



**EMPIRE STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

## **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Action Plan**

*Supported by the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI)*

**2023-2028**

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## Statement from President Lisa Vollendorf

This DEI Action Plan has been created with the input of faculty, staff, professional employees, administrative leadership, and students at Empire State University. Our institutional core values—of access; diversity, equity, and inclusion; flexibility; and innovation—are key to our mission, our vision, and our very way of being. Since its founding, SUNY Empire has embraced a holistic commitment to serving students from all walks of life and all backgrounds at all stages of life. We know that we can and must do better to remove barriers to student, faculty, and staff success.

This DEI Action Plan serves as a reminder of the work we have undertaken and are committed to undertaking as we embark upon Elevate '28, our 2023-2028 strategic plan. The DEI Action Plan will be woven into the work of all divisions at the institution, and we all—regardless of where we sit at the university—share a responsibility to take on the work outlined here in service to our students, the institution, and each other.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Vollendorf". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline.

Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D., President

## Introduction

In 2015, the SUNY Board of Trustees issued a [SUNY diversity, equity and inclusion policy](#) that required each SUNY campus to recognize diversity, equity and inclusion as essential aspects of campus planning and indispensable characteristics of academic excellence. The Board asked campuses to appoint a chief diversity officer (CDO) and develop and implement a comprehensive strategic diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) plan.

This DEI Action Plan is a framework for creating an inclusive campus and engaging the SUNY Empire community in this effort in the future. The new plan builds on the first SUNY Empire DEI Plan, which was submitted to the SUNY Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in October 2017 and included 10 short-term, 10 intermediate, and 10 long-term goals.

Over the years, SUNY Empire has engaged in a series of initiatives to close racial disparities in the professoriate and in student recruitment and retention. Developing this second plan required an honest assessment of how and where the initial plan prompted meaningful change and where it missed the mark. Additionally, the revision provided an opportunity to align SUNY Empire's DEI objectives with the 2021 SUNY [25-Point DEI Action Plan](#).

Faculty, staff, and students from across SUNY Empire contributed to this plan via workgroups, community feedback, and background research. Our new DEI Action Plan (2023-2028) provides a roadmap for SUNY Empire for the next five years with focus on five strategic areas: (1) institutional commitment to DEI; (2) diversity in the student body; (3) diversity of faculty, professionals, staff and administrators; (4) inclusive learning environments; and (5) climate and culture.

## DEI Mission

SUNY Empire supports the development, promotion, and implementation of policies, practices, and academic programs dedicated to creating a community that is favorable to the development of the human potential of all students, faculty, staff, and administrators. As a diverse community of learners and leaders, SUNY Empire respects all aspects of human difference, including but not limited to age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression and identity, language heritage, learning style, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, status as a veteran and worldview.

All members of the SUNY Empire community must respect federal and state laws and SUNY policies regarding discrimination on the basis of race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, disability or marital or veteran status. SUNY Empire's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts will focus on compliance and equity of services and will implement professional-development programs and strategies to promote cultural competency and diversity awareness.

## DEI Vision and Commitments

### DEI Vision

SUNY Empire aspires to become a national leader in higher education. To achieve this, we are committed to embracing diversity as an integral component of quality academic and social experiences that prepare students for success in an increasingly multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual society. SUNY Empire's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts help create a high-quality educational experience for our students, who represent a rich array of human and intellectual diversity. By fully embracing a commitment to serving a diverse student population, SUNY Empire will demonstrate leadership through programs, policies, and practices that promote diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of its mission and work.

The CDO for institutional equity and inclusion is a resource to SUNY Empire faculty, staff, and students and is charged with promoting and furthering the institution's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### DEI Commitments

The following commitments map to SUNY Empire's vision, shape how we carry out our mission, and guide how we should treat one another:

- We take the broadest possible view of diversity, including seen and unseen qualities.
- We acknowledge life experiences that make individuals unique.
- We expect our workplace to be an inclusive environment built on mutual trust, respect, and dignity.
- We pledge to identify and eliminate barriers to equal opportunity in the workplace.
- We commit to build equal educational opportunities.
- We commit to foster equitable employment and educational practices.
- We offer meaningful academic and intellectual inclusion in curriculum, research, and service.
- Through a variety of support systems, we serve our SUNY Empire community in New York, nationwide, and around the globe, including those living in underserved areas, people from populations that are underserved in higher education, and students who have experienced educational and economic challenges.

