Measuring the Diversity Inclusivity of College Courses: An Update

Thomas F. Nelson Laird
Sarah S. Hurtado
Bridget Yuhas

Indiana University

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In our current educational and national moment, few things matter more than finding ways to facilitate learning across differences. Including diversity in the college curriculum is one well-established way to promote this learning. Over the last few decades, several researchers have shown that the incorporation of diversity in courses has positive effects on student learning and prejudice reduction (Chang, 2002; Denson, 2009; Denson & Chang, 2009; Nelson Laird, 2005; Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005). For example, Hurtado, Mayhew, and Engberg (2003) found that students who took a diversity course made gains in moral reasoning, particularly when compared to their peers in a management course. Others identified a positive relationship between diversity curricula and lower levels of racial prejudice (Chang, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004) and higher levels of critical thinking (Hurtado, 2003; Pascarella, Palmer, More, & Pierson, 2001; Villalpando, 2002). Not surprisingly, many institutions have instituted some form of curricular diversity requirement in hopes of promoting these outcomes (Cole, Case, Rios, & Curtin, 2011).

Interestingly, designating courses as "diversity courses" and limiting investigative focus to those courses likely underestimates the impact of including diversity in the curriculum (Nelson Laird, 2011). This labeling approach and requiring students to take a single "diversity requirement," may also be problematic since studies suggest that taking one course is not sufficient, and that students need to engage diversity in multiple courses to receive the benefits others found (Brown, 2004; Larke, 1990). However, the empirical evidence for where diversity can be found in the curriculum is thin. Further, in recent years institutions have drawn criticism for the ways they do or do not work toward promoting diversity and equity on campus (Deruy, 2016; New, 2016; Wong & Green, 2016. To aid in such investigations, Nelson Laird (2010,

2014) developed a diversity inclusivity model to examine *how*, rather than *whether*, a course is inclusive of diversity, which better positions faculty, faculty developers, researchers, and others to explore curricular diversity. Informed by ongoing research and Nelson Laird's model for predicting diversity inclusivity in courses, the current study was guided by the following research questions.

- In the 2017 administration of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, how much do faculty report including diversity in their courses?

- How do faculty demographics, faculty appointment characteristics, faculty perceptions of institutional inclusiveness and commitment to diversity, and course characteristics relate to measures of how much faculty include diversity into their courses?

Previous Literature

Broadly speaking, research examining the benefits of incorporating diversity into the curriculum focuses on designated diversity courses. However, what counts as a diversity course varies (Nelson Laird, 2011). In some cases, institutions identify specific courses that fulfill general education diversity requirements (Chang, 2002). In other cases, courses taught in departments such as gender or ethnic studies are named diversity courses (Astin, 1993). The variety in what does or does not count makes it difficult for institutions to truly understand how students are experiencing diversity in the curriculum. Additionally, in some courses, incorporating diversity is viewed as difficult or unnecessary (Nelson Laird, 2011).

Although there are challenges in determining how diversity is included in the curriculum, several studies have examined predictors of how faculty included diversity into their courses. Faculty infuse diversity into the content of a course by identifying readings (Hurtado, 2001; Mayhew & Grundwald, 2006) and incorporating perspectives from

underrepresented groups (Milem, 2001). Faculty members also develop activities that promote student interactions across difference (Reason, Cox, Lutovsky Quaye, Terenzini, 2010) and working to resolve diversity issues (Smart & Umbach, 2007). Additionally, there are a number of faculty characteristics that predict including diversity into courses. These include discipline and course characteristics (Milem, 2001; Mayhew & Grunwald, 2006; Smart & Umbach, 2007), institutional characteristics (Milem, 2001; Reason et al., 2010; Umbach, 2006), and individual characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender; Reason et al., 2010; Umbach, 2006).

Nelson Laird (2011) developed a set of 12 survey items he appended to the Faculty Survey Student Engagement (FSSE) in 2007. Those items capture how nine course elements (e.g., purpose/goals, pedagogy) can be more or less inclusive of diversity. Nelson Laird (2011) confirmed many of the findings from previous studies. For example, Nelson Laird (2011) found discipline was a significant predicator of diversity inclusivity. He also found that women and faculty of color were more likely to incorporate diversity compared to their peers. Combined, previous research highlights the importance of taking a nuanced approach to discussing how diversity is included in the curriculum, in order to understand how these curricular experiences shape student learning. In this moment, ten years after the original items were administered to faculty members, the items, with some updates, were again appended to FSSE. Guided by the previous study (Nelson Laird, 2011) and other research (e.g., Mayhew & Grunwald, 2006), the updated item set included the 12 diversity inclusivity items (with slight modifications) as well as several other items.

