See this page in the course material.

Learning Objectives

- Identify factors that define a diverse group

What Is Diversity?

There are few words in the English language that have more diverse interpretations than *diversity*. What does *diversity* mean? Better yet—what does diversity mean to *you*? And what does it mean to your best friend, your teacher, your parents, your religious leader, or the person standing behind you in a grocery store?

For each of us, diversity has unique meaning. Below are a few of the many definitions offered by college students at a 2010 conference on the topic of diversity. Which of these definitions rings out to you as most accurate and thoughtful? Which definitions could use some embellishment or clarification, in your opinion?

Diversity is a group of people who are different in the same place.

Diversity to me is the ability for differences to coexist together, with some type of mutual understanding or acceptance present. Acceptance of different viewpoints is key.

Tolerance of thought, ideas, people with differing viewpoints, backgrounds, and life experiences.

Anything that sets one individual apart from another.

People with different opinions, backgrounds (degrees and social experience), religious beliefs, political beliefs, sexual orientations, heritage, and life experience.

Dissimilar

Having a multitude of people from different backgrounds and cultures together in the same environment working for the same goals.

Difference in students' background, especially race and gender.

Differences in characteristics of humans.

Diversity is a satisfying mix of ideas, cultures, races, genders, economic statuses and other characteristics necessary for promoting growth and learning among a group.

Diversity is the immersion and comprehensive integration of various cultures, experiences, and people.

Heterogeneity brings about opportunities to share, learn and grow from the journeys of others. Without it, limitations arise and knowledge is gained in the absence of understanding.

Diversity is not tolerance for difference but inclusion of those who are not the majority. It should not be measured as a count or a fraction—that is somehow demeaning. Success at maintaining diversity would be when we no longer ask if we are diverse enough, because it has become the norm, not remarkable.[1]

Diversity means different things to different people, and it can be understood differently in different environments. In the context of your college experience, diversity generally refers to people around you who differ by race, culture, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, abilities, opinions, political views, and in other ways. When it comes to diversity on the college campus, we also think about how groups interact with one another, given their differences (even if they're just perceived differences.) How do diverse populations experience and explore their relationships?

"More and more organizations define diversity really broadly," says Eric Peterson, who works on diversity issues for the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). "Really, it's any way any group of people can differ significantly from another group of people—appearance, sexual orientation, veteran status, your level in the organization. It has moved far beyond the legally protected categories that we've always looked at."[2]

In the following video, students from Juniata College describe what diversity means to them and explain why it's an important aspect of their college experience.



See this interactive in the course material.

You can view the transcript for “Empowering Conversations: Diversity and Inclusion at Juniata College” here (opens in new window).

Surface Diversity and Deep Diversity

Surface diversity and deep diversity are categories of personal attributes—or differences in attributes—that people perceive to exist between people or groups of people.

Surface-level diversity refers to differences you can generally observe in others, like ethnicity, race, gender, age, culture, language, disability, etc. You can quickly and easily observe these features in a person. And people often do just that, making subtle judgments at the same time, which can lead to bias or discrimination. For example, if a teacher believes that older students perform better than younger students, she may give slightly higher grades to the older students than the younger students. This bias is based on perception of the attribute of age, which is surface-level diversity.

Deep-level diversity, on the other hand, reflects differences that are less visible, like personality, attitude, beliefs, and values. These attributes are generally communicated verbally and nonverbally, so they are not easily noticeable or measurable. You may not detect deep-level diversity in a classmate, for example, until you get to know him or her, at which point you may find that you are either comfortable with these deeper character levels, or perhaps not. But once you gain this deeper level of awareness, you may focus less on surface diversity. For example: At the beginning of a term, a classmate belonging to a minority ethnic group, whose native language is not English (surface diversity), may be treated differently by fellow classmates in another ethnic group. But as the term gets under way, classmates begin discovering the person’s values and beliefs (deep-level diversity), which they find they are comfortable with. The surface-level attributes of language and perhaps skin color become more “transparent” (less noticeable) as comfort is gained with deep-level attributes.

The following video is a quick summary of the differences between surface-level and deep-level

diversity.



See this interactive in the course material.

You can view the transcript for “Surface Level vs. Deep Level Diversity” here (opens in new window).

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1. https://sph.unc.edu/files/2013/07/define_diversity.pdf ↵
2. http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122327104 ↵

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