## The DEI Action Plan

This action plan is a living document that describes the process and outcomes of a 15-month revision process. It will be refined and updated every five years by the CDO and DEI Council with input from the president, president's cabinet, and the SUNY Empire community. This section reaffirms the institution's DEI vision and mission and establishes the values that serve as a guide to the objectives in this document. It also describes the current state of the institution and the process used to revise SUNY Empire's first DEI plan, which resulted in five broad "themes" and a set of objectives and outcomes within each theme.

While publication of this document marks the end of the planning process, it does not end the important work to be done. Implementation will take place over a longer period and with the recognition that incremental change is a necessary component of lasting change. As Empire State University embarks upon the 2023-2028 institutional strategic plan, "Elevate '28," we have a unique opportunity to integrate the DEI Action Plan into our overall planning and implementation efforts, ensuring that we are infusing and living up to our values in all aspects of our work. The DEI Action Plan sets the course for future planning and implementation by providing a framework that rationalizes a set of activities that can help the institution make deliberate progress toward inclusive excellence.

### Proposed Objectives & Goals

The following proposed objectives and goals will be refined as they are integrated into the objectives and goals of the various divisions at the institution, ensuring that all goals are measurable and that we have tracking mechanisms in place to assess progress in all arenas. Moreover, the DEI Council's proposed initiatives will be considered in the phase of identifying tactics to support the goals in each of the divisions.

#### Theme 1: Institutional Commitment to DEI

**Strategic Objective 1:** Ensure accountability to diversity and inclusion efforts and campus commitment to diversity across the institution.

**Goal 1.1:** Diversity and inclusion are embedded and reflected in all administration units, job responsibilities, policies, and communications.

**Goal 1.2:** The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) and the Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) have sufficient resources to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

**Strategic Objective 2:** SUNY Empire builds a data-driven, decision-making culture that incorporates institutional DEI data.

**Goal 2.1:** DEI data is visible, accessible, and used by the university community to inform decision making.

## Theme 2: Diversity in the Student Body

**Strategic Objective 1:** Ensure that the diversity of the student body reflects the multidimensional diversity of the State of New York.

**Goal 1.1:** Marketing and recruitment efforts attract and successfully convert applicants from historically underserved populations to enrolled students.

**Goal 1.2:** New and strengthened partnerships cultivate a diverse pipeline of students.

**Strategic Objective 2:** Identify and resolve institutional barriers that impede the academic achievement of historically underserved students.

**Goal 2.1:** Equity in retention and graduation rates of historically underserved students improves.

## Theme 3: Diversity of the Faculty, Professionals, Staff, and Administrators

**Strategic Objective 1:** Ensure that the diversity of employees reflects the multidimensional diversity of the State of New York, and beyond.

**Goal 1.1:** Strategic recruitment and hiring efforts support employee diversity and growth in underserved populations, particularly BIPOC populations.

**Strategic Objective 2:** Retain a diverse employee population and create an inclusive and supporting workplace environment for BIPOC employees to thrive.

**Goal 2.1:** Practices for tenure and promotion of faculty and permanency and promotion for professionals and staff are equitable and transparent.

**Goal 2.2:** SUNY Empire sustains its commitment to the professional development of its employees, including opportunities for upward mobility.

## Theme 4: Inclusive Learning Environments

**Strategic Objective 1:** Create and strengthen learning environments that demonstrate diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Goal 1.1:** Faculty engage in evidence-based pedagogy and inclusive teaching and learning practices to enhance student learning and support diverse students.

**Goal 1.2:** Students with disabilities and neurodiversity have access to reasonable learning accommodations and support services.

**Goal 1.3:** DEI is integrated into academic programs to enable diverse narratives across the curriculum, particularly aspects of intersectionality such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and/or power and privilege.

**Goal 1.4:** Students engage in curricular and cocurricular opportunities to experience international exposure and globalization.

## Theme 5: Climate and Culture

**Strategic Objective 1:** Advance a climate that fosters respect, an institutional culture that promotes belonging, and inclusive excellence.

