

3 Year Social Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Action Plan: Executive Summary

The JEDI Committee of Niagara County Community College (NCCC) developed this Action Plan in order to create an environment that is not only welcoming to all, but impactful to all who grace its campuses. The creation of an educational space that champions the inclusive practices that make all learners feel as though they are an integral part of the learning process, will ultimately succeed in its mission of providing, “flexible teaching and learning environments dedicated to educational excellence and committed to our core values of student centeredness, accessibility, comprehensiveness, collegiality, community partnership, and lifelong learning.” As per the NCCC Mission.

While this is the Mission of NCCC as a whole, the Mission of the JEDI Committee specifies that we will: *ensure that underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations will be recognized and connected to the NCCC community. Through intentionally designed strategies, academic offerings, policies, and practices, the College will work to empower these groups toward successful outcomes. The (JEDI) Committee supports the College in building a diverse and inclusive space where historically marginalized populations are valued.*

In addition, the *25-point Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan* created by SUNY in 2021, explicitly states that:

Comprehensive strategic diversity plans be developed for campuses and SUNY’s administrative headquarters. Campus plans would address student recruitment, retention, and completion strategies; administrative, faculty, and staff recruitment and retention strategies; and include an evaluation/assessment component.

The good work of the JEDI Action Plan must be seen as the work of every section of our institution. In the words of President Biden on his first day in office January 20, 2021, on signing the Executive Order on Racial Equity: “We need to open the promise of America to every American. And that means we need to make the issue of racial equity not just an issue for any one department of government; it has to be the business of the whole of government.” We believe NCCC would do well to emulate the spirit of this statement, namely to ensure that the whole college makes Social Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion everyone’s business.

For our purposes, and the pursuits of this document, it would make sense here to clarify the central terms at the heart of the JEDI Principles: Social Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Since SUNY does not explicitly state definitions in its *25-Point Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan*, we have chosen instead to express these terms in a manner considered in deep alignment with the aims and intentions of this JEDI Action Plan. These definitions are elucidated here by NCCC Chief Diversity and Equity Officer, John D Strong:

Social Justice: a communal effort dedicated to creating and sustaining a fair and equal community in which each everyone is valued and affirmed. It encompasses efforts to end systemic injustice and racism and to stop, to reboot, or to overhaul all systems that devalue the dignity and humanity of any person on our campuses. It recognizes that the legacy of past injustices remains all around us and will persist if not intentionally interrupted so, therefore, promotes efforts to empower individual and communal action in support of restorative justice and the full implementation of human and civil rights.

Equity: promoting justice, impartiality and fairness within the procedures, processes, practices and distribution of resources by our institution. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society and an intentionality that recognizes equity as the *process*, and equality as the *result*. “Equitable access” refers to not only resources, but success by all measurements.

Diversity: is expressed in myriad forms, including age, race, creed, caste, color, culture, ethnicity, national origin, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, military status, marital status, familial status, socioeconomic status, (dis)ability status, neural diversity, language, religious commitments, or political perspective. When applied to an educational organization, defining diversity should include philosophical diversity, cultural diversity, and experiential diversity in order to better serve a diverse student body and to continually refresh the environment.

Inclusion: is an outcome to ensure those that are from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed and celebrated. Inclusion outcomes are met when you, your program, and your institution are truly inviting to all members of your community. Inclusion identifies the degree to which diverse individuals are able to participate intentionally, meaningfully, and confidently in the decision-making processes and development opportunities within the NCCC family.

Belonging: incorporates diversity, equity, and inclusion in an equal proportion to balance the environment where it lives. It is embodied by a community that engages the full potential of the individual, where innovation thrives and all views, beliefs, and values are integrated into the daily innerworkings of the organization. Belonging without diversity leads to oversaturation of similarity, homogeneous culture, and simplified points of view. Belonging without equity leads to constantly and consistently recognizing and redistributing power. Belonging without inclusion leads to cultural assimilation, resulting in disengagement and low retention.

