Tips for Inclusive & Equitable Programming

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The University of Mississippi embraces its public flagship mission of inspiring and educating our diverse and vibrant community where all individuals are able to intellectually, socially and culturally thrive through transformative experiences on our campus and beyond. In fulfillment of this mission, the Division of Student Affairs is committed to creating and maintaining an environment in which all campus community members are and feel included, empowered, and open to the intersecting identities of others and themselves. With that in mind, I challenge you to reimagine how you conduct programming on our campus. Reject going backwards to the normalcy of yesterday and embrace the newness that awaits in tomorrow. The following may help you do just that:

**Practice Identity-Consciousness**

Identity-conscious structures and practices are designed to ensure that individuals’ demographics are included in the decision-making processes of the organization. Therefore, throughout program planning, implementation, and evaluation, be sure to consider the identities, experiences, perspectives, contributions, and realities of the students we serve as well as our programmatic impact on these areas. Provide adequate support services and resources to students while continuously seeking out opportunities to grow personally, departmentally, and divisionally within and beyond diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice.

**Use Inclusive Language & Imagery**

Throughout your marketing efforts, program implementation, and assessment tools, be sure to utilize language and illustrations that acknowledge and value the different experiences and perspectives of our students. Employ words and phrases such as “everyone” or “you all” instead of gendered language such as “ladies and gentlemen” or “you guys”. Intentionally, use preferred or requested names and pronouns, but remember that not everyone wants these items publicly shared. Therefore, instead of having names and pronouns required and put on display, leave it up to the individual to share on an event-by-event basis. Remain cognizant of the challenges associated with idioms, metaphors, and pop culture references as these may create more barriers than bridges with our students. Lastly, ensure that survey questions, especially those inquiring about social identities (I.e., race/ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation), host a wide variety of options and are being included with the intent to improve the collegiate experience for our students.

**Consider Accessibility, Availability, Affordability, & Acceptability**

When planning and implementing your programs, consider the physical and informational accommodations necessary to ensure the empowerment and inclusion of our students. This includes but is not limited to issuing accommodation statements along with marketing materials; gender-inclusive restrooms; automated captioning; inclusive signage; language interpreters; materials in alternative formats; culturally-appropriate food options; accommodated transportation and/or routes; virtual screening options; and diverse seating arrangements. Be sure to provide the program or service with adequate notice along with various offering times at little or no cost to the student when possible. Do your best to avoid continuously offering a rejected accommodation and respect those that have declined assistance. Remember that intentional inclusiveness is highly prioritized over reinforced separation.

**Conclusion**

The practice of inclusive programming acknowledges and challenges biases and stereotypes that can undermine students’ success and sense of belonging. Reach out to members of the DSA Diversity Change Team or the Division of Diversity & Community Engagement website to learn more about how to provide inclusive and equitable programming to our campus community.