual identities (LGBTQIA+; Northwestern University, Searle Center for Advancing Learning & Teaching, n.d.). The terms *heteronormativity* and *heterosexism* refer to the

discriminatory cultural message that heterosexuality is the “normal” or preferred sexual orientation.

Know that students do not come out only once.

The process of coming out is repetitive, given heteronormative assumptions and different contexts relating to safety, trust, and individual relationships. Sharing an identity with someone does not solidify that the identify stays the same over time. A student’s identity should not be shared with others without explicit consent.

Avoid heterosexist and heteronormative biases.

Deficit-framed narratives or language about LGBTQIA+ students may still be included in textbooks and course curriculums. There may be courses where there are little to no queer writers or researchers cited in a syllabus, or where material upholds outdated, stereotypical understandings about nonheterosexual orientation. Some social groups or identity centers and predominantly heterosexual spaces on campus may also hold subtle or covertly hostile views toward LGBTQIA+ students. Continued endorsement of heteronormative cultures can result in social exclusion, marginalization, and suppression of a student’s identity.



Disability Status

Students with disabilities may include students with learning disabilities, permanent health conditions, or mental health conditions, as well as those with visual, auditory, or mobility disabilities. According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the presence of a disability necessitates “(a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of that individual, (b) a record of such an impairment, or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment” (§ 12102).

The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 broadened the definition of *disability* and no longer considers mitigating measures (e.g., taking insulin or Adderall to regulate diabetes or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, respectively, mitigates the impact of the disability but should not be considered when determining disability). It also reduced emphasis on third-party documentation. The regulations acknowledge that postsecondary institutions may request a reasonable level of documentation; however,

requiring extensive medical and scientific evidence perpetuates a deviance model of disability, undervalues an individual’s history and experience with disability, and is inappropriate and burdensome under the revised statute and regulations.

Consider that students may not always prefer person-first language.

Person-first language emphasizes that a person is not defined by their disability and that it is not a qualifier for someone’s personhood (e.g., *person with disability* or *person with autism* versus *disabled person* or *autistic person*). However, some students may prefer identity-first language, as their disability is closely linked to who they are and cannot be separated. Under this thinking, for example, acknowledging a person’s identity as a d/Deaf person is analogous to someone saying that they are Black or Asian. For some, their disability is central and inextricably connected to how they identify as a whole person. Students who prefer identity-first language to describe themselves should not be corrected. Person-first language is always preferable,

however, when describing a medical definition or referring to a person's medical diagnosis, such as a person with Down syndrome (Ladau, 2015).

Adopt a proactive approach to removing institutional barriers for students with disabilities.

Rather than understand a student's disability as something that should be fixed, a social model of disability frames inaccessible environments and institutional barriers as disabling societal features for students with impairments (Mole, 2013). Institutions should proactively design accessible systems, policies, practices, and learning experiences to limit instances in which students with disabilities need to make accommodations requests (Mole, 2013). Supports should be built into learning contexts and student experiences so that the campus environment is accessible for everyone.

Align language with the social model of disability.

Ableism is deeply ingrained on most campuses, and language is where it is most evident. For example, asking students to walk around campus assumes ability to walk; whereas exploring campus is a more inclusive framing of this without losing the intent. Use of terms like *crazy*, *nuts*, *lunatic*, and *insane* to insult someone or describe something that is surprising or unexpected is another form of casual ableism (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018). Institutional communications about disability should be framed in an antideficit manner that identifies systems and environments as barriers to success for students with disabilities.

Students should be empowered but not forced to disclose disabilities.

Forcing students with disabilities to publicly discuss their disability or to "out" themselves in order to receive accommodations can be marginalizing (Messiah University, n.d.). Disability disclosure is a highly personalized and continuous process that can come in multiple forms. Some students may want to avoid disclosure in certain spaces for a variety of reasons,

including fear of stigma and that their intersectional identities will be reduced into a single identity based on their disability (Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Students with disabilities have to grapple with questions around how to disclose, why disclosure is needed, to whom they need to disclose, and more. Institutions should examine the culture of disability disclosure on their campuses, and consider opportunities for improvement from an anti-ablest lens.

Religion, Spirituality, and Secularism

Religion, faith, and spirituality are related aspects of identity but have different meanings. *Religiosity*, or *religion*, refers to belief in a god or a group of gods and can involve following a set of doctrines and behavioral practices. Some students may express their religious identity through what they wear, such as a Muslim woman wearing a hijab, although others may choose not to publicly identify themselves in this way (Northwestern University, Searle Center for Advancing Learning & Teaching, n.d.). The absence of any externally expressed form of religious affiliation does not mean that students do not identify as religious. Faith can reflect an individual's personal belief system but does not require culturally defined membership like religion does. The term *spirituality* largely refers to beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life and connectedness with the world (McIntosh, 2014). Senior leaders should recognize distinctions among religious identity, expression, and culture when designing supports and policies with student needs and preferences in mind.