Framework

Drawing from course planning models (Lattuca & Stark, 2009), multicultural education (Banks, 2005; Sleeter & Grant, 2008), and feminist theory/pedagogy (Maher &

Tetrault, 1995; McIntosh, 1983), Nelson Laird (2010, 2014) developed a model that identified

a diversity inclusivity continuum for nine course elements (i.e., purpose/goals, content,

foundations/goals, learners, instructors, pedagogy, classroom environment,

assessment/evaluation, and adjustment). For example, course content can range from focusing

on a single culture (monocultural) to including content from multiple cultures (multicultural).

Rather than focusing on the courses that have been designated a "diversity course" by their

institution, the model opens possibilities for examining the diversity inclusivity of any course.

This model guided the creation and updating of the 12 diversity inclusivity items (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Diversity Inclusivity model
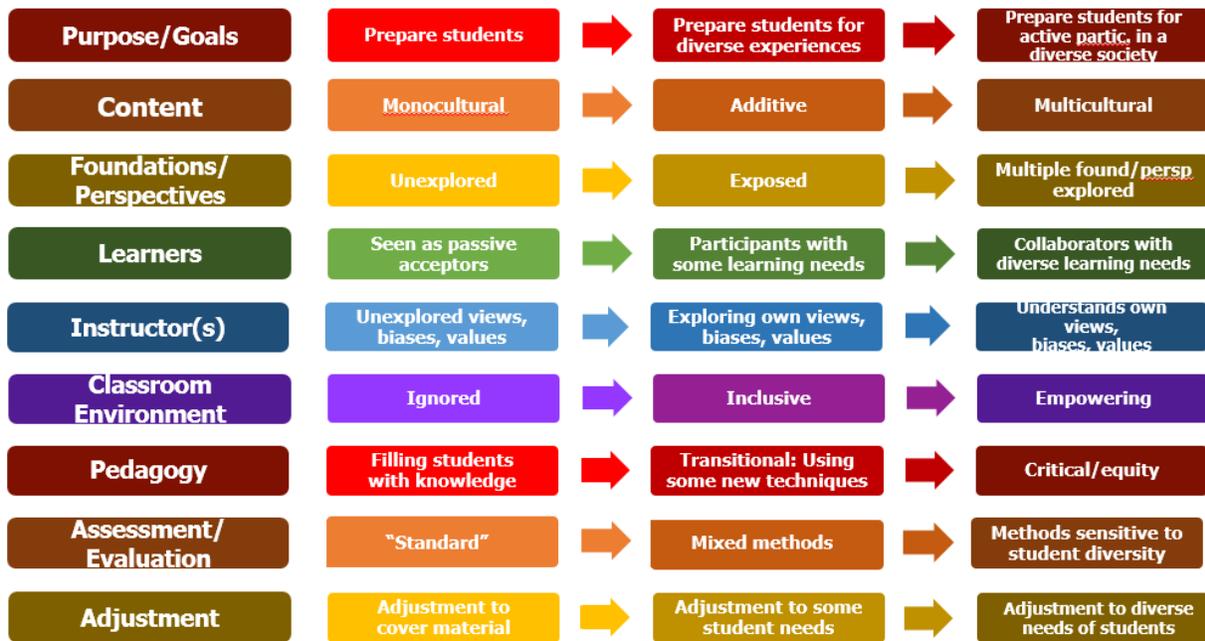
Source: Nelson Laird (2014)

Nelson Laird (2011) used measures of several faculty and course characteristics to

predict diversity inclusivity. However, guided by conceptual relationships between campus

climate and the curriculum (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012) as

well as studies indicating that faculty members' sense of institutional and/or departmental commitment to diversity relates to their incorporation of diversity into coursework (Maruyama & Moreno, 2000; Mayhew & Gunwald, 2006), we use a model that includes (a) faculty demographics (e.g., gender, race, years teaching), (b) faculty appointment characteristics (e.g., rank, employment status, discipline), (c) faculty perceptions of institutional inclusivity and commitment to diversity (e.g., perceptions of colleagues' commitment to diversity), and (d) course characteristics (e.g., course level, course size, course status as a diversity requirement).

