

# Appropriate Evaluations of Applicants' Diversity Statements for Improved Inclusivity and Convergent Thinking

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**Abstract**— Diversity statements are becoming mandatory in increasing numbers of job searches by increasing numbers of institutions. However, how to use diversity statements is seldom discussed with search committee members or persons interviewing the potential candidate. Some institutions, even if required, do not provide guidance or expectation to the use of the statement. Some institutions and/or search committees use diversity statements in a very basic way as tiebreakers. Institutions seeking improved inclusivity and convergent thinking have found that by reading the diversity statement first, higher numbers of traditionally underrepresented candidates are remaining in the pool at each stage of the hiring process [1], [2]. This workshop provides participants with a framework to create and use rubrics to evaluate diversity statements for improved inclusivity.

**Keywords**—diversity statements, rubrics, hiring practices

## I. GOALS OF THE SESSION

The participants will primarily be prepared as a search committee member, chair, or convener to determine how to best evaluate diversity statements, in order to enhance the selection of applicants for a more inclusive environment filled with more convergent thinking individuals. People writing application statements will also develop more understanding to strengthen authenticity and demonstrate deeper understanding.

## II. WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Engineering educators are going to enhance students' abilities to develop their professional skills with convergence norms driving creativity and innovation. NSF has defined such thinking in research as:

“the convergence paradigm intentionally brings together intellectually-diverse researchers to develop effective ways of

communicating across disciplines by adopting common frameworks and a new scientific language, which may, in turn, afford solving the problem that engendered the collaboration, developing novel ways of framing research questions, and opening new research vistas.” [3]

However, the idea of convergent thinking as a crucial step in meaningful creativity has been around for many years. For example, Isaksen and Treffinger in 1982 [4] listed the guidelines for convergent thinking to get to the most creative and best solutions as:

- Be Deliberate – Allow decision-making the time and respect it requires.
- Check Your Objectives – Verify choices against your objectives in each step.
- Improve Your Ideas – Not all ideas are workable solutions. Even promising ideas must be honed and strengthened.
- Be Affirmative – Even in convergence, it's important to first consider what's good about an idea and judge for the purpose of improving, rather than eliminating, ideas.
- Consider Novelty – Do not dismiss novel or original ideas.

These are still useful guidelines when we want to create a team of professionals with diverse backgrounds and ways of framing, or thinking about, a situation. The ultimate goal being to appreciate and utilize convergent thinking to generate a new framing instead of choosing only one profession's way of framing.

Bourke and Titus [5] found in their research on inclusive leadership six recurring characteristics: visible commitment, humility, awareness of bias, curiosity about others, cultural

intelligence, and effective collaboration. While these characteristics differ from convergence guidelines, it is easy to see how these characteristics would aid someone with convergence thinking.

One tool emerging when assessing a new employee or team member is diversity statements. However, academia search committees often do not understand how to evaluate these statements, not only for the sake of diversity and inclusion, but to enhance convergence thinking as desired in NSF research. The Abura Group principles would propose that when properly evaluated such statements are not merely ‘tie breakers’ for qualified applicants, they are fundamental to insights about the applicants’ attitude, skills, and knowledge concerning working in a truly inclusive, diverse, and convergent environment. Therefore, this workshop proposes to lead participants in understanding

- the relationship between diversity statements and convergent thinking;
- the general and unique characteristics of the organizational culture the applicant desires to enter;
- the expectations for different levels of leadership in the organizational culture;
- and finally, the development of rubrics for judging the strength of candidates’ diversity statements depending on the convergence culture and leadership position needed.

### III. SESSION AGENDA

Participants will consider a particular position search throughout the workshop (e.g., faculty, staff, postdoc, administrator/leader). Working groups from an institution may cluster, otherwise participants will be clustered for similar position searches. Using Edgar Shien’s model of organizational culture, the participants will be asked to identify underlying assumptions, often unspoken, that led their organization to have gaps between espoused values and goal achievement in diversity of convergence. Alignment between a truly diverse and inclusive organization and the representation of convergent thinkers in those environments will be explored by moving participants between groups focused on specific KSAs and then back to their position groups (Jigsaw technique). Each group will derive a logic model connecting the existing culture with its gaps and the goal of an organization that is diverse and inclusive. Each group will begin to develop rubrics for evaluating diversity statements, beginning by looking at some institutions’ rubrics. Finally, each group will look at actual diversity statements and evaluate them with their rubrics. Details of workshop activities are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 - WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES.

Activity	Outcome	Time Allotted
Welcome and Introductions to include identification of position search category to group participants in later activities	Group trust building	15 minutes
Climate Setting – Background and theory of diversity statements	Understand the history of diversity statements	10 minutes
Shien’s model of organizational culture to determine diversity convergence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Groups identify underlying assumptions between espoused values and goal achievement</li> <li>• Groups identify specific KSAs to be used in rubric</li> </ul>	KSAs by position type with key components listed for participants to choose from in later steps	50 minutes
Break		10 minutes
Each group will derive a logic model connecting the existing culture with its gaps and the goal of an organization that is diverse and inclusive.	Provides experience with a tool to think about the process of creating a rubric	20 minutes
Each group will begin to develop rubrics for evaluating diversity statements, beginning by looking at some existing institutions’ rubrics.	Rubric creation	25 minutes
Each group will look at actual diversity statements and evaluate them with their rubrics.	Rubric review and further development	30 minutes
Each group will report out and share with other groups. These rubrics will be distributed to all participants.	Sharing and distribution of rubrics	15 minutes
Wrap-up and evaluation of the workshop		5 minutes

#### IV. AUDIENCE

We can handle up to 100 participants, using 10 groups of 10 participants in the small group activities. We believe faculty and staff who will participate or lead search committees will be well served, but also students, faculty, and administrators who anticipate applying for positions in the near future.

#### V. TAKEAWAYS

The participants will see the theoretical and practical connections between convergent thinking and diversity and inclusion. They will understand the many ways that a diversity statement helps to find the best applicants for the organizational cultures we must develop. They will see the KSAs and ideas that can be discovered or revealed in a diversity statement. Finally, they can develop appropriate rubrics for different organizational cultures for judging the strengths of diversity statements.

#### VI. QUALIFICATION OF PRESENTERS

The six partners of the Abura Group have combined professional experience, in higher education, business and industry, the NSF, and non-profits, of over 180 years in roles including President and CEO, Provost, Vice President, Associate President, Associate Provost, Dean, Associate Dean, Department Head, Director, Program Officer, Professor, Academic Advisor, Research Associate, Technical Engineer, and we have been elected to leadership

roles in ABET, ASEE, IEEE, NAMEPA, NSBE, SPE, and WEPAN. We have learned from experience that existing and future engineering graduates must develop more strength in convergent thinking as well as diversity and inclusion. Fortunately, the two areas involve attitudes, skills, and knowledge (KSAs) with tremendous overlaps. These partners have participated and led organizations and searches, many successful and some not, that worked to get existing personnel to have better insight of what to look for in convergent thinking, and in contributing to the culture for diversity and inclusion.

#### REFERENCES

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