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ON THE WAY TO DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SHOWCASE OF NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Abstract

The paper delves into the essential role of universities in providing all students with equal access and opportunities, focusing on their specific responsibilities towards this goal. It scrutinizes the Diversity, Equality, and Inclusivity (DEI) policy at Nazarbayev University (NU), highlighting its dedication to an inclusive academic atmosphere. Evaluating NU's DEI practices is crucial, reflecting the university's commitment to an inclusive educational environment. The paper emphasizes the critical need for practical, effective implementation of DEI policies, moving beyond mere theoretical discourse. It examines various strategies and initiatives to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are genuinely embedded in the university's culture, curriculum, and community life.

Furthermore, it identifies persistent challenges to achieving real inclusivity in higher education and proposes solutions through innovative and consistent university leadership efforts. Concluding with a forward-looking discussion, the paper suggests potential improvements and strategies for NU's leadership to refine DEI policies. These recommendations encompass policy modifications, program development, and community engagement to establish a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Keywords: equality, access, inclusivity, responsibility of educational institutions, the concept of DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Nazarbayev University experience.

Introduction. This paper discusses the institution's responsibility to ensure access and choice for all. It concludes with a discussion of opportunities the NU leadership can consider to enhance DEI policies on the institutional level and some brief concluding remarks. One more important discussion point in this paper is that the concept of inclusivity may vary across the universities. The purpose of this paper is to encourage other Kazakhstani educational institutions to start by asking a question about what inclusion means and how it could be represented in a particular academic community in a particular social context, to share practical examples "in the vicinity" of how a selective institution can ensure access and choice for all.

Main part. The paper mainly draws on relevant literature and document sources, emphasizing the university's responsibility to ensure access and choice for all. It provides examples from the case-study institution, NU.

Among the valuable for study and reasoning, in our opinion, we would like to highlight the experience and research of experts in higher and graduate education, who:

– discuss strategies and approaches to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for students of different racial and ethnic groups on the University campus (Hurtado, 2002; Hurtado et al., 2012; Council of Graduate Schools, 2003, vol. 2);

– note the importance of genuine interest, action, and commitment to campus diversity, residents on student recruitment and retention of a diverse contingent and diversity issues (Anyaso, 2008; Council of Graduate Schools, 2003, vol.1);

– conclude that individual university services and units can create an environment that empowers community members and nurtures a sense of belonging, and "building a community helps" the support system extended to the underrepresented members of the university community in every discipline and academic level from the newly admitted students to postdoctoral scholars (Council of Graduate Schools, 2003, vol.3);

– indicate mistakes that well-known universities made in an attempt to preserve their academic excellence and prestige.

– explore and discuss concerns and barriers related to college students with special needs and utilizing disability services and accommodations in the universities (Marshak et al., 2010).

We believe that the focus on the university's responsibility to ensure access and choice for all starts with a review of the processes and situational analysis. It is essential because inclusion and diversity do not mean the same to all universities. After all, students, faculty members, and programs can be different from university to university from school to school. Every institution must reflect on inclusion and diversity (Tomas, 2020). Inclusion could have similarities at a particular academic institution in a specific social context. For institutional change and embracing racial justice and equity as essential components of higher education, the institution leadership and the policymakers must consider what should be done to reduce racial inequality and create diverse and equitable campuses (Byrd, 2021).

Established in 2010, NU was built to become a world-class university that offers everyone affordable, high-quality education. NU embraces cultural diversity that is "integrated into every aspect of education, research, and community" and" vouches for equal access to education – regardless of race, religion, gender, physical capacity, or socioeconomic status" (NU, 2022). For example, 70% of the NU faculty are international. Our diverse faculty hails from 58 countries (NU, 2022). NU pursues an articulate strategy for attracting international students. For example, international students hail from 12 countries (NU, 2022). A meritocracy is a key principle for NU admission. NU maintains its responsibility of ensuring access and choice for all despite its strong emphasis on student selection. While NU adopted a strategy of selecting the best and brightest students regardless of race, sex, gender identification, sexual orientation, national origin, native language, religion, and cultural background, the University has to align its equity and diversity policies with the principle of talent concentration and student selection. NU needs to avoid the errors and mistakes of some elite colleges (compromising diversity and inclusivity) as they try to maintain only their academic excellence and prestige as the top priority (Lesesne, 2008). NU offers generous scholarships to both local and international students and considers the needs of low-income students (NU, 2022), grants a preparatory year foundation course for undergraduate and graduate bright candidates, and even arranges the entry examination in the regions at the institution's expense to ensure equal access to all from step one.