Methods

Data Source and Sample

FSSE collects information from faculty at four-year colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. The survey measures the extent to which faculty and other instructional staff engage in effective educational practices that are empirically linked with student learning and development. More specifically, FSSE asks questions about how often faculty engage in various educationally beneficial activities, the quality of their interactions with students, and their perception of their campus environment. A faculty respondent answers many of the core FSSE items about a particular course taught during the current academic year. Since 2003, more than 250,000 faculty and other instructional staff from more than 800 different institutions have responded to FSSE.

In 2017, 24,418 respondents from 154 institutions participated. The Diversity Inclusivity item set was administered at 42 of those institutions that represent a wide cross-section of US higher education (19% doctoral/research universities, 57% master's university, and 24% baccalaureate colleges; 62% public institutions; 50% with undergraduate enrollments less than 5,000; 26% less or non-competitive, 45% competitive, and 29% very competitive or

above as rated by Barron's). After limiting to common faculty appointment types (e.g.,

assistant, associate, and full professors as well as instructors and lecturers) and the 10

disciplinary areas used in this study, as well as dropping cases for missing data, the sample

contained 4,468 faculty members. Like their 42 institutions, the respondents were also a varied

group (see Table 1).

Measures

The dependent measures used in this study are the 12 individual diversity inclusivity

items and the two diversity inclusivity scales, Diverse Grounding and Inclusive Learning. The

scales have very similar properties in our sample as they did previously (Nelson Laird, 2011),

even with the updated item wordings (see Table 2).

The independent measures used in the regression analyses came from the core FSSE

instrument as well as the Diversity Inclusivity item set. *Faculty Demographics* cover gender,

sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and years teaching. All these measures come from the core

FSSE instrument and, with the exception of sexual orientation, were included in Nelson

Laird's (2011) models. Sexual orientation was added to FSSE after the original study and has

been shown to relate to FSSE measures of effective teaching practices (e.g., BrckaLorenz &

Nelson Laird, 2017). *Faculty Appointment Characteristics* cover rank and employment status,

course load, and disciplinary area, all measures included by Nelson Laird (2011). *Faculty*

Perceptions of Institutional Inclusiveness and Commitment to Diversity were captured with

two measures from the Diversity Inclusivity item set: (a) a single-item measure of faculty

members' perceptions of their institutions' diversity inclusivity and (b) an 8-item scale

capturing how committed to diversity faculty perceive their departmental colleagues,

department chairs, departmental staff members, students, upper-level administrators, other

Table 1
Independent Variables

Name	Description
Faculty Demographics	
Gender[a]	Men[b] (48%); Women (48%); Preferred not to respond (4%)
Sexual orientation[a]	Straight[b] (85%); Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning or unsure, Another sexual orientation (6%); Preferred not to respond (9%)
Race/ ethnicity[a]	White[b] (71%); Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander (5%); Black or African American (5%); Hispanic or Latino (6%); American Indian, Alaska Native, Other race, or Multiracial (6%); Preferred not to respond (8%)
Doctorate	0 = no doctorate (34%); 1 = doctorate earned (66%)
Years teaching	Continuous variable in decades (range 0.1-7.2, mean = 1.6, sd = 1.1)
Faculty Appointment Characteristics	
Rank & empl status[a]	Part-time lecturer/instructor[b] (16%), Full-time lecturer/instructor (16%), assistant professor (21%), associate professor (21%), full professor (26%)
Course load	Continuous variable (range 0-13, mean = 5.5, sd = 2.5)
Disciplinary area[a]	Arts & humanities[b] (24%); Biological sciences, agriculture, & natural resources (8%); Physical sciences, mathematics, & computer science (13%); Social sciences (14%); Business (9%); Communications, media, & public relations (4%); Education (8%); Engineering (5%); Health professions (10%); Social service professions (4%)
Faculty Perceptions of Institutional Inclusiveness and Commitment to Diversity	
Curricular diversity	1 = Not at all inclusive to 7 = Totally inclusive (mean = 4.9, sd = 1.4)
Commitment to diversity	8-item scale (α = 0.91, range 1-4, mean = 2.72, sd = 0.75)
Course Characteristics	
Level[a]	Lower division (38%), Upper division (56%), Other[b] (6%)
Size[a]	20 students or less (27%), 21 to 50 (31%), More than 50 students[b] (42%)
Format[a]	Classroom instruction on campus (80%); Classroom at auxiliary location (2%); Distance education (10%); Combination of classroom and distance (9%)
Gen ed req	0 = No (51%); 1 = Yes (49%)
Diversity req	0 = No (73%); 1 = Department or college requirement (27%)

[a] Dichotomous indicator created for each sub-group (0 = not in sub-group, 1 = in sub-group)
[b] Reference group

administrators, and other faculty colleagues. The former was included in Nelson Laird's (2011)

models and measures similar to the latter were included by scholars in studies of the inclusion

of diverse content in courses (e.g., Mayhew & Grunwald, 2006).

