One of the central ideas that I have concerning issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (ADEIB) is that there be a clear and definitive understanding of these concepts and what they mean. They must be operationalized to match the institution’s goals and practices. To that extent they must be an integral part of the University’s raison d’etre. I believe the grouping of these concepts speaks volumes about the priority they take within the institutional hierarchy. There must be a prioritization. To that extent we must focus on the institution and the community in which we exist.

The idea of Access, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (ADEIB) may seem daunting to achieve, but in truth it is not as complicated as it appears. The idea of practicing access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging means that one must have an open mind and look at things through multiple lenses. I have always used this perspective throughout my career. As a person of color, it is part of my very being, and because I believe that people, no matter who they are, should be acknowledged. The idea of being inclusive for me then is second nature. However, I am not naïve enough to think that simply because I believe or do something that it is fait accompli. It is never that easy. In a complex, rich, traditional, and intransient culture such as we have in the academic world there are several things that must be done to ensure success of any proposed program.

In general, I think that the overuse of and lack of fundamentals regarding the ADEIB philosophy has led to a malaise toward the idea among some within the academy. Any person involved with issues of change, specifically around issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, must begin by discussing the long-term consequences and the meanings of what such changes will do for the academy. To that end, I expect that one of the first things that would need to be done is to establish a clear and unwavering understanding of the impending and unchanging demographic shifts that are occurring in our society. At the same time there is a real need to understand how the experiences of sex, race, ethnicity, social-class and long-term hegemony for majority groups, has consequences for those who grew up in the United States. The issue of international status brings with it yet another set of complications that are often not addressed and yet we know that some of the international students and faculty often experience similar forms of isolation and disconnection from the institution as do many of the underrepresented students.

In short, there must be real involvement and valuing of others. It will be necessary to have open and clear dialogues about issues and to develop a synergistic understanding of how these differences will alter some of our existing privilege systems. What this means is that learning must come from all parties, it cannot be one-way communication; we already know what does not work.

Underrepresented groups must not be treated as the “outsiders.” Instead, an appreciation for differences must be acknowledged and we must all work together to develop what is commonly referred to as best practices. These ideas must address value and respect students, faculty, and staff. To that end we must develop meaningful partnerships with national organizations that are working models of access, diversity, inclusion, equity, and belonging.

The hidden levels of stratification within the institution must be uncovered and addressed and real consequences for lack of participation in the future of the institution must be discussed. Real and tangible rewards must be attached to any program designed to promote change within an organization.
This is a lesson learned from modern businesses where they seem to have less difficulty adapting to the changing demographics than the university community seems to have.

I have outlined some brief steps that we can use to ensure an access, diverse, equitable, inclusionary, and belonging model be a permanent part of our institution’s makeup. Although these things are listed as separate, they are in fact integrated and continuous, they are part of a process model that involves evolutionary change and growth and at the same time reinvestment in the system. I am using a modified systems theory model (suggested by David Easton, 1965 in his work on political systems) that will help to see how things could work out.

**Preliminary Process (Input)**

The first is to build genuine trust. What this means is that there must be clear goals, meaningful follow-through, and an iterative process to make changes in a more systematic and rapid fashion. Second, someone must assume direct responsibility; and third, that person must have the authority to act—even in the face of long-term obstacles and barriers without reprisals or adverse effects. These things require extensive conversations, exchanges, input from constituents, and healing time, a necessary factor for reflection and reiteration of ideas and concepts. The timeline for this process is continuous. Cultural inclusiveness mandates that we must adapt and develop as the culture does.

**Programmatic Process (Environment and Culture System)**

The program would of course be dynamic and iterative. It must include elements of intentional recognition of underserved groups, have very transparent goals, address issues of hate, sexual assault, free speech, access, equity, diversity, inclusiveness, and regular assessment and reporting of activities, good or bad, in keeping with the idea of being transparent. Another issue that should be part of this is pay and workload inequity for all personnel. This is an issue that is all too often overlooked.

Some examples of this process would include meaningful processes for building true community and working toward supportive and integrative communities. These elements would provide for more open communication, processes for reporting problems, programs for addressing changes, and establishing protocols for continuous improvement and growth of our ADEIB program.

**Outcome Process (including Decisions and Feedback)**

The general idea that I am proposing here is one where if we are successful there will be an enhanced campus climate. The very nature of the University community and the many competing interests makes sure that no one iteration will suit all people; however, with knowledge that there are constant
adjustments and adaptations people will be more willing to work with us as we try to find a reasonable homeostasis from which we can operate in a more inclusive manner. The most important thing to understand from all of this is that we must work continuously on this issue because it is dynamic and requires us to be iterative and adaptive to the external and internal environment inputs. There should also be in this model a way to report out what is happening, good or bad, with the intention of reassessing and making the elements better. There are several ways in which this could be done, so of these include campus climate surveys, annual reports of activities and policy issues, open forums, and linking measurable outcomes to job and unit performance to ensure compliance.

Role of the Provost in ADEIB

The role of the Provost in ADEIB is to “make waves.” In other words, the Provost must ensure that there is a clear and distinct linkage between the University’s practices and its adherence to the ADEIB goals and practices. The Provost is required by the very nature of the position to enforce, supervise, and ensure that principles and policies regarding ADEIB are adhered to and are matched to the stated goals of the institution. This can be seen in hiring practices, personnel actions, and outward facing policies that influence community and university relations. The Provost must embody the principles of ADEIB and view them as an integral part of the University’s fiber and being. As your Provost I pledge to make this a critical aspect of my job as I have always done in my other roles within the academy; however, being the Provost will provide me with the necessary leverage to see that projects are integrated into the system and become a standard part of how we do our work within the University and throughout the communities that make up the environs.

My Own Life and Work on ADEIB

My commitment toward ADEIB does not come in terms of just philosophy but rather actions as revealed by my curriculum vitae and other work experiences. Throughout my career I have addressed these issues in terms of my work choice, professional direction (research and publications), and my dedication to furthering the advancement of students, colleagues, and others as they pursued life in the academy. That dedication extends itself to outside of the academy as well and has found itself in the external work that I have done working with the mentally ill, the unhoused, people with HIV, marginalized communities such as formerly incarcerated, and college aged students and adolescents. I understand what it means to be from a marginalized community and how lack of access can impede most efforts at diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

As an administrator I have been able to make specific ADEIB impact. For example, in my College I was able to increase the hiring of diverse candidates by 800% over five years. In addition, I also increased the graduation rates of our underrepresented students by 60% and improved access to our facilities and programs. In terms of students, I created a program designed to give access to underrepresented BIPOC/ALANA and poor White students, who can experience opportunity gaps but when lumped in the same group are often not seen and as a result might lack Access—an essential component of success. During my 11 years with the program, the four-year graduation rate was 92%. The overall graduation rate was 99% (two students were awarded posthumous degrees) with an average GPA of 3.23, and a median GPA of 3.15. Approximately 80% of the students went on to a wide variety of graduate programs (e.g., MD, PhD, JD, DVM, OD, DDS, DPT, MEd, MS, MA) thus ensuring that their life chances would be greatly enhanced.
I understand how one must clearly articulate the issues surrounding ADEIB and how they must be addressed. I also understand that inequality is an unacceptable form of living and one that can be dealt with even though it might cause some discomfort to others. However, in a society where there is so much, why should only a few experience its wealth and privilege? To ignore the inequality is to perpetuate and non-sustainable model of human existence. Education, and in particular, Higher Education, is designed by its very structure, an element to combat inequality and move us toward a place where access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging are common-place and become the new norms of our society.

Conclusion

This vision statement is but a small snapshot of the many issues that I believe are involved in changing the face of an institution. There is much work to be done. However, without a good foundation and baseline data of what works, any program will have trouble succeeding. Nothing will work without establishing clear goals and metrics. This begins by both embracing and challenging the status-quo. Some things do work, we know what they are. The challenge will be expanding those projects, jettisoning others, and developing new ideas. Nothing will work without the full commitment of all involved. Culturally responsive pedagogy; inclusive practices for students with disabilities, international and multilingual students, faculty, and staff, veterans, survivor-victims of sexual assault, undocumented students, and staff, LGBTQIA and non-binary individuals, and first-generation college students; introduction to Title IX; introduction to bias incident reporting process; anti-sexual and racial harassment training; and implicit bias are all examples of where we can excel and succeed. However, everything begins with the first step of the process which is always difficult.

While this idea is linked to the institution it can, does, and should have a direct impact on our near community and its environs. Access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging cannot just be something that ends at our campus borders. The substantive principles of the systems model make it impossible for us not to have a symbiotic relationship with our near community and environs. This means that what we do matters and that it has long-term consequences and a global reach. Therefore, it is important that we address the issues of access, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging with the utmost care and consideration.