

Transforming Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee Structure Within a Nursing Academic Program

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Problem: Schools of nursing are challenged to form a DEI committee to help integrate social determinants of health throughout curricula (Zappas et al., 2021). Nurses can help mitigate poor health outcomes known to result from individuals' physical, social, and psychological differences, inequities that limit full participation in health services, and unsupportive environments that constrain the opportunity to thrive and prosper (Amonoo et al., 2022). Compared to published literature that focuses on DEI committee "best practice" guidance within other health professions programs (e.g., radiology, psychiatry, medicine, pharmacy, neurology, pediatrics, social work, physical therapy), similar publications related to schools of nursing is not readily available.



Innovation/Strategy: ...engage one school of nursing (SON), within a Carnegie R1 research university (i.e., Clemson University), to incorporate research informed elements within its current DEI committee structure. Research-based factors believed to enhance DEI Committee outcomes will be recommended to the SON committee as well as use of the Plan-Do-Study-Act Model as a quality improvement framework (Institute of Healthcare Improvement [IHI], 2023). The model, designed to accelerate change, was selected due to its focus on forming a team; setting aims; establishing measures; and selecting, testing, implementing, and spreading tested quality improvement changes.



Method: A scoping review was conducted to identify current literature pertaining to DEI or diversity committee guidance. Of 11 related publications identified, 2 met the requirement of being research: Leon & Williams, 2016 and Smith & Roberts, 2007. Since the latter focused on a retrospective assessment of a 30-yr. old committee, the former article was used from which findings were analysed to identify recommended practices for use within the CU SON.

Implementation: DEI committee recommendations are presented in Table 1. They were synthesized from findings of one qualitative research study conducted to better understand the role of diversity committees as mechanisms toward strategic diversity leadership within academia (Leon & Williams, 2016). The study's theoretical framework is based in five key actions to help committees institutionalize diversity -- the committee's 1) definition of diversity, 2) role and responsibilities, 3) scope, 4) membership, and 5) permanence. Study data were generated from 10 different university DEI committees, within predominantly Caucasian research institutions, in the midwestern region of the US, and analyzed to elucidate work of the committees (versus assessment of their effectiveness).

Evaluation: The evaluation includes process and outcome measures: 1. The PDSA framework includes an integrated evaluation. Its four prescribed steps (plan, do, study, act) require identification of specific activities needed for each selected change and then assessment of each outcome, followed by any revision to the activity and re-testing, as necessary, until desired outcomes are attained.

2. The evaluation also consists of intermittent review (by author of this project as SON Faculty Council member) of the SON DEI Committee's "charge" and processes in relation to incorporation of any recommended change and subsequent impact on the committee's outcomes.

Table 1: Recommendations for CU SON DEI Committee

1. Develop or subscribe to a definition of diversity to use as context for the work
2. Craft committee role from perspective of senior leadership (e.g., is the focus on strategy, implementation, or both?)
3. Establish scope of committee (i.e., address specific issues as they arise, student issues, marginalized group or sub-population issues, etc.)
4. Determine level of institutional hierarchy within which committee operates (i.e., part of department, college, campus)
5. Confirm to whom committee reports, frequency, & mechanism of reporting
6. Reconceptualize diversity work from "what to do next" to "why did this happen"
7. Work with others (department, campus wide) to avoid duplication of effort & foster political capital
8. Understand state of diversity within SON, department, & institution (e.g., review retention, recruitment, graduation, tenure & promotion, rates, etc.)
9. Include members with expertise in areas such as organizational change, institutional transformation, and diversity work credibility
10. Partner with others not directly involved with diversity to help center the work in day-to-day operations of SON

References (partial):

1. Institute for Healthcare Improvement (2023). How to improve. <https://www.ihl.org/resources/pages/howtoimprove/default.aspx>
2. Leon, R.A., & Williams, D.A. (2016). Contingencies for success: Examining diversity committees in higher education. *Innovative Higher Education*, (41), 395–410. doi 10.1007/s10755-016-9357-8
3. Williams, D.A. (2013). Strategic diversity leadership: Activating changes and transformation in higher education. Stylus.
4. Zappas, M., Walton-Moss, B., Sanchez, C., Janett A., Hildebrand, J.A., & Kirkland, T. (2021). The decolonization of nursing education. *Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 17(2), 225-229.

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Biography

Dr. Shirley M. Timmons is a professor at the Clemson University School of Nursing, Clemson South Carolina, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in research, professional issues in nursing, population/community health, and health policy and economics. She received BS, MN, and PhD degrees from the University of South Carolina (SC), Columbia that highlighted care of vulnerable populations. She holds professional certifications as faith community nurse and nurse educator. Dr. Timmons's primary interest is the design of evidence-based health promotion interventions that mediate racial/ethnic related health disparities. She has a proclivity toward qualitative research methods used to uncover cultural nuances that inform health interventions that work. Her peer-reviewed publications focus on individual health behaviors related to HIV infection, self-management, weight management, and hypertension and service commitments span an emphasis on the well-being of underserved populations and implications of racial and/social justice to health outcomes. Her master's degree education enabled her to identify systemic factors associated with racial and health equity and to become informed about the need for population level change. Doctoral education instilled the ability to recognize (and use) research to inform culturally relevant health initiatives that also garner community engagement. Initiatives included healthcare workforce development: Director of continuing education to help registered nurses meet practice outcomes within a 6-county SC region (Midlands Area Health Education Center) and Director of the SC Healthcare Recruitment and Retention Center (formerly, SC Nurse Recruitment and Retention Center) to support and increase the number of care practitioners—with emphasis on equitable representation of racial/ethnic minority groups. She has applied systems improvement theory as director of 1 of 6 regions (southeast) of the US DHHS Health Disparities Collaborative to empower federally qualified health center workforces toward improving patient health outcomes. Her project director role of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, Excellence in Partnerships for Community Outreach, Research on Health Disparities and Training program at Clemson University also addressed the needs of health researchers toward disease management within four low-resource SC counties. She currently serves as director of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Covid-19 pandemic related statewide collaboration (SC Public Health Preparedness Student Corps) of six universities to engage undergraduate students, of diverse majors, within the public health workforce of trained disaster and emergency management personnel. Dr. Timmons's experiences align with published scholarship within diverse journals that range from Health Promotion Practice, Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice, and Journal of Religion and Health, to Nursing Education Perspectives, Journal of Christian Nursing, Journal for Nurse Practitioners, and Healthcare for Women International.

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