Table 2
Diversity Inclusivity Scales and Items

Scales and Items[a]	Related course element[b]
Diverse Grounding ($\alpha = 0.84$, range 1-4, mean = 2.79, sd = 0.76)	
a Students gain an understanding of how course topics connect to societal problems or issues	Purpose/goals
b Students develop skills necessary to work effectively with people from various backgrounds	Purpose/goals
c The course content covers contributions to the field by people from multiple cultures	Content
d The course emphasizes multiple approaches to analyzing issues or solving problems	Foundations/ perspectives
f You explore your own cultural and scholarly biases as part of class preparation	Instructor(s)
g You address your potential biases about course-related issues during class	Instructor(s)
Inclusive Learning ($\alpha = 0.83$, range 1-4, mean = 3.20, sd = 0.62)	
e You learn about student characteristics in order to improve class instruction	Learners
h You vary your teaching methods to allow for the multiple ways students learn	Pedagogy
i The classroom atmosphere encourages the active participation of all students	Classroom environment
j Students feel empowered in their learning	Pedagogy
k You evaluate student learning using multiple techniques	Assessment/ evaluation
l You adjust aspects of the course (e.g., pace, content, or assignments) based on student learning needs	Adjustment

[a] Scales and items adapted from Nelson Laird (2011). Faculty members were asked how much each item happened in their course sections. Response options were 1 = Very little, 2 = Some, 3 = Quite a bit, and 4 = Very much.
[b] Course elements from Nelson Laird's (2010, 2014) model.

Course Characteristics cover course level (e.g., upper division), size, format (e.g., classroom instruction on campus or classroom instruction at an auxiliary location), whether a course met a general education requirement, and whether a course met a diversity requirement. All measures were from the core FSSE instrument except the diversity requirement measure which was in the Diversity Inclusivity item set. Nelson Laird (2011) included course level, size, and the diversity requirement measure. Course format and the general education requirement measure were included because of their links to effective teaching practices (e.g., BrckaLorenz & Nelson Laird, 2017; Nelson Laird, Niskodé-Dossett, & Kuh, 2009). See Table 1 for more information on the independent variables.

Analyses

To conduct the analyses for this study, we first ran frequencies on the 12 diversity inclusivity items to determine how much faculty reported including diversity into 9 course elements. Second, we ran two OLS regression analyses to determine the unique effects of each independent variable on the two diversity inclusivity scales. Despite the structure of our data (faculty nested within institutions), OLS regression was used because, as with many measures of faculty teaching practice, the amount of institution-level variation in the dependent measures in this study was quite small (3-4%) and our focus was on faculty-level predictors.

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Results

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The responses to the 12 diversity inclusivity items show that, in general, a higher percentage of faculty members reported doing inclusive learning practices "Quite a bit" or "Very much" compared to the diverse grounding practices (see Table 3). The percentage of faculty doing the diverse grounding practices "Quite a bit" or "Very much" ranged from 49% to 77% while the comparable percentages of those doing the inclusive learning practices

ranged from 67% to 92%. This pattern is similar to what Nelson Laird (2011) found. Three

items in our study were worded identically to those used by Nelson Laird (2011). On those

Table 3
Distribution of Faculty Responses to the Diversity Inclusivity Items (N = 4,468)

Item[a]	Very little	Some	Quite a bit	Very much
Diverse Grounding				
a Students gain an understanding of how course topics connect to societal problems or issues	9%	22%	29%	39%
b Students develop skills necessary to work effectively with people from various backgrounds	11%	29%	31%	29%
c The course content covers contributions to the field by people from multiple cultures	16%	28%	27%	29%
d The course emphasizes multiple approaches to analyzing issues or solving problems	4%	19%	35%	42%
f You explore your own cultural and scholarly biases as part of class preparation	19%	28%	27%	27%
g You address your potential biases about course-related issues during class	22%	29%	25%	24%
Inclusive Learning				
e You learn about student characteristics in order to improve class instruction	8%	26%	34%	33%
h You vary your teaching methods to allow for the multiple ways students learn	3%	22%	35%	40%
i The classroom atmosphere encourages the active participation of all students	1%	8%	29%	63%
j Students feel empowered in their learning	1%	15%	40%	43%
k You evaluate student learning using multiple techniques	3%	15%	35%	46%
l You adjust aspects of the course (e.g., pace, content, or assignments) based on student learning needs	5%	19%	32%	44%

[a] Faculty members were asked how much each item happened in their course sections.

three items (g, k, and l), the percentage indicating "Quite a bit" or "Very much" were 49%,

81%, and 76%, respectively. Nelson Laird's findings were similar for those items, but a bit

lower (42%, 76%, and 74%, respectively).

