Exploring the Status of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on the Website and Policy Documents of a Pharmacy Program: A Case Study

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Exploring the Status of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on the Website and Policy Documents of a Pharmacy Program: A Case Study

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) were presented in a School of Pharmacy’s website and policy documents.

Method: A deductive content analysis was undertaken, employing an a priori coding scheme derived from existing literature. Each researcher independently conducted coding and categorization, resolving queries through consensus within the entire coding group to ensure accuracy and reproducibility.

Results: A total of 168 DEI codes, with 61 on websites and 107 in policy documents, were identified. Most common were diversity codes (55%), followed by equity (27%) and inclusion (18%). Diversity codes covered age, gender, race, religion, and cultural competency. Equity codes included anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, harassment policies, and access to resources. Inclusion codes related to space accessibility, program access, student participation, and community integration. No specific plans for targeted recruitment were found in policy documents. Additionally, no dedicated DEI sections were observed on websites or in institutional or program-level documents. DEI coverage on course syllabi was limited.

Discussion: This study delves into the current state of DEI within the school, offering insights crucial for refining DEI efforts. Analysis of websites and policy documents identified common citations related to DEI, particularly diversity codes followed by equity and inclusion. These insights will help DEI leaders to develop initiatives addressing the identified gaps and fostering inclusivity aligned with the institution’s mission. Furthermore, the study provides valuable insights for other institutions researching DEI inclusion at both institutional and programmatic levels.

Keywords: Pharmacy education, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Policy documents, Website

1. Introduction

Many higher education institutions have incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into their core missions and strategic plans [1–3]. A conventional definition of diversity includes aspects such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, disability and may extend to considerations like religion, education, and family/marital status [4,5]. Equity is the principle of fairness and justice in ensuring everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources, regardless of their individual differences [6,7]. It emphasizes respecting diverse needs, abilities, and characteristics while eliminating discrimination in the learning environment [8,9]. Inclusion facilitates an environment where students from diverse backgrounds engage in open dialogues, learn from one another’s experiences, and prepare for culturally competent learning environment [10,11].

There is an increasing call for diversity and inclusion initiatives in healthcare education [2,12,13]. Within its operational framework, the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) underscores the value of diversity, aiming to promote
the growth of a diverse community of pharmacists [13]. There is a handful of literature on the examination of DEI in teaching and learning practices in the schools and colleges of pharmacy [10,11,14].

Higher education institutions utilize their official websites as a platform to communicate their mission, vision, and values, conveying these aspects to the public and prospective students. Additionally, institutions emphasize the benefits of fostering diversity and inclusivity by integrating DEI statements across websites, organizational documents, policies, as well as mission and vision statements [15–17]. Medical education communities are urging institutions to thoroughly review their policies and educational materials to ensure the presence of diversity, equity, and inclusion languages [18,19].

The American University of Health Sciences (AUHS) is a Christian-based minority-serving institution with a mission to welcome students from diverse backgrounds. To strengthen its DEI initiatives, the School of Pharmacy (SOP) is currently exploring the development of formal DEI programs. The study aims to explore the current state of DEI through a comprehensive review of SOP program policies, procedural documents, and the program website. This research is expected to provide valuable insights into the school’s commitment and actions in promoting DEI.

2. Method

The research protocol involved a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the University and pharmacy program websites and several key institutional and program policy documents, including the faculty handbook, student handbook, program strategic plan, financial aid manual, student recruitment brochure, and faculty recruitment advertisements. Additionally, 58 PharmD course syllabi were also included for content analysis.

The content analysis employed a deductive approach, as described previously [14,15,20,21]. The investigators adopted the definitions of DEI elements and developed an a priori coding scheme based on existing literature [1,6,22]. The initial coding scheme, developed by the principal investigator (PI), underwent subsequent refinement by the team through an iterative process, ensuring coding accuracy, reproducibility, and trustworthiness. The content analysis first involved the investigators reading and coding the web content, policy documents, and the course syllabi. Three investigators independently extracted and recorded a section or a paragraph that specifically addressed DEI (the units of analysis) in an Excel file with an appropriate identifier. The next step of the analysis involved open coding of the units of analysis, where categorical themes were identified through reading and making notes on the texts. For instance, the investigators recorded the frequency and specific contextual association of terms such as equity, diversity, or inclusion whenever mentioned. Each researcher conducted their coding and categorization independently.

Coders consulted the entire coding group to achieve consensus on applying the coding scheme to specific units of analysis, ensuring accuracy and reproducibility. Once the codes were finalized, investigators independently grouped codes to generate a list of potential categories. During subsequent meetings of the investigators, final categories and overall themes were developed. Descriptive statistics were reported for the general characteristics of the documents. The university institutional review board determined this study was not human subject research.