Include preferences and needs of faith and nonfaith students in programming and supports.

The religious beliefs or expressions held by students may be critical to who they are and influence how their experiences are shaped. Campus activities, policies, and programming should account for religious plurality. Public colleges and universities that are now considered nonsectarian may still have chapels on campus or mottoes that reflect being originally founded by Christian institutions (Northwestern University,

Searle Center for Advancing Learning & Teaching, n.d.). Recognizing the default presence of Christianity on many campuses, institutions should account for the diversity of religious identities and the various ways that an identity can be expressed.

Academic schedules and official campus holidays are often centered on Christian holidays. This practice implies that students who observe other religious, spiritual, or secular traditions are not as highly valued to the institution as are Christian students. Academic commitments that conflict with traditions, cultural priorities, and holidays can cause students stress and negatively impact their performance. Institutions should also consider ways to accommodate dietary restrictions related to religious observance. For example, Halal and Kosher food options should be consistently included in dining halls. Dining hall hours of operation can also be a challenge for students whose mealtimes are restricted during observance of a fast. Dining hall schedules should be adjusted in accordance with religious holidays that call for fasting. In recognizing religious diversity on campus, institutions should also ensure that students with nonreligious, secular, or atheist views are not overlooked in programming and supports on campus.

Recognize the challenges of Islamophobia faced by Muslim students.

In the United States, the religious identity of Muslim students is often conflated with their language, culture, and race. Muslim students are a diverse population with myriad preferences and expressions of religious identity. Islamophobia often presents itself on college campuses in the form of Muslim students experiencing targeted instances of discrimination, alienation, suspicion, exoticization, speech and viewpoint suppression, limited religious accommodations, and assumptions of religious homogeneity (Nadal et al., 2012; Turk et al., 2012). The campus community should engage in ongoing education and trainings related to religious and cultural diversity, Islamophobia, and how the intersections of race and ethnicity, phenotype, religious expression, citizenship, gender, and sexual orientation can influence Muslim student experiences.

Institutions should communicate widely to ensure that all students have a clear understanding about how to report and address instances of bias and discrimination on campus.

Immigration and Documentation Status

In the United States, undocumented students include those who do not possess a valid visa or immigration documentation. Documentation status is not universally understood as an identity. Although students who are undocumented may share meaningful experiences and face common challenges, some may consider documentation status as a social condition that can influence identity development—rather than an identity in and of itself (Reyes, n.d.).

The term *DACAmented* refers to those individuals who are eligible and have applied and received administrative relief from federal deportation laws and employment authorization under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Northern Illinois University, n.d.).

International students are those who hold citizenship in another country and have a student visa to pursue a college education or advanced degree in the United States. Undocumented students are not considered international students and do not have to meet the same requirements for enrollment (Northern Illinois University, n.d.).

Know that documentation status is not an exclusively Latinx and Hispanic student issue.

The media tends to center the conversation about undocumented students on Hispanic and Latinx immigrants, despite the prevalence of undocumented immigrants who are Asian, Pacific Islander, or Black. The experiences of undocuLatinx students, undocuBlack students, and undocuAsian students are not the same. For example, undocumented Black immigrants are detained and deported at 5 times the rate of any other demographic group (Scott, 2017). Programs and resources centered only on the undocuLatinx experience can keep undocuAsian and undocuBlack students in the shadows.

Know that the term DACAmented is not interchangeable with undocumented.

DACA protects only a very narrow subpopulation of undocumented students. Although undocumented students with DACA and without DACA can be part of a shared community, key distinctions exist between the two groups. For example, DACAmented students are eligible for non-Federal Work Study on-campus employment, but this is not the case for undocumented students. Communications, resources, and programs should be specific and include statements such as “open to undocumented students with and without DACA.”

Do not use the words illegal immigrant or illegal alien to refer to individuals who do not have documentation to live in the United States.

These words are offensive and dehumanizing. Use *undocumented* instead of *illegal* (Northern Illinois University, n.d.).

Include safe spaces for international students to report discrimination.

International students do not always feel comfortable or empowered to report instances of discrimination, racism, or microaggressions via standard processes in place. Colleges and universities may consider gathering international students’ perspectives and ideas about appropriate and culturally responsive policies for privately reporting discrimination on campus. Institutions should also offer supports for international students of color, who may be grappling with how their racialized identities show up in the United States in a way that is distinct from their experiences in other countries.