The results in Table 4 show women, LGBQA faculty, faculty of color, faculty who

teach a heavier load, and faculty from the arts and humanities, social sciences,

communications, media, and public relations, education, and the social services professions

tend to include diversity in their courses more than their colleagues. These results mirror those

of Nelson Laird (2011). In both analyses, faculty perceptions of commitment to diversity on

their campuses, a measure not used by Nelson Laird, was strongly related to the dependent

variable indicating an important relationship between including diversity into one's course and

one's sense of the commitment to diversity held among the students, faculty, and staff at one's

institution. In Nelson Laird's study, perceptions of curricular diversity were moderately related

to both scales, but those relationships were weaker in our study because the two perceptions

measures shared variance in the model due to a fairly strong relationship between the two.

Course characteristics were also important predictors in the model, particularly the course

format and diversity requirement measures. Interestingly, faculty who teach in classrooms at

auxiliary locations were much more likely to include diversity than their colleagues teaching

on campus, a result that deserves additional study.

Discussion and Implications

While students protest for their colleges and universities to become more inclusive of

diversity (Deruy, 2016; New, 2016; Wong & Green, 2016), our results suggest many faculty

members across the US are including diversity into several aspects of their courses. And,

although there is still room for improvement in terms of expanding instructor use of inclusive

Table 4
Diversity Inclusivity Regression Results (N = 4,468)

	Diverse Grounding[a]			Inclusive Learning[a]		
	B	SE of B	β	B	SE of B	β
Constant	-1.06	0.10	***	-1.19	0.11	***
Faculty Demographics						
Gender (Men = reference group)						
Women	0.12	0.03	0.06***	0.28	0.03	0.14***
Preferred not to respond	0.01	0.08	0.00	0.12	0.08	0.02
Sexual orientation (Straight = reference group)						
LGBQA	0.16	0.05	0.04**	0.15	0.06	0.04*
Preferred not to respond	0.04	0.06	0.01	-0.04	0.06	-0.01
Race/ethnicity (White = reference group)						
Asian, NH, Other PI	0.06	0.06	0.01	0.16	0.07	0.03*
Black, African American	0.32	0.06	0.07***	0.37	0.06	0.08***
Hispanic, Latino	0.23	0.06	0.05***	0.22	0.06	0.05***
Other race/ethnicity	0.21	0.06	0.05***	0.20	0.06	0.04**
Preferred not to respond	0.15	0.06	0.04*	0.19	0.07	0.05**
Doctorate earned	-0.01	0.03	-0.00	-0.09	0.04	-0.04*
Years teaching (in decades)	-0.02	0.01	-0.02	-0.03	0.01	-0.03
Faculty Appointment Characteristics						
Rank and employment status (part-time lecturer = reference group)						
Full-time lecturer	-0.08	0.05	-0.03	-0.06	0.05	-0.02
Assistant professor	-0.04	0.05	-0.02	0.04	0.05	0.02
Associate professor	-0.01	0.05	-0.00	0.01	0.05	0.00
Full professor	-0.07	0.05	-0.03	-0.06	0.05	-0.02
Course load	0.02	0.01	0.05***	0.03	0.01	0.07***
Disciplinary area (arts & humanities = reference group)						
Bio, ag, & nat resources	-0.54	0.05	-0.15***	-0.17	0.06	-0.05**
Phys, math, & comp sci	-0.82	0.04	-0.27***	-0.19	0.05	-0.06***
Social sciences	-0.01	0.04	-0.00	-0.09	0.05	-0.03
Business	-0.32	0.05	-0.09***	-0.10	0.07	-0.03
Comm, media, & PR	0.03	0.07	0.01	0.09	0.06	0.02
Education	-0.02	0.05	-0.01	0.28	0.07	0.07***
Engineering	-0.74	0.07	-0.15***	-0.13	0.06	-0.03
Health professions	-0.17	0.05	-0.05**	-0.19	0.06	-0.06***
Social service professions	0.02	0.07	0.00	-0.08	0.07	-0.02
Faculty Perceptions of Institutional Inclusiveness and Commitment to Diversity						
Inst curricular diversity	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.05**
Inst diversity commitment	0.33	0.02	0.25***	0.31	0.02	0.23***

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[a] Dependent variable standardized prior to entry into the model.