Materials and methods. The methodological layout of this paper is a case study research method, "a common research method in psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, and community planning" (Yin, 2014) and, in this case, it is a relevel approach for explanation of NU DEI case as it is aimed to illustrate and interpret achievements of the University and its examination contributes to the knowledge of Kazakhstan higher educational organizations and the other experts in leaders in higher education. The case study is accompanied by the narrative literature review, providing a qualitative interpretation of the existing studies and practices related to the questions raised by this paper. In selecting literature for our research, a deliberate choice has been made to limit the focus to US researchers, experts, and practitioners. This approach allows for the

facilitation of comparative analyses. By honing in on US literature, we can effectively compare DEI initiatives, successes, and challenges within the US with those in other countries, including Kazakhstan. This offers a basis for understanding the potential transferability of DEI strategies to diverse global contexts.

NU's long-term experience and strategic partnerships with top US universities further bolstered the decision to emphasize US literature. This strategic collaboration signifies a deep-rooted connection and mutual exchange of knowledge and resources in the field of DEI. However, the review inclusion is extended to the wide range of sources (research papers, newsletters, books, reports, and publications of the agencies, organizations, and associations) referenced throughout the paper's central part.

Results and discussion. The Role of University Leadership and *Faculty in Ensuring Inclusion, Equity, and Access on Campus.* To respond effectively to the question posed in this paper within the context of NU, it is crucial to have a clear conceptualization of inclusion, equity, and diversity because these phenomena could differ from institution to institution. At the NU level, we articulate these three concepts in our public documents on the institutional, school, and classroom levels. For example, on the institutional level, the NU 2018-2030 Strategy (a publicly available document) clearly states that "NU functions as a social lift for poor but talented young people" (NU, 2018, p. 16). In this regard, our leaders and student affairs units must engage in complex conversation to "create change: self-knowledge, knowledge of and experiences with others, understanding historical and institutional contexts, understanding how to change the status quo and transformative action" (Watt, 2012). The institution shall revise the faculty hiring process toward more inclusive hiring and a more diverse faculty (O'Meara, 2020).

Furthermore, Anyaso (2008), based on the perspectives of the three university presidents on recruiting and retaining diverse populations and diversity challenges, notes the importance of genuine interest, actions, and commitment to campus diversity, starting from even the stage of crafting the public diversity statement (Carnes, 2019)

Part of the NU's commitment to campus diversity is the recognition of various types of student categories from the perspective of cultural and racial diversity, socio-economic status, and disabilities (Hurtado et al., 1998; Marshak et al., 2010). For instance, all the schools and faculties at NU recognize the following student categories and maintain headcount statistics of these student categories on the school level: (1) Orphan students who lost both of their parents; (2) Students from single-parent families; (3) Students from large families (with more than four children); (4) Students whose parents have disabilities; (5) Students who were born with disabilities. This categorization of various student groups strengthens NU's inclusion approach and the policy's view.

Enacting DEI Policies into Practice. Academic institutions should be held publicly accountable in determining their institutional priorities by considering where to begin with DEI policies and practices. This involves conducting a comprehensive assessment of factors such as the individuals present, the resources at our disposal, and the optimal timing for initiation. Inclusion cannot start after some time. Institutions must implement the process to become an "ideal" inclusive university. Then institutions need a mission statement - What should happen daily, every week, to make us achieve the vision? For example, from Day 1, NU developed its vision and mission of providing everyone with an affordable, high-quality education. Part of the core values reflected in its mission is "equal access to education – regardless of race, religion, gender, physical capacity, or socioeconomic status" (NU, 2018, p. 24).

DEI policy implementation is another important element of providing access and choice to everyone. Universities are expected to implement the policy, which should be developed concerning all aspects of DEI. The policies should be monitored and controlled. University leaders need help developing policies and putting them on the shelf. They must monitor processes to see what has been achieved and identify context-specific challenges. In this respect, Anyaso (2008) indicates the value of defining explicit purposes and timely reporting "on results, including failures" (p. 20). This means that university leaders, deans, and heads of academic departments should be guided by the principle of transparency in their DEI policies and practices, fostering an environment of trust

and accountability within their institutions. The NU 2018-2030 Strategy notes "transparency and openness, public access to all aspects of university operations" (NU, 2018, p. 24). So, this principle puts much emphasis on the university leadership and faculty to be transparent when it comes to the decisions regarding applications, admissions, and enrollment.

Regarding the transparency of operations and processes related to DEI, university leaders are advised to conduct a situation analysis and institutional readiness. For example, the Index of Inclusion is an appropriate strategy to introduce in higher education institutions. In this respect, (Losada Puente et al., 2022) point out that promoting inclusivity in a global context is gaining momentum, emphasizing the need for reforms that address the diverse needs of all individuals.