**Goal 1.1:** Every member of the SUNY Empire community takes responsibility for advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Goal 1.2:** Employees' perceptions of disparities and their sense of belonging improves.

**Goal 1.3:** Students' perceptions of disparities and their sense of belonging improves.



# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Definition of Terms

#### Institutional Definitions

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council authored and endorsed the institutional definitions below. As approved by Senate on June 24, 2022, the definitions help create a shared understanding of the work to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice at SUNY Empire.

Table 1. Institutional Definitions

Diversity	Equity	Inclusion
Diversity includes all aspects of human difference, including but not limited to, age, ability, race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression and identity, language heritage, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, status as a veteran, citizen status, and worldview. The focus of diversity at SUNY Empire is the commitment to and embracing of individual and group differences in social identities, lived experiences, and perspectives.	Equity is the creation of opportunities to ensure that historically underrepresented populations are provided the access and resources they need to ensure that all SUNY Empire outcomes reflect justice and fairness.	Inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation to create a true sense of belonging. It refers to "the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in the curriculum, co-curriculum, and communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions" (Clayton-Pedersen and Clayton-Pedersen, 2008).

#### Other Key Terms

For the purposes of this document, the following terms are defined as overarching guidance for the planning and work.

**Cultural Competence:** The ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own. It requires the acceptance of differences in appearance, behavior, and culture.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy:** Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) is a newer term. Django Paris, as quoted by Nieto and Bode (2018), explains CSP as follows: "[CSP] seeks to perpetuate and foster — to sustain — linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. In the face of current policies and practices that have the explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society, research and practice need equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality" (p. 150).

**Employee:** In this document, we use "employee" broadly to encompass all individuals who work at SUNY Empire, including classified staff, professional employees, tenured, tenure track and non-tenure track faculty, adjunct instructors, and administrators/management confidential.

**BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color):** BIPOC is a term that grew out of People of Color or POC which originated in the 1960s and '70s, an early iteration of people-first language. POC was recently expanded to BIPOC to acknowledge the unique relationship that Black and Indigenous people have to whiteness.

**Inclusive Excellence:** The recognition that an organization's success is dependent on how well it values, engages, and includes the diversity of its community members, including its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and affiliates.

**Learning Environment:** Encompasses the technology, physical locations, resources that enhance learning, contexts, and cultures in which students learn.

**LGBTQIA+:** An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and other communities not defined by the acronym. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**Racialized:** The process by which groups of people are assigned different treatment based on assigned attributes or physical characteristics of their identity. The visible effects of racialization are racial inequities which are embedded within social structures and systems. (Schaefer & Sage Publications, 2008).

**Underserved:** The U.S. federal agency Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) defines underserved and vulnerable populations as populations that face health, financial, educational, and/or housing disparities. Underserved and vulnerable populations include populations such as Hispanic/Latino, African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, individuals with disabilities, refugees, and individuals with limited English proficiency. This term focuses on how the institutions supports (or lacks support) for a population.

## Appendix B

### Snapshot: Current State 2023

To address issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion at SUNY Empire, we must understand where we currently stand based on available data. A snapshot from existing self-reporting surveys, along with results for the most recent climate surveys, are included to give context to the action items in this plan.

#### Our Students

The student population at SUNY Empire is comprised of 80% undergraduate and 20% graduate students. Approximately 70% study part time. The average student age at SUNY Empire is 36. Approximately 90% of our students are NYS residents. The most popular undergraduate majors are business, management and economics and community and human services. The Master of Business Administration program is the most popular graduate program.

Approximately 39% of our students self-identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), compared to 44% in the population of New York state (according to the 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates). Black or African American and Hispanic students account for nearly one-third of our student population.

#### Our Faculty and Staff

In 2022, the employee population at SUNY Empire consisted of approximately 60% faculty and 40% staff, with more than one-half of the employees serving in full-time roles. Approximately 60% of our faculty are adjuncts and 40% are line-based. Approximately two-thirds of our employees are female, 87% are NYS residents, and the average age for employees at SUNY Empire is 54.

Approximately 13% of our faculty and staff self-identify as BIPOC. Black or African American and Hispanic employees account for approximately 9% of our employee population. Efforts toward employee diversification in terms of both recruitment and retention are underway, with the goal of helping SUNY Empire diversify faculty and other employee ranks over time.