Provide career supports that are relevant for international students.

Career center administrators and advisors should have a clear understanding about international students’ eligibility to participate in various internships, jobs, and learning opportunities. Part of this understanding should include a familiarity with the legal work restrictions and eligibility for various forms of federal, state, and local financial resources. Institutions should

ensure that campus-level policies are inclusive of international student preferences and needs.

Veteran Status

Veteran is a legal term to identify a person who served in active military, naval, or air service, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2017). The terms *student veterans* and *veteran students* include students who are currently or formerly serving members of the military, including active duty, National Guard, and Reserves, regardless of combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use. Depending on the institution, *student veterans* may be more narrowly defined and exclude those who are currently serving, have retired, or have been dishonorably discharged (Vacchi, 2012). Going through basic training is a formative and intense identity-developing experience that is shared among most student veterans in higher education.

The term *military-connected student* encompasses those who are currently serving members of the military, including active duty, National Guard, and Reserves; veterans, or formerly serving members of the military regardless of discharge status or whether they are retired; dependents of a currently or formerly serving member of the military; or surviving dependents of a deceased military service member (Community College of Baltimore County, n.d.; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.).

Measure campus support of student veterans in multiple ways, beyond numbers accessing a veteran center.

Some students may not feel comfortable self-identifying as veterans or safe or welcomed in veteran center spaces. Negative experiences in the military, for example, can cause a student to suppress certain aspects of their identity or to avoid self-identifying as a veteran. Additionally, if a student veteran stops using the resource center, that change can be a signal of identity growth—in that they have transitioned from the military to college and had some level of success.

Support, rather than replace, the skills student veterans bring to higher education.

Approaches to serving student veterans often focus on ways to support those with posttraumatic stress disorder, without much other substantive focus on pedagogy. Students in the military go through intense training and socialization that fosters a sense of responsibility, flexibility, unity, and cohesiveness (Student Veterans of America, 2017; Vacchi, 2015). This shared experience and development of competencies are strengths that should be adapted into a higher education context.

Recognize the diverse range of demographic identities among your student veteran population.

Diversity, inclusion, and social justice have not been part of the dominant conversation about student veterans. Seeing only cisgender White men in posters or among veteran center staff can be an alienating experience for student veterans. Campus outreach materials must reflect the diverse, intersecting, and nuanced identities of student veterans across multiple spaces.

Formerly Incarcerated Status

Formerly incarcerated describes individuals who were in a carceral setting (e.g., prison, immigration detention centers, local jails, juvenile detention centers) and have now been released. The term *carceral system* is an antideficit description of the criminal justice system. Not all who commit a crime enter the system, and justice is applied unevenly and understood in varying ways (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2019). Because conceptions of justice are relative, *system-impacted* is a more student-centered term and is preferred over *justice-impacted*.

System-impacted students refers to students involved with the carceral system in a variety of ways—including those who have been incarcerated, those who have been or are on parole or probation, and those with arrests/convictions but no incarceration—as well as those who

have been impacted by a loved one's incarceration (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2019).

Do not reduce a student's identity to the conviction type.

Labeling students as *violent offenders*, *drug offenders*, or *felons* is dehumanizing; specifying the type of crime involved is rarely necessary and should be avoided when possible. Referring to students using terms such as *ex-convicts* or *ex-felons* is also marginalizing and implies that a student is not welcomed or accepted (Berkeley Underground Scholars, 2019). Changing language helps destigmatize former involvement with the carceral system (Johnson, 2020).

Do not require student disclosure of justice involvement.

Requiring campus background checks and that applicants report criminal records limits access to valuable employment, scholarship, and experiential learning opportunities for formerly incarcerated students. Self-identifying can also be challenging for students as they are shedding one identity for another as they are transitioning into their identity as a student (Johnson, 2020).

Create long-term structures and visible supports for formerly incarcerated students.

Formerly incarcerated students are receiving more attention in the field now than they have in past, despite having been on college campuses for some time. Formerly incarcerated and system-impacted students should not be tokenized; this group requires long-term investments in resources and visibility across campus. Students should be able to easily identify resources on their campuses and online.

CLOSING CONSIDERATIONS

This guide offers an overview of areas of attention for growth. Senior leaders should use this guide as a field-level resource to help make the case for updating and contextualizing their knowledge about students. In an effort to motivate introspection and campus dialogue, this guide highlights common misunderstandings and antiquated verbiage; however, the guide is not comprehensive and does not intend to suggest that administrators must memorize every possible microaggression and term listed herein. The guide's goal is to encourage leaders to recognize, correct, and prevent harm against students. Developing a praxis of understanding about students' socially and culturally constructed identities has no fixed arrival point; it requires continual learning, listening, and updating of knowledge.