*These definitions were informed by: <https://medium.com/@krysburnette/its-2019-and-we-are-still-talking-about-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-dd00c9a66113> AND <https://dei.extension.org/> AND <https://diversity.umich.edu/about/defining-dei/> AND <https://research.utoronto.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/equity-diversity-inclusion> AND <https://www.ccsu.edu/johnlewisinstitute/terminology.html>

Finally, the Equity Literacy Institute has identified in its document *Basic Principles of Equity Literacy* that, “*(a)n important aspect of equity literacy is its insistence on maximizing the integrity of transformative equity practice. We must avoid being lulled by popular “diversity” approaches and frameworks that pose no threat to inequity—that sometimes are popular because they are no real threat to inequity.*” In other words, this JEDI Action Plan has the distinct purpose of disrupting the previous status quo at NCCC, and it should be the intention of all who interact with it to pursue this end.

In light of this, the JEDI Action Plan for 2022 - 2025 and those contributing to it seek to

- I) Identify those policies and practices within our environment that may impede the progress of those whom we would endeavor to educate;
- II) Augment and improve those policies and practices with explicit intention and attention to social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, so that all those who honor us with their hope and initiative may have an equitable and inclusive path to prosperity;
- III) Propose new policies that will maintain the resulting positive paradigm shifts within our educational setting, but also identify early-warning systems that may hint at relapse into old modes of thinking and acting that have disadvantaged stakeholders in the past.

Steps to the JEDI Action Plan Process

- Literature review (included the review of a UNC Special Report on [Governance, Academic Freedom & Systemic Racism](#); Equity Literacy Institute’s [Basic Principles for Equity Literacy](#); Institute for Higher Education Policy’s [Opening the Promise: The Five Principles of Equitable Policymaking](#); Student Experience Project’s [Increasing Equity in College Student Experience: Findings from a National Collaborative](#); and Strategic Action Plans from [NADOHE](#), [US DOE](#), [UC Berkley](#), [U Michigan](#), [SUNY ESF](#), [SUNY Orange](#), [SUNY Oswego](#), [SUNY TCCC](#); and of course the [SUNY ODEI 25-Point Action Plan](#))
- Review of the past SUNY Climate Survey data in collaboration w/ the JEDI Committee
- Connect with the tenets of the new NCCC Strategic Plan as well as the recent HR Action Plan

Identification of Obstructions to JEDI principles at NCCC

Goal Statement: Identify those policies and practices within our environment that may impede the progress of those whom we would endeavor to educate. Interrupt behaviors that lead to disenfranchisement and to perceived opacity, in order to facilitate growth and progress leading to improved student success and employee satisfaction.

1. Increase Diversity in Staff Hiring

Enact an intentional policy in the ESPA and TSPA (as per the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*, recommendation E4 & E6) to hire community members of color in order to counteract the, "Racial diversity (which) is lacking within all campus employment sectors, including executive, managerial, non-faculty professional, service/maintenance, secretarial/clerical, technical/paraprofessional and other positions."

a. Additionally, part-time or adjunct hiring is not intentionally targeted toward diversifying the campus community. NCCC has "hired from within" historically, and while this practice may reduce time and cost to hire, shorten onboarding times, and potentially strengthen employee engagement, it ultimately and persistently diminishes the ongoing efforts to diversify NCCC. Inaction in this practice will ultimately undermine PRODiG efforts, present a visage of cronyism and homogeneity, and continue NCCC on its path divergent from the changing face of the USA.

2. Review Literature and Data to Identify Structural Racism Within the NCCC Space

Review NCCC policies, procedures, exit survey information, and climate survey information; connect proposed national deficits to possible local occurrences, etc.), as per the Introduction in the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*, "To that end, Chancellor Malatras directed that the plan examines racial disparities within SUNY and seeks to understand how these disparities impact the experiences of students, faculty, staff, and communities, and then provide solutions to the problems."