3. Results

The analysis of the website and policy documents revealed 168 DEI codes, comprising 61 from the website and 107 within the policy documents. The diversity codes were the most common (55%), followed by equity (27%) and inclusion (18%). In the websites, the University Vision and Mission statements, SOP Vision and Mission Statements, and Meet the Dean sections had the highest number of citations of diversity. The equity and inclusion elements were cited in sections about clubs and organizations, student activities and services, and campus environment and safety sections. The Faculty Handbook, Student Handbook, and SOP Strategic Plan addressed DEI across all three dimensions.

Figure 1 demonstrates the codes related to the contexts of the DEI statements. Diversity contexts were identified on statements on the website and policy documents capturing the representation of different demographic groups of faculty, students, or staff, encompassing factors such as age, gender, race, religion, cultural competence, and social status. On the other hand, the identified codes of equity are contextualized as fairness and justice for all, addressing anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, as well as the policies and resources that ensure these principles. Inclusion pertains to the accessibility of spaces and programs, student participation, and integrating of different communities and cultures. Inclusion codes underscore the efforts to make all individuals, including those with disabilities, feel integrated and part of the educational and
social fabric. Some representative examples of statements about diversity, equity, and inclusion across the websites and policy documents are shown in Table 1.

The document analysis revealed that no DEI codes or specific plans for targeted recruitment were identified in faculty hiring advertisements and student recruitment materials. In addition, the analysis showed a lack of dedicated sections pertaining to DEI on websites or in any institutional or program-level formal documents. The institution has formed a DEI Committee with SOP representatives. A draft of DEI policy was obtained from the DEI Committee, which has yet to be formally approved.
Our investigation revealed that all course syllabi contain statements related to “equity” and inclusiveness” in the context of disability accommodation and teaching and assessment strategies. Two courses were identified with specific DEI-related course content outlines. The Professional Communication course included a 3-h session on “concepts of culture, race, ethnicity, and health literacy”. In the Psychosocial Aspects of Healthcare course, the DEI topics include cultural competence, race and ethnicity, health disparities, cross-cultural communication, religion and spirituality in pharmacy practice, aging patients, patients with disabilities, and sexual orientation.

4. Discussion

It is a common practice that academic program websites emerge as crucial in attracting diverse faculty, staff, and students [23,24]. While targeting a broad audience, websites typically highlight the advantages for students, particularly by featuring a racially and ethnically diverse student body [25,26]. Additionally, policy documents play a key role in formally advancing and influencing equity, diversity, and inclusion [27]. In the current study, citations regarding DEI were present both on websites and policy documents. Explored diversity contexts included age, gender, race, color, ethnicity, religion, cultural competence, representations, underprivileged or underserved groups, minorities, patients, students, faculty and staff, along with the broader community. Within these contexts, 91 distinct codes were identified, showcasing the multifaceted and complex landscape of diversity. Equity follows 42 codes, underscoring its focus on achieving fairness and justice for all by addressing anti-discrimination, equal opportunity, and related policies. Inclusion, with 33 codes, highlights the importance of creating inclusive environments where all individuals, including those with disabilities, feel integrated and valued. Our analysis has not found a dedicated DEI section on the website or any documents outlining DEI goals at the institutional or program levels. Furthermore, the recruitment advertisement lacked indications of equal opportunity or targeted recruitment, highlighting a gap in DEI communication. These findings emphasize the need to address potential gaps in the DEI efforts.

In pharmacy education, existing literature reports the inclusion of DEI elements, including social identities within patient diversity into curriculum through case presentations, integration of health disparities and cultural competency training, and emphasis on gender in patient cases [14,28,29]. Several other studies identified pharmacy students’ knowledge gaps in unconscious bias, particularly related to race, and deficiencies extend to providing specific care for transgender patients [11,30,31]. We have reviewed PharmD course syllabi to identify any explicit DEI elements. Every course syllabus incorporated statements about “equity” and “inclusiveness,” particularly related to disability accommodation. Two courses included DEI topics such as cultural competence, health disparities, intercultural communication, religion in patient care, aging needs, disabilities, and sexual orientation diversity. However, to better understand the extent of DEI coverage across the AUHS SOP curriculum, further study involving a thorough examination of curriculum materials is warranted.

5. Conclusion

The website and policy documents analysis identified citations related to DEI, with diversity codes
being most common, followed by equity and inclusivity. These insights will help DEI leaders develop initiatives addressing the identified gaps and fostering inclusivity aligned with the institution's mission. Moreover, the study findings offer valuable perspectives for other institutions researching DEI inclusion at institutional and programmatic levels.

Ethics approval

The university institutional review board determined this study was not human subject research.

Other disclosure

None.

Conflicts of interest

No conflict of interest, financial or other, exists.

References