

Cultural Competence, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging (DEIB)

By Dr. M. Kumar

**Please keep in mind that language evolves, and terms and definitions may change, so it is important to look up terminology in AP style references regularly and stay updated.*

By now, many of you may have heard the terms mentioned in the title, but what do they mean, and how do these terms relate to life in general?

Diversity means variety and can be found in nature, perspectives, food, and fashion, for example. When diversity is mentioned as it relates to people directly, the term can be used to refer to race, ethnicity, and additional areas, including (but not limited to) class, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, values, political beliefs, physical ability, and national origin, to name a few. Diversity can also be found in culture, which can help shape one's identity and sense of belonging.

What is **culture**? Several definitions from many sources are available for review. For the purpose of understanding terms, such as dominant culture and non-dominant cultures, here is one definition of culture: "Culture is the sum total of experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests represented by the diversity of students and adults in our schools. While culture is often defined and perceived by schools as the celebration of important people, religions, traditions, and holidays, as well as an appreciation of the customs of different groups, it is also more than that. Culture is as much, or as little, as the everyday experiences, people, events, smells, sounds, and habits of behavior that characterize students' and educators' lives" ([National Education Association](#)). **Cultural competence** is generally defined as "the ability to understand, appreciate and interact with people from cultures or belief systems different from one's own" ([American Psychological Association](#)). It is important to understand one's own culture as well, as that is a major lens that can shape one's views of the world and of various cultures.

What is **dominant culture**, then? Dominant culture is the culture that is well-established by members of that culture and often regarded as the norm or the standard in a society. "Whereas traditional societies can be characterized by a high consistency of cultural traits and customs, modern societies are often a conglomeration of different, often competing, cultures and subcultures. In such a situation of diversity, a dominant culture is one that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving on a subordinate culture or cultures. This may be achieved through legal or political suppression of other sets of values and patterns of behaviour, or by monopolizing the media of communication" ([from encyclopedia.com](#)). Note: Sometimes, dominant culture is also unintentionally imposed on members of non-dominant (marginalized) groups.

Personal Exercise/Questions to Ponder: What is the dominant culture of the society in which you live? What is the dominant culture at your university or where you work?

Being part of the dominant culture can mean having certain privileges. In the simplest of terms, **privilege** means advantage. It is common for people to perhaps not be aware of their privileges and the benefits that come with them. In some ways, one might even be a part of the dominant culture and not realize it. For example, if a person does not have a physical disability that requires the use of a wheelchair, this person may not think about a building's wheelchair accessibility. Not having to think about this may be considered a privilege that a person has. This does not mean that this person does not have to think about other things; it just means that this is one thing that perhaps does not cross the person's mind.

Personal Exercise/Question to Ponder: What are some things you may not have to think about that someone of a non-dominant cultural group might on a regular basis? (You can review the definition of diversity to help you think further about this if you get stuck.)

Equality is treating everyone the same as though their experiences are all the same. This is not to be confused with the term **equity**, which refers to fair treatment, the creation of opportunities, and access to those opportunities. "Equal treatment results in equity only if everyone starts with equal access to opportunities" ([from the University of Iowa](#)). For example, one might think being fair means giving everyone the same item to succeed, but what if someone already has that item or cannot use it? What if someone doesn't need that item but needs a different item? Equity is the result of providing people with what they need (not what others have assumed they need) to be successful.

While focusing on what humans have in common can be helpful and comfortable, it is also important to appreciate difference and diversity because by doing this, people are acknowledging uniqueness instead of accidentally ignoring or dismissing differences. This, along with **inclusion**, the act of genuinely involving people, can help cultivate a greater sense of **belonging**. As authors Liz Fosslien and Mollie West Duffy say, "When we feel belonging, we feel valued not for fitting in, but for everything that makes us unique."

Personal Exercise/Questions to Ponder: What part(s) of your identity, if any, do you find yourself leaving at the door when you enter certain spaces? If so, why do you think you do this? Why might people you know do this?

Summary and Conclusion:

Inclusion strategist [Vernā Myers](#) says: "Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance," while diversity leader [Daniel Juday](#) elaborates: "Diversity is going to a party; inclusion is being a member of the party-planning committee," and authors [Fosslien and Duffy](#) say, "Diversity is having a seat at the table, inclusion is having a voice, and belonging is having that voice be heard."

Understanding these terms, staying up to date with them as they evolve, and seeing how they relate to your studies, your relationships, your career, and your life in general can be a major step toward cultural competence.

Sources/Additional Resources:

[C.A.R.E. strategies for closing the achievement gap](#) – National Education Association

[In search of cultural competence](#) – American Psychological Association

[“Dominant Culture”](#) – Encyclopedia.com

[Diversity, equity and inclusion](#) – University of Iowa

[The Verna Myers Company](#)

[Inclusion isn't “being asked to dance.”](#) – LinkedIn

[What is diversity, inclusion and belonging?](#) – Nasdaq.com

[Diversity in the newsroom can build better media. Here's why.](#) – World Economic Forum

[Definitions of cultural competence](#) – National Center for Cultural Competence

[Cultural Competence: An introduction to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging \(DEIB\)](#) –
Dr. M Kumar