Policy & Practice Improvement Recommendations

Goal Statement: Augment and improve those policies and practices with explicit intention and attention to social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, so that all those who honor us with their hope and initiative may have an equitable and inclusive path to prosperity.

1. Construct an internal questionnaire

Create a standardized questionnaire for all NCCC stakeholders that provides data that brings to light perceptions of belonging and relative worth to the institution (similar to the format of Exit Surveys) in order to connect with the principles shared in *Institute for Higher Education Policy's Opening the Promise: The Five Principles of Equitable Policymaking*, "(e)nsure the final policy or program promotes the collection and use of quality postsecondary data. In addition to data-informed steps within the process, policies themselves should include disaggregated data collection to illuminate impact and inform future policy improvements.")

2. Intentionally targeted minority recruiting of underrepresented populations

Execute within Niagara county and beyond (partially identified in the current *NCCC Strategic Plan* as well as the *SUNY PRODiG* initiative, and many more sources), in an attempt to intentionally diversify the NCCC community and increase a sense of belonging amongst diverse populations.

3. Expanding Community Connections

Intentionally expanding community connections; to create harmony and inclusion in the areas surrounding NCCC (& NFCI), we need to partner with local businesses, secondary education, municipal organizations, and private citizen-led initiatives in the spirit of inclusivity. We also need to facilitate cross-cultural and cross-group interaction and dialogue through intentional programming (as per the Introduction of the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*, community partners who connect with this initiative will serve, "notice to SUNY students and the broader community that in patronizing these businesses, they can expect to be treated with welcome and respect, consistent with SUNY's values.")

4. Creating and maintaining the SUNY DEIS Gen Ed Offerings

Establish norms in this area, identify sections, ensure rigor and fidelity to stated SUNY expectations, provide professional development and collegial support (as per the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*, "The Chancellor requested that the plan at least include faculty-driven curriculum development toward racial equity")

5. Assist historically underrepresented minorities (URM) students in financial shortfalls

Intentionally assist URM via the Smart Start Scholarships early in their time at NCCC, as well as an ongoing basis as determined by need and association with historical underperformance based on ethnicity or other diversity factor (as per *Institute for Higher Education Policy's Opening the Promise: The Five Principles of Equitable Policymaking*, "(w)here and how government and higher education institutions invest

resources reflect which groups they prioritize. Equitable investments focus on communities that have been historically underrepresented and marginalized. These investments seek to dismantle systemic oppression and build sustainability.”)

6. Facilitate college-wide buy-in to the JEDI principles

Implement via targeted programming for students, faculty, staff, and administrators (Diversity Dialogues, SUNY programming, and more). Ensure that JEDI principles are communicated through all NCCC correspondence and part of the upcoming rebranding of the institution. Connect “change agents” from the JEDI Committee to committees across the campus (faculty, student, and College-wide bodies) facilitate intergroup dialogue and co-participation (as per the *Equity Literacy Institute’s Basic Principles for Equity Literacy*, “The Prioritization Principle: In order to achieve equity, we must prioritize the interests of the students and families whose interests historically have not been prioritized. Every policy, practice, and program decision should be considered through the question, “What impact is this going to have on the most marginalized students and families? How are we prioritizing their interests?”)

7. Provide Support for Inclusivity in Instruction

Intentionally support inclusivity in instruction institution-wide, by providing professional development to Faculty that are involved in the DEIS Gen Ed, as well as to those who are not, but still wish to provide greater access and equity to their students in the educational in order to, “decrease racial equity gaps and increase racial literacy.” (as per the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*, recommendations Part C)

8. Formalize the review of JEDI offerings

Intentionally address within the NCCC community (research how this process is completed on other campuses; tailor the process to meet our data needs)

9. Designate physical space to clubs and offices

Select areas that demonstrate the intentional delegation of valued space related to the pursuit of JEDI principles (consider the planned space in G-building and how best to populate it, and organize it as a supportive space); reference *Increasing Equity in College Student Experience: Findings from a National Collaborative*

10. Ensure inclusion, equity, and accessibility at all campus events by policy

Connect with shared governance and agree upon this policy and adopt it for all institutional settings – professional development, multi-media, webinars, seminars, presentations, etc. (as per the Student Experience Project’s Increasing Equity in College Student Experience: Findings from a National Collaborative, “Just as professional development for faculty helps them improve students’ experiences in the classroom, administrators need opportunities to develop their leadership skills in centering and promoting equitable experiences in the domains where they can affect change.”)

