









Climate Case Study #6 - Diversity and Excellence

How to foster respect and inclusion in your unit when...

...in a faculty meeting discussion about increasing the diversity of the faculty, just prior to the launch of a search, a faculty member says, “But we have to ensure we are also maintaining excellence in our faculty.” After this comment, the enthusiasm in the room noticeably diminishes and the discussion ends.

The Climate Case Studies are organized around RISE’s [Eight Levers to Shift Climate for Respect and Inclusion](#) framework. RISE uses the eight levers above to think about the ways in which more inclusive, respectful, and civil climates might be intentionally cultivated in the higher education workplace context.

LEVER	APPROACH	WHAT IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE
<div></div> <div>ENVIRONMENT</div>	Use the ENVIRONMENT to affirm the vital role that diversity plays in shaping the intellectual life of your discipline.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post statements of inclusive excellence and a commitment to anti-racism. In meeting spaces post these so they are readily accessible during deliberations.• Display images of scholars who hold underrepresented identities in your discipline. Name awards after them. Invite them to present their work to your community. Such actions disrupt assumptions that only people with majoritized identities make valuable contributions to scholarship within your field.
<div></div> <div>EXPECTATIONS</div>	Set EXPECTATIONS for conversations about faculty recruitment and retention. Point out when those expectations are not met.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share goals and boundaries for the discussion prior to the meeting so that community members can prepare appropriately. Present “ground rules” for how you expect faculty members to engage with one another that reflect the challenges and harm some people may face in the conversation.• Point out predictable problematic responses in conversations of this kind and take them off the table explicitly and proactively.
<div></div> <div>INTERACTIONS</div>	Create thoughtful INTERACTIONS that help to mitigate the impact of such a comment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When a community member contravenes expectations, name what has occurred and its impact. For example, <i>“Whether you intend to or not, your comment implies that scholars who hold minoritized identities are less capable of excellence. That assertion makes me uncomfortable, and if I’m reading the room correctly it’s made other uncomfortable as well.”</i>• Invite the faculty member who made the chilling comment to clarify their position: <i>“It sounds like you’re saying that faculty members who hold majoritized identities are more likely to be excellent than faculty who hold minoritized identities. Is that what you’re saying? If so, could you say more about what you mean?”</i>• Consider inviting the faculty member to meet with you one on one to help them understand why their statement was harmful.
<div></div> <div>LANGUAGE</div>	Use LANGUAGE to name problems and shift the conversation. Think carefully about the ways faculty members might have different understandings of “loaded” words and concepts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work to create shared understanding of key terms, informed by subject matter experts. There are fantastic scholars who are specialists in DEI work (at U-M!).• Foreground the problematic way “diversity” is positioned rhetorically in opposition to “excellence.” For example, <i>“Rather than suggesting, as many people do, that diversity and excellence are mutually exclusive, we have to recognize that without diversity we will never truly be excellent.”</i>• Highlight that people rarely interject about “maintaining excellence” when candidates from overrepresented and/or dominant groups are being discussed. For example, <i>“It’s interesting that people seem to express concerns about excellence primarily when we are discussing diversifying our faculty. The excellence of BIPOC scholars should not need to be defended or explained anymore than it is for their white counterparts.”</i>
<div></div> <div>MODELING</div>	MODEL a commitment to equitable faculty recruitment and retention practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend a STRIDE Faculty Recruitment Workshop. Encourage others to attend as well. Then arrange a discussion of strategies to be incorporated into your unit’s search practices.• Think carefully about how “excellence” has historically been characterized in your discipline/department.• Model a more robust and expansive understanding of excellence by speaking to other ways excellence can present itself.
<div></div> <div>OPPORTUNITIES</div>	Consider ways this experience can be an OPPORTUNITY to interrogate assumptions about diversity, to deepen your community’s understanding of DEI, and to revisit your unit’s hiring practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share data about common drivers of hiring disparity and/or how the excellence narrative limits faculty diversity.• Note how failing to consider a diverse slate of candidates will artificially restrict the opportunities for the department to grow and improve. Highlight ways the department has missed out on opportunities because of insufficient attention to diversity.
<div></div> <div>ROUTINES & STRUCTURES</div>	Create ROUTINES & STRUCTURES to be attentive to equity in hiring processes and discussions, and anticipate resistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a working group to review existing hiring practices and to recommend research-based changes to those practices.• Gather individual viewpoints from a wide variety of faculty members before discussing potentially contentious issues in a large group setting. This will help you anticipate challenges and identify allies you can activate if necessary.
<div></div> <div>TIME</div>	Ensure there is adequate TIME to have meaningful discussions about diversity and excellence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signal the importance of the topic by devoting an entire meeting to its consideration.• Reactivate key takeaways from this conversation over time to cement learning and strengthen community values.• Take the time you need to prepare for challenging conversations with your faculty colleagues.

Additional Resources:

- [Action Plan for Inclusive Excellence Toolkit](#) (Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University)
- [Making Excellence Inclusive: A Framework for Embedding Diversity and Inclusion into Colleges and Universities’ Academic Excellence Mission](#) (Clayton-Pedersen, O’Neill, McTighe Musil for the Association of American Colleges and Universities)
- RISE Committee. (2021, November). *Climate Case Study #4: Interrupting a Bad Actor*. University of Michigan ADVANCE Program.

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