Since 2010, SUNY Empire has engaged in recurring assessment of faculty and staff workplace climate. Two surveys are administered: one focused on faculty perspectives and one on staff (support staff, professional employees, and management confidential employees). The 2021 survey instrument for both populations incorporated new items in the areas of civility and diversity. The instrument also included one open-ended item per topic area.

The 2021 survey was sent to 256 faculty, including 37 faculty with an appointment percentage less than 50%, and 464 individuals in non-faculty positions (support staff, professional employees, and management confidential). The overall response rate for the surveys was 44.1% and 57.3%, respectively. In general, both faculty and staff expressed higher levels of satisfaction in 2021 than in 2018. However, there were some response trends among BIPOC and historically underserved groups that pointed to work that needs to be done to build a more inclusive and equitable climate for all. For example, BIPOC and historically underserved groups

were more likely to be concerned about their safety than their White counterparts. Also, staff perceptions of diversity in 2021 were comparable to 2018; however, there were significant differences in perceptions based on race and ethnicity.

The DEI Action plan integrates many of the issues raised in the 2021 climate survey as priorities, objectives, and goals. Moreover, the Climate Committee continues to devise and help operationalize recommendations to improve the climate, which also is infused into two of the four priorities of Elevate '28: 'Academic and Inclusive Excellence' and 'Organizational Effectiveness.' To view the 2021 survey results and the full reports, visit [Climate Survey 2021 Results](#).

## Appendix C

### Review Process Overview

SUNY Empire's initial DEI Plan was submitted to and accepted by SUNY in 2017. Many great initiatives resulted from this plan, including the formation of the DEI Council. Notably, the Empire Opportunity Program was launched in January 2021 to provide targeted financial aid and enhanced academic support to historically disadvantaged students. With the success of the program, the SUNY Educational Opportunity Program and the Empire Promise Program (EPP) soon followed. In June 2022, data showed that opportunity program (OP) students are more likely to pass their courses and re-enroll in the subsequent term than their non-OP peers.

The revision process began by examining, categorizing, and evaluating current efforts, as well as identifying gaps and opportunities. The revised DEI Action Plan provides a cohesive, coherent, and collaborative approach to infusing diversity into every aspect of organizational structures, systems, and practices.

Through the data review, analysis, and synthesis processes, five thematic strategy areas were identified:

- Institutional commitment to DEI
- Diversity in the student body
- Diversity of faculty, professionals, staff, and administrators
- Inclusive learning environment
- Climate and culture

These five priority areas served as the basis for the development of objectives and proposed goals for the DEI Action plan. Many of these objectives could be categorized into multiple themes due to interconnectedness of the issues. For instance, professional opportunities to expand our awareness of DEI issues ideally will help promote a welcoming climate (climate and culture) but they also exemplify SUNY Empire's commitment to inclusive excellence (institutional commitment).

While we know that our full vision for inclusive excellence at SUNY Empire cannot be accomplished in five years, successful implementation of this plan is expected to help create the cultural and climate changes necessary for achieving equitable and inclusive student and employee success.

The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion would like to recognize the many collaborators who made the creation of this plan possible (see Table 2).

## DEI Action Plan Working Groups

Table 2. Members of the DEI Action Plan Working Groups (2021-2022)

Institutional Commitment	Diversity in the Student Body	Diversity of Employees	Learning Environments	Climate & Culture
Matthew Berge	Tibian Ahmed	Audrey Campbell	Mark Abendroth	Frances Boyce
Kristina Brousseau	Dana Brown	Bidhan Chandra	Jane Greiner	Lisa D’Adamo-Weinstein
Debra Kram-Fernandez	David Fullard	Jelia Domingo	Patricia Pillsworth	Tina Evans
Karen Lehoe	Dilanthi Graham	Alejandro Galindo	Sandra Winn	Cherie Haughney
Peggy Tally	Colleen Reedy	Janay Jackson	Melissa Zgliczynski	Dianne Ramdeholl
Nadine Wedderburn	Karen Tanski	Callie Montalvo Patel		Mark Spain
	Amanda Udairam	Sophia Mavrogiannis		

## Appendix D

### References

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