11. Provide Mentorship for all parties

Intentionally identify and execute a plan to enhance the sense of belonging across NCCC. Identify, train, and re-infuse mentors in all corners of the College (as per Recommendations B1, B4 & E1 in the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*)

12. PRODiG Implementation

Create a collaboration between faculty and the administrative parties responsible for enacting the *SUNY PRODiG* policies on the NCCC campus. Navigate the process of using PRODiG funding to set-up a welcoming environment for URM faculty and women in STEM positions. Create a fertile recruitment and search process to attract and hire these populations. Maintain a supportive and inclusive environment to retain these worthwhile members

Maintenance and Early Detection Recommendations

Goal Statement: Propose new policies that will maintain the resulting positive paradigm shifts within our educational setting, but also identify early-warning systems that may hint at relapse into old modes of thinking and acting that have disadvantaged stakeholders in the past.

- 1. Systematize the data reporting of intergroup disparities**

Create annual tracking of grad rates, retention rates, transfer rates, etc. related to race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability status to be disseminated and utilized across the College for the purpose of action planning (as per the Introduction of the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*, "The Chancellor requested that the plan at least include an assessment of racial equity gaps")

- 2. Systematize the data reporting of searches and new hires**

Intentionally identify, record, disseminate, and navigate hiring data from all corners of the College. Recognize who was represented in the search pools, intergroup percentages, comparative analysis, and more (as per Recommendation B1 in the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*)

- 3. Systematize the data reporting of the NCCC population vs Niagara County/NYS**

Identify gaps in campus population compared to the county and the state; collaborate with the Institutional Research Committee for this and other initiatives (as per the *Student Experience Project's Increasing Equity in College Student Experience: Findings from a National Collaborative*, "Disparities in outcomes by demographic group often indicate disparities in student experience by group membership, so having these data can inform leaders where improvement is needed and prompt change.")

- 4. SUNY-sponsored annual climate surveys**

SUNY has alluded to the creation and dissemination of a new survey geared at collecting "belonging" data from SUNY institutions. The task here will be to facilitate the collection of this data and utilize it to improve programming and other germane NCCC pieces (policy, practice, etc.)

- 5. Revisit the Mission, Vision, and Core Values of the JEDI Committee**

Place this initiative in a regular cycle in order to ensure the most contemporary practices and principles are still reflected within it (compare and contrast to contemporary literature and data)

- 6. Formally incentivize inclusion practices campus wide**

Create multiple means of inclusive practices at all levels of the College (addition of inclusion principles within the administrative and faculty assessments - as per the Introduction to the *SUNY 25-point DEI Action Plan*; inclusion in the promotion and tenure process, as well as staff assessment/review, and more)

7. Identify EDI offerings as a charitable stream within the Foundation

Create an account on behalf of JEDI offerings so that community contributors can intentionally support the challenges faced by individuals who have disparate outcomes arising from diverse and underfunded backgrounds

Anticipated Outcomes of the JEDI Action Plan

- All members of the NCCC community report a strong sense of belonging and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully navigate and lead in a diverse world
- Intergroup disparities in the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates of undergraduate students are diminished and trend towards eradication
- Staff at all levels, including the executive and management levels, reflect the rich diversity of the national and local talent pools
- The faculty hiring and retention rates reflect the composition of the availability pools of exceptional talent in the fields nationally and locally
- The campus devotes the leadership and resources to enhance and sustain social justice, equity, inclusion and diversity at NCCC in order to realize an environment that fosters belonging for all