In the case of NU, academic deans and program directors sit down and ask the following question: "How do we do situational analysis?". There are three dimensions: (1) Producing inclusive policies: looking at the policies if the policies are taken into consideration, if all aspects of DEI are respected, and have been implemented; (2) Evolving inclusive practices: what practices are we engaged in and are they effective?, and (3) Creating inclusive cultures: what cultures of inclusion have we created at the institution? Have we created a culture of enablement or a culture of barriers? These NU experiences can be adapted and adopted as some, if not most, Kazakhstan Universities might share attitudes toward the approach and priority. NU is a missionary willing to translate the knowledge, policies, and insights (Sagintayeva, 2023).

Opportunities to Enhance DEI Policies on the Institutional Level. Defining opportunities to enhance DEI policies is an important aspect of campus diversity and ensuring access to all. DEI is a never-ending process that always has room for improvement. Finding the gaps between an institution's intentions/efforts and students' expectations is key, and it is the institution's responsibility to include students in the process of diversity-aimed initiatives to effectively address the needs and challenges of underrepresented groups of students (Ovink, 2022). Spotting out the conditions that "undermine performance-related outcomes for individuals at the intersections of race and gender" that affect academic success

(Willson, 2015) is another critical task at the institutional level. "Students indicated they want to be challenged by their instructors, but they also want to feel supported and feel faculty care about their well-being. They want to be seen as a whole person - their potential, their challenges, their goals," as Cuenca-Carlino reflects on the task force analysis of students and faculty where "input from students offered insights about their experiences in the classroom, how they felt engaged in learning, and barriers they faced as students." (Hatch, 2020).

As part of the response to the question posed in the study, the whole institutional approach is an effective way to enhance campus diversity and access to high-quality education. The entire institutional approach is based on (1) the review of policies, (2) the review of practices, and (3) the analysis of factors that explicitly or implicitly serve as barriers to ensuring access and choice for everyone.

So, for instance, the review of policies can be structured in the following way: admission, screening, identification, assessment, and support. First, the review of admission policies is essential. Regarding a university's admission policy, academic administrators need to consider various factors. Should we prioritize promoting diversity among our student population or focus solely on admitting academically exceptional students? Are we selecting students based on race, age, or ability? Our admission policies must reflect our commitment to promoting diversity and ensuring access to everyone. We should ensure we have measures to assess if we successfully foster a diverse student body. Second, the screening process is crucial after the admissions process. Once students are admitted, it becomes essential to have a robust screening process in place. This process enables us to identify and understand their individual educational needs. It is of utmost importance to be aware of these needs to provide appropriate support and resources. Third, it is identification. We must have effective methods to identify students with special needs, disabilities, social challenges, learning difficulties, or those facing migratory-related issues. We need to be mindful not to limit access for students with disabilities and ensure that our institution remains inclusive for all. Fourth, it is assessment. A well-defined assessment policy is vital. It should not

compromise academic standards to accommodate students with disabilities. Maintaining the integrity of our assessment processes is crucial. We can still provide necessary support while upholding the rigorous standards of our university.

Finally, providing adequate and relevant support to each student category is important. Our focus should be on providing ample support to students with special educational needs. This support can come in various forms, such as tailored educational resources, counseling services, or accommodations to create an inclusive learning environment (Douglass, 2020; Freadman, 2021). By addressing these areas – admission, screening, identification, assessment, and support – we can create an inclusive institution that promotes diversity, recognizes individual educational needs, maintains academic standards, and offers appropriate support to students throughout their academic journey.

Conclusion. This paper posed the question about the institution's responsibility to ensure access and choice for all. The paper attempted to ask this question by discussing NU's case. The paper drew on relevant literature and provided some key examples from the case-study institution. The paper mainly argued about the importance of implementing DEI policies rather than only examining them on policy rhetoric. The paper concluded with a discussion of opportunities that the NU leadership could consider enhancing DEI policies on the institutional level. As an academic institution that aspires to become a world-class institution, NU has to align its DEI policies with its goal of cultivating a culture of academic excellence. Thus, NU makes an interesting case of how to be a university that is accessible and selective at the same time.

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THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF EARLY CAREER GUIDANCE FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Abstract

The article discusses such an urgent problem as professional work, it was at this stage that the theoretical foundations of vocational education were prepared in the world of professionals, which is known from individual labor activity. The author presented theoretical aspects traditional, practical and modern determined the level of professional development. Developed a set of ways and means to provide students with information about the concept of a profession. Conducting work to improve the quality of individual practical activities improving the professional competence of children of the older generation. Organizes special calls for personnel on the labor market as practitioners. Experienced work was carried out on the position of labor in nurseries, the competence of the profession. Comparative diagnostics were carried out with the two groups and the final results were obtained. There is a high demand for social, humanitarian, military, and Natural Sciences, which work in several directions.

Keywords: profession, social, humanitarian, natural science, society, child, nursery