Table 4 (cont.)
Diversity Inclusivity Regression Results (N = 4,468)

	Diverse Grounding[a]			Inclusive Learning[a]		
	B	SE of B	β	B	SE of B	β
Course Characteristics						
Course level (other = reference group)						
Lower division course	-0.12	0.06	-0.06*	-0.22	0.06	-0.11***
Upper division course	0.01	0.06	0.00	-0.15	0.06	-0.07*
Course size (more than 50 students = reference group)						
20 students or less	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.13	0.04	0.06***
21 to 50 students	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.10	0.03	0.04**
Course format (Classroom instruction on campus = reference group)						
Classroom at aux location	0.50	0.11	0.06***	0.42	0.11	0.05***
Distance education	0.07	0.05	0.02	-0.04	0.05	-0.01
Combination	0.12	0.05	0.03**	0.18	0.05	0.05***
General ed requirement	0.16	0.03	0.08***	0.05	0.03	0.02
Diversity requirement	0.34	0.03	0.15***	0.21	0.03	0.09***
Multiple R	0.55			0.44		
R-squared	0.30			0.19		
Standard Error	0.84			0.90		
F	53.90***			28.67***		

$* p < 0.05$, $** p < 0.01$, $*** p < 0.001$

[a] Dependent variable standardized prior to entry into the model.

learning and diverse grounding, a majority of instructors report engaging in elements of both facets of diversity inclusivity. Our results validate Nelson Laird's model (2010, 2014) and his prior study (2011), as well as suggest that dramatic improvements in diversity inclusivity have not likely been made in the last decade. In addition, those instructors who are more likely to have experienced oppression due to gender identity, racial/ethnic identity, and sexual orientation are more likely to engage in these practices. Institutions should consider this as they hire lecturers, instructors, and tenure-track faculty members and should look for ways to reframe who "should" do this work so that all faculty both have the opportunity to learn skillful ways of including these practices, and feel the responsibility to do so.

Following this line of thought, our findings also indicate that faculty perception of institutional commitment to diversity is an important predictor of diversity inclusivity. Leaders at the institution and department level have the opportunity to influence the degree to which instructors incorporate diversity inclusivity into their courses, and future studies of the inclusion of diversity into any aspects of a course should account for this construct. Practically, faculty development efforts aimed at improving the inclusion of diversity in the curriculum may usefully work both on individual faculty practice and programs and initiatives aimed at raising an institution's commitment to diversity.

Our study also suggests a number of additional areas for future research. For example, although our measures capture the frequency of engagement in aspects of diversity inclusivity, we do not measure how skillfully instructors are wielding these tools. More work is certainly needed in this area. Further, we have not captured how students are perceiving these efforts by their faculty. Although faculty may believe they create a classroom environment that encourages the active participation of all students, all students in that room may not perceive the environment the same way.

Conclusion

As a follow-up to the study by Nelson Laird (2011), our current study validates the earlier results. Our findings suggest much work is being done by instructors to include diversity across the measures used in this study. While this continues to be encouraging, it was a bit disappointing that we did not find more evidence of an increased focus on diversity inclusivity in 2017 (the year the data for the current study were collected) than in 2007 (the year the original data were collected) given the amount diversity, equity, and inclusion have been in the news, a part of student unrest and demands, and a part of the discourse about and

emanating from higher education institutions. It is also disappointing, though not unexpected, that differences between instructors from traditionally marginalized/oppressed groups (women, LGBQA faculty, and faculty of color) and their counterparts continue to exist and are meaningful in size.

Importantly, the current study as well as Nelson Laird's (2011) original study suggest that the inclusion of diversity is driven by faculty identity and socialization, course type, and the context within which the course is taught. Much work is needed to continue to understand these factors and how they operate, as understanding them better may lead to practical approaches to improving both the quantity and quality of diversity inclusivity throughout the collegiate curriculum. In the interim, our results suggest that institutions serious about improving diversity inclusivity should place priority on it in hiring and faculty development, especially since evidence suggests doing so will improve undergraduate instruction in many important ways (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011) and improve outcomes for students (Chang, 2002; Denson, 2009; Denson & Chang, 2009; Nelson Laird, 2005; Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005).

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