

## Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity at Lehigh University: A Systemic Approach

Over the past several months we have been discussing and working on a plan regarding how to understand, acknowledge, and address stakeholder calls for action around social justice. Those calls for action demand that we take a more systemic approach to diversity, inclusion, and equity (DI&E). Today, I will be sharing our strategic level approach to enhance our ongoing DI&E efforts at Lehigh.

What I will be sharing with you today reflects my decades-long experience in leading and advising at the highest levels in government, business, and higher education on improving organizational climates. Furthermore, it is reflective of my research (scholarly and community) in leading practices and current thinking in the diversity, inclusion, and equity space.

For Lehigh to truly be a progressive leader in the DI&E space, we must be willing to apply a systems-based approach to our DI&E strategic plan. While racial justice needs to be highlighted in this approach, systemic DI&E goes beyond racial justice, and touches every facet of inclusion across all walks of life and elements of humanity. Systemic DI&E recognizes, and then reimagines, the structures and systems that perpetuate inequities.

The language and methodology of antiracism addresses systemic DI&E. In his 2019 book, *How To Be an Antiracist*, Professor Ibram X. Kendi argues that racism is systemic because it is intertwined – both consciously and unconsciously – in the fiber and foundation of virtually every organization, in every community, in every nation, manifesting through the written and unwritten beliefs, laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people. His assertion is shared by many sociological, psychological, and historical scholars like Professors Judith H. Katz, Beverly D. Tatum, and BG (ret) Ty Seidule, to name a few.

Kendi further argues that racism cannot be reversed, and instead promotes redefinition through the lens of antiracism – the active identification, challenging, and changing of values, structures, and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism. Thus, if we want to be truly transformational in our approach to DI&E, we must apply the principles of antiracism to our system. This requires us to develop broad, bold strategies that challenge historical structures, systems, processes, and policies.

### Resources:

- Harvard Business Review: [Diversity and Inclusion Efforts That Really Work](#) (May 12, 2020)
- New York Times: [Corporate America Has Failed Black America](#) (June 6, 2020)
- Inside Higher Ed: [Words Matter for College Presidents, but So Will Actions](#) (June 8, 2020)
- Washington Post: [As big corporations say “black lives matter,” their track records raise skepticism](#) (June 13, 2020)
- New York Times: [Corporate America Says Black Lives Matter. It Needs to Hold Up a Mirror.](#) (June 15, 2020)

- Harvard Business Review: [Restructure Your Organization to Actually Advance Racial Justice](#) (June 22, 2020)
- Harvard Business Review: [Update Your DE&I Playbook](#) (July 15, 2020)
- Wall Street Journal: [Your Company Says Diversity Is a Higher Priority. Now What?](#) (July 19, 2020)
- Harvard Business Review: [“Woke-Washing” Your Company Won’t Cut It](#) (July 27, 2020)