# 2024 Student's Essay Competition

"What would you change about your higher education experience or environment to make it more inclusive for all who have the ability to benefit from it?"

## Amanda Wangari

**United States International University-Africa,
Keyna**

**Improving Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Changes for a More Equitable Academic Experience.**

**Introduction**

Higher level Education is a dynamic tool that can enhance individual development and social advancement but only when it is open to everyone. However, High Institutes of Learning have not yet fully made all students feel represented and supported in their academic communities despite previous remarkable achievements in diversifying student population. For instance, they need to take measures such as employing diverse faculty members, making sure student clubs are accessible to the disabled, support working students, provide for parenting students, and Integrating exchange students to the curriculum. Through these means, institutions can achieve an educational environment that is friendly to all students on campus where they feel a sense of dignity and purpose in contributing positively to their learning institutions.

   **1. Increasing Diversity Representation in Staff and Faculty:**

Today, many institutes of higher learning are more diverse than ever. According to research, students from all backgrounds perform better academically with a diverse teaching workforce, and a lack of representation can negatively impact student engagement and achievement (Understanding the value of diversity hiring in education, 2024, para.1). This mismatch has led to a representation gap highlighting students' difficulty in finding a role model to whom they relate culturally and ethnically. Institutes have to adapt their diversity procedures and pursue diverse faculty members by designing a novel concept of how to find diverse candidates, modifying the current guidelines, and investing significant efforts in defining an efficient methodology ("What is Diversity Hiring and Why is it Important at Work?" 2023, para. 9). First, is the hiring of a DEI specialist who would be in charge of managing such processes. Also,3

conducting DEI training to inform the employees of how they should create an equal environment, and eliminate the bias in the workplace creating a better inclusive institutional climate (Kinne, 2023, para. 5).

## 2. Ensuring Accessibility for Disabled Students in Club Activities:

In the case of persons with disabilities, the European Agency for Special Needs, and Inclusive Education, and the United High Commissioner for Refugees, believed in inclusive education whereby such persons were empowered to participate and mentioned integration of barriers to learning and participation for all students (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022, para.2). Nevertheless, there are still existing practices of educational discrimination and prejudice in any educational system and they function as real barriers or barriers of transition. Helen Henderson stressed that inclusiveness helps everyone because each person has something to learn and teach (Hopler, 2023, para.2). Student clubs should always consider accessibility while planning their activities. This includes selecting accessible settings, providing resources, and increasing awareness of disability inclusion among all students. Clubs should also receive training and support from disability services, as well as subsidies for modifications and auxiliary aids, such as deaf interpreters.

## 3. Supporting Working Students:

One of the many obstacles that working students encounter is the total unavailability to engage in curricular activities. They cannot interact with other students beyond their classrooms or attend events at the university for instance. The University of Kentucky's student business enterprise coordinator, Benjamin Star, emphasizes the significance of scholar groups in setting up a feel of campus network. In this time of transition, scholar organizations play a same role as eve (Venable, 2020, para. 2). Institutions can provide clubs and agencies with flexible assembling schedules and asynchronous participation choices to incorporate digital meetings, staggered timetables, or taped classes that allow working students to attend whilst it is handy for them. Finally, offer workshops, webinars, or short guides that target career development, management abilities, and sensible information relevant to operating college students' professional aspirations.

## 4. Offering Support for Student Parents:

Student who are parents struggle to balance parenting and teachers. Example. Some students can be single parents or have an ill child, making it tough for them to manipulate look at and parenting. Institutes can create specialized and sanitary regions for scholar moms to use for personal necessities like breastfeeding or changing diapers. Many institutions continue to discuss ways to offer women adequate childcare resources. Providing professional development training and alternate academic plans for college student parents who want a part-time path over the typical full-time method. Additionally, encourage professors to identify and give accommodations so that student parents are not

overburdened and forced to choose between academic and family commitments (Lopez, 2023).

### 5. Integrating Exchange Students to The Curriculum:

Exchange students at colleges that use languages other than their primary language for instruction often encounter significant difficulties. Even though they are good in academics, these students find it hard to fulfill duties as well as fit into scholastic and social situations because of language barriers. Language constraints can detract from total enjoyment while studying abroad gives the pleasure of a journey; new friendships, enhanced language skills, and world-class education (6 common challenges students face studying abroad, 2023. Para.1). Universities should provide online language courses before arrival and intensive language seminars during orientation as well as assign them native mentors for practice to help them. For successful adaptation and thriving in college, translated summaries of central ideas, lecture recordings with subtitles, extended deadlines, flexible assessments and bilingual tutors' access would be useful to them.

### Conclusion

Access to higher education has expanded-but genuine inclusion in the college experience will require a more complete response that meets all students where they are. Increased diversity among professors and staff provides students with authentic role models as well as advisors. One key element to this work is the improvement of access in student clubs, making participation on those extracurricular activities more equitable. Providing various modes of participation and online tools help the working students to freely handle all responsibilities. Additionally, financial aid helps to provide flexible schedules and also childcare support which is needed for student parents when juggling between having multiple jobs. Flexible language support and assessments that are designed to take the individual case of exchange students into account enhance integration. And these changes help support a more diverse, equitable and inclusive academic culture for everyone.

### REFERENCE

*6 common challenges students face studying abroad*. ApplyBoard. (2023, August 17). https://www.applyboard.com/blog/challenges-students-face-abroad

Fernández-Batanero, J. M., Montenegro-Rueda, M., & Fernández-Cerero, J. (2022, September 21). *Access and participation of students with disabilities: The Challenge for Higher Education*. International journal of environmental research and public health. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9565787/#B2-ijerph-19-11918

Hopler, W. (2023, October 27). *Famous quotes on inclusivity and well-being - center for the advancement of well*. Being. https://wellbeing.gmu.edu/famous-quotes-on-inclusivity-and-well-being/

Kinne, A. (2023, November 20). *Dei training: What works & why*. Workhuman. https://www.workhuman.com/blog/dei-training/

Lopez, E. (2023, March 3). *College student parents Reshape Higher Education Spaces*. Lumina Foundation. https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/college-student- parents-reshape-higher-education-spaces/

*Understanding the value of diversity hiring in education*. College of Education. (2024, February 16). https://education.illinois.edu/about/news-events/news/article/2024/02/16/understanding-the-value-of-diversity-hiring-in-education#:~:text=Classrooms%20today%20are%20more%20diverse,impact%20student%20engagement%20and%20achievement.

Venable, M. (2020, December 18). *6 types of virtual student clubs: BestColleges*. BestColleges.com. https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/virtual-student-clubs-organizations/

What is diversity hiring and why is it important at work? (2023, August 28). https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/diversity-hiring