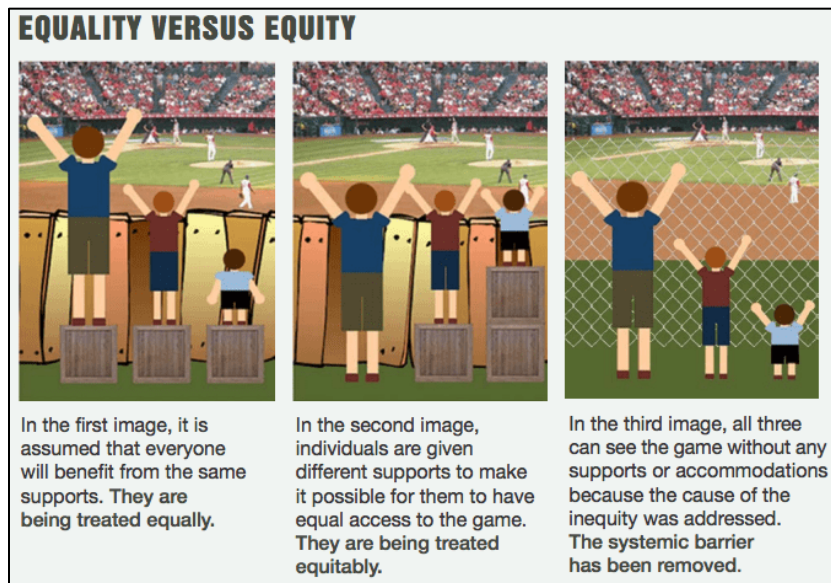


Those of us serving on NACRAO’s **Diversity and Inclusion Committee** will be spending time this year discussing the daily realities of what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean in higher education and our individual departments and offices. When you ask someone to define “diversity” you will likely get as many different answers as the number of people you ask. Diversity definitely has many components and it may be delineated very specifically by your school, depending on your mission and vision. That definition can determine how your institution approaches its students, families, employees, and community. Your school may be lucky enough to have a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion department; smaller schools may only have a committee or taskforce with or without clear goals and direction as to how they fit within the organization’s culture. One of our goals as a committee is to provide material generating thought and discussion among our members that results in less fear and more routine recognition of human equity and inclusion of all aspects of our diverse populations.



It is important to understand that while there may be many organizational strategies in place that exist toward a goal of *equality*, the bigger question to consider is whether your institution’s structure, philosophy, procedure, or policy truly strives for *equity* as well as removing barriers to access and success.



One of the most sensitive components of diversity centers around race and how to raise awareness of systemic racism and develop anti-racist policies and environments. There are innumerable articles and blogposts online providing insights on diversity in general, but it’s difficult to find suggestions to magically overcome the challenges with talking about race. Several sources underscored the need to be open-minded, respectful, and to keep emotions in-check; but nothing about this conversation is easy, especially in highly politically charged contexts; see these recent headlines, for instance:

- [Nebraska Governor Criticizes University Diversity Initiative](#)
- [Nebraska Lawmakers Call for Resignation of UNL Chancellor](#)

One great resource for beginning our discussions is Emmanuel Acho. He is the creator, host, and producer of the web series *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*—also the title of his book—which he uses as a vehicle to answer questions about racism and to drive open and uncomfortable dialogue. A 2020 *Today Show* segment called *How to have difficult conversations about race* featured American professor, lecturer, author, and podcast host Brené Brown. She described the need to be courageous when talking about our differences and explained that courage requires being vulnerable. Vulnerability means feeling emotionally exposed, feeling uncertain, or feeling at risk, none of which is easy. So instead of looking for an easy fix, we need to step outside our comfort zone to work on finding the courage to be vulnerable and have those difficult conversations to help understand other points of view. Only in this way can we learn and grow.

It is our hope that this committee can start open and honest conversations within our association about how we can talk about race and racism, as well as other aspects of diversity we deal with on our campuses. I understand that my language here might not be correct, but I am willing to be vulnerable by starting the discussion and welcome others' thoughts, suggestions, corrections, comments, and resources. It's only when we understand how better to talk about diversity and be comfortable with the vulnerability of it, that we can fully embrace how best to ensure the second part of our committee's role, inclusivity.

Submitted by Susan Stephenson for NACRAO's Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Recommended sources:

Acho, Emmanuel (2020, June 3). *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man — Episode 1*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8jUA7JBkF4>

Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, University of Missouri (n.d.). *Tips for Talking about Race at Mizzou* <https://diversity.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/talk-about-race.pdf>

PBS NewsHour (2018, May 15). *Talking about race is hard. Here's why it's worth it*. <https://www.pbs.org/video/race-matters-1526417218/>

Today Show (2020, September 11). *Brené Brown: How to have difficult conversations about race*. <https://www.today.com/video/bene-brown-how-to-have-difficult-conversations-about-race-91526213661>

