Policy Equity Review: A Tool for Inquiry (PER)

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Overview

As a collaborative document, this *Policy Equity Review: A Tool for Inquiry* (PER) represents the work done by CU Denver's Institutional Equity Advocacy Council (IEAC) to provide a Policy Equity Review Framework and university Policy Equity Training program. These guiding principles and practices reflect our collective thinking about socially just higher education and