



Intellectual Diversity in Higher Education

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What is “intellectual diversity”?

“Intellectual pluralism and academic freedom are central principles of American higher education... Colleges and universities should welcome intellectual pluralism and the free exchange of ideas. Such a commitment will inevitably encourage debate over complex and difficult issues about which individuals will disagree. Such discussions should be held in an environment characterized by openness, tolerance and civility... Academic decisions including grades should be based solely on considerations that are intellectually relevant to the subject matter under consideration. Neither students nor faculty should be disadvantaged or evaluated on the basis of their political opinions.”

(American Council on Education, joined by 28 other organizations)

<https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Statement-on-Academic-Rights-and-Responsibilities-2005.pdf>

What is “intellectual diversity”?

“a multiplicity of ideas” that “in the college setting, is the foundation of a learning environment that exposes students to a variety of political, ideological, and other perspectives”

(American Council of Trustees & Alumni)

https://www.goacta.org/wp-content/uploads/ee/download/intellectual_diversity.pdf

What is “intellectual diversity”?

“Viewpoint diversity exists when members of a group or community approach problems or questions from a range of perspectives. When a community is marked by intellectual humility, empathy, trust, and curiosity, viewpoint diversity gives rise to engaged and respectful debate, constructive disagreement, and shared progress towards truth.”

(Heterodox Academy)

<https://heterodoxacademy.org/the-problem/>

What is “intellectual diversity”?

Intellectual diversity is the plurality of ways of thinking about various subjects, topics, and issues.

Though there may be some correlations, this is different than demographic diversity (race, class, gender, etc.).



What are common axes of intellectual diversity in higher education?

- Political belief
- Religion
- Ontology / epistemology
- Theoretical frameworks
- Research methodology



Ongoing Controversies

- “Cancellation” of speakers / faculty across the political spectrum
- University of Iowa and Religious Student Organizations
- Florida’s College Intellectual Diversity Survey
- Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Inclusive Practices in Intellectual Diversity

1. Recognize that providing space for a variety of viewpoints does not mean they are all equally meritorious, valid, etc.
2. Commit to your own intellectual humility
3. Deliberately present multiple perspectives on issues
4. Recognize the difference between normative theories and descriptive theories on social issues
5. Utilize disagreements as opportunities to foster understanding in both directions

Inclusive Practices in Intellectual Diversity

6. Protect others from overt harm (harassment, threats, etc.)
7. However, recognize that the pursuit of knowledge and understanding inherently comes with risk of offense, psychological stress, etc.
8. Approach others in good faith
9. Read / listen to the “other side” as much or more than your own
10. Take an intellectual diversity audit of your department and hiring practices

Recent Reading

“Higher Ed Has a Credibility Problem” (August 12, 2021)

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/higher-ed-has-a-credibility-problem>

Getting Around Faux Consensus: Heterodox Academy Communities



Anthropology

Heterodox Anthropology seeks to increase open-mindedness and respectful dialogue in anthropology. Participants should be affiliated with the field of anthropology (or a closely related field) through an advanced degree, current graduate studies, or current/previous employment.

Questions? Please contact Dan Eisenberg, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Washington, at danafton@gmail.com.



Rhetoric & Composition

The purpose of Heterodox Rhetoric & Composition is to safeguard private, multifaceted online discussions in which open-minded dialogue and respectful disagreement can further critical scholarship in rhetoric and composition. Participants should be affiliated with the field of rhet/comp (or a closely related field) through an advanced degree, current graduate studies, or current/previous employment in education.

Questions? Please contact Erec Smith, Associate Professor of Rhetoric at York College of Pennsylvania, at esmith47@ycp.edu.



Environmental Engineering & Science

Heterodox Environmental Engineering & Science aims to foster true viewpoint diversity in environmental research, education, practice, and policy/government work. Participants should be affiliated with the field of environmental engineering and science (or a closely related field) through an advanced degree, current graduate studies, or current/previous employment.

Questions? Please contact Siddhartha Roy, Research Scientist at Virginia Tech, at sidroy@vt.edu.



Sociology

Heterodox Sociology seeks to increase open-mindedness and respectful dialogue in sociology. Participants should be affiliated with the field of sociology (or a closely related field) through an advanced degree, current graduate studies, or current/previous employment.

Questions? Please contact Ilana Redstone, Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, at redstone@heterodoxacademy.org.

<https://heterodoxacademy.org/hxcommunities/>