Those looking for additional information and support should visit <https://www.advisingsuccessnetwork.org/resources>.



RESOURCES AND TOOLS

NASPA Knowledge Communities, Initiatives, and Events

- African American Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/african-american>
- Asian Pacific Islanders Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/asian-pacific-islanders>
- Center for First-generation Student Success: <https://firstgen.naspa.org>
- Disability Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/disability-knowledge-community>
- Formerly Incarcerated Students & System Impacted Families Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/formerly-incarcerated-students-and-system-impacted-families-knowledge-community>
- Gender and Sexuality Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/gender-and-sexuality>
- Indigenous Peoples Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/indigenous-peoples>
- International Education Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/international-education>
- Latinx/a/o Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/latinx/a/o>
- Men and Masculinities Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/men-and-masculinities>
- Middle East, North Africa, South Asia NASPA Area: <https://www.naspa.org/region/middle-east-north-africa-south-asia-menasa>
- NASPA Multicultural Institute: Advancing Equity and Inclusive Practice: <https://www.naspa.org/events/naspa-multicultural-institute-advancing-equity-and-inclusive-practice1>
- Socioeconomic and Class Issues in Higher Education Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/socioeconomic-and-class-issues-in-higher-education>
- Spirituality and Religion in Higher Education Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/spirituality-and-religion-in-higher-education>
- Transracial Adoptee and Multiracial Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/transracial-adoptee-and-multiracial-knowledge-community>
- Undocumented Immigrants and Allies Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/undocumented-immigrants-and-allies>
- Veterans Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/veterans>
- Virtual Symposium on Military-Connected Students: <https://www.naspa.org/events/naspa-virtual-symposium-on-military-connected-students>
- Women in Student Affairs Knowledge Community: <https://www.naspa.org/division/women-in-student-affairs>

Additional Resources

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Student Personas as a User Design Tool

Personas are depicted as fictional characters that represent motivations, needs, and experiences of real groups of people. Alan Cooper's (1999) seminal book, *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*, introduced personas as a way for software developers to keep customers at the center of product and service design. Typically, a persona has a name, sometimes with a tagline that characterizes it, followed by a narrative with details about the user divided into subsections. Most personas include a visual representation so that they seem more realistic. A signature aspect of a persona layout is that it offers a snapshot of information in a clear and digestible way. Personas are now widely used in a variety of industries for marketing, product development, service design, and communications.

Personas offer a range of benefits, some of which include using them to do the following:

- Build empathy and understanding about users in a memorable and clear way.
- Establish alignment about users in language that can be widely understood when referenced (Nielsen & Hansen, 2014)—for example, “this form of service delivery would make sense for Maria but would not work well with Andrew given his technology constraints when at home.”
- Facilitate more nuanced discussions about how to serve a set of users grouped by similar patterns and key attributes.

Personas can serve as a powerful resource when strategically used alongside other tools for understanding and designing user experiences. However, the perceived usefulness of personas is limited when created or used improperly. The value of personas can hinge on their credibility, scope, and purpose.

The credibility challenge is rooted in the belief that qualitative data gathered from a small group of individuals are too subjective, meaning that insights drawn from personas cannot be statistically valid (Salminen et al., 2018). Difficult to validate on a large scale, personas are subject to varying degrees of bias depending on the approach used to create them. Distrust about rigor can also arise when personas are created in isolation, excluding from the process those meant to use them. In order for personas to hold value, stakeholders who use them must believe that they are credible tools that offer new, helpful information (Salazar, 2018). For stakeholders to use personas, they have to believe in them, feel invested in them, and have ownership over them. The most successful personas are created with involvement from their end users.

Another persona pitfall is when its scope is either too broad or too narrow. The choice about the level of details to include in a persona poses tradeoffs. On the one hand, the more specificity added to a persona, the less accurately it reflects the reality of the whole user group; on the other hand, trying to pack extensive amounts of real-user quantitative data into a persona can lead to vague descriptions that seem unrealistic (Salminen et al., 2018). Persona developers should be mindful about balancing accuracy with precision (Adlin, 2017).

A persona's purpose influences the methodology and data sources used, as well as the user characteristics included in the description. A common challenge with personas is when the same descriptions are used to try to satisfy different purposes over time. For example, a persona used for marketing may highlight a customer's level of desire for a product or other categories related to how a product fits with their lifestyle (Floyd et al., 2008). This type of information would have less relevance for a designer looking for gaps in services provided and who has more interest in knowing persona pain points. Personas should be continuously updated and revised to align with new goals and target specific design problems.

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