

**Article Critique:**

**Administration's Great Impact on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

College of Professional Studies, Northeastern University

EDU 6202: Faculty, Curriculum, and Academic Community

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) has become a focus of higher education institutions in recent years, as student populations diversify among most social identities. In the article “Academic leaders’ diversity attitudes: Their role in predicting faculty support for institutional diversity,” Marchiondo, Verney, and Venner (2021) explore a trickle-down leadership model to support informal action on the part of academic leaders to their faculty members. This article highlights the viability of strengthening administrative and academic leadership, thereby effectively strengthening the support of DEI on campuses across the country; however, the demographics of the sample make this study harder to apply to a majority of institutions across the country, and it fails to actually connect faculty support to institutional actions or improvements related to DEI.

Marchiondo, Verney, and Venner (2021) created a multilevel moderated mediation model to test two hypotheses: (1) that attitudes on diversity held by academic leaders have a stronger effect on those who experience less bias and are less likely to rely on personal experience as motivation for commitment to DEI, specifically male faculty, and (2) recognized and/or perceived bias is a predictor of a faculty member’s endorsement of DEI initiatives and programs. Using this model, they conducted two climate surveys across populations of academic leaders (N = 70) and full time faculty (N = 254). Both hypotheses were supported by the results of this study, thus suggesting that academic leaders at an institution play an important part in the success of DEI in higher education as leaders, role models, and educators.

The researchers’ focus on this issue shows an awareness of the limitations of institutions’ DEI programs and seeks to discover if there are alternatives to currently utilized systems. Formal programs—which are often the method for fostering faculty DEI support—require time, funding, and recruitment to be successful. By acknowledging that informal factors, like social influence,

can heighten support of DEI initiatives without the need for costly resources, the researchers make social capital and influence accessible and viable assets to all institutions. Faculty buy-in, one such informal factor, is a key measure in the success of an institution's DEI programs and initiatives, as faculty possess power in the form of academic freedom and their research focuses, as well as in shared governance.

Furthermore, this study relies heavily on a trickle-down model of leadership, wherein employees' values and attitudes are developed and adapted from watching and listening to their colleagues and particularly their supervisors. This study also shows that this model can be further leveraged to support DEI initiatives, as evidence indicates this method is particularly effective for influencing the view of male faculty. Men have more opportunities to voice their opinions as a result of informal power and a higher social capital than women; additionally, they also hold a majority of tenured positions that carry prestige and influence. If male faculty can be positively influenced to support DEI programs through trickle-down leadership, this could drastically change the overall support for DEI at an institution.

Despite these strengths, there are some limiting factors in this study that require further investigation. First, this study was conducted at a public 4-year Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the southwestern United States. Student demographics and geography affect the rate of faculty exposure to conditions that alter their perceived bias. This makes it difficult to compare or project results at an institution that is geographically located in a predominantly White area or has a predominantly White student population. Similarly, the background of the sample group for this study was in large part made up of faculty in STEM fields. The educational background of faculty can also affect how they perceive bias around them; a faculty member in a college of

social sciences and humanities is likely to have a different perceived bias than an engineering professor, based simply on what they study and how they were taught to study it.

Furthermore, though the results of this study implicate a conditional relationship between gender and perceived bias, the researchers did not further explore how race/ethnicity interact with gender and perceived bias. Researchers also had similar limitations when it came to assessing the connection between faculty members' support of institutional diversity and actual diversification and behavioral change. To accomplish this, this study should also have encompassed analysis on the trajectory of the institution's success in DEI areas over the same period of time. Without this, the relationship between improved faculty support of DEI cannot be connected to institutional improvement.

Marchiondo, Verney, and Venner offer useful insight into understanding faculty's perception of bias, and how that perception can be affected by academic leaders and close supervisors. While it is important to understand the significance of this information for the purpose of training leads in effective leadership methods and approaches, this study fails to actually prove a connection between improved faculty support and the improvement of DEI related matters on the campus itself. To further test this model, this study should be replicated at an institution with a different student demographic, encompass a wider range of faculty fields of study, analyze the relationship between gender and race/ethnicity, and measure the institution's conditions in the same time period.

### References

- Marchiondo, L. A., Verney, S. P., & Venner, K. L. (2021). Academic leaders' diversity attitudes: Their role in predicting faculty support for institutional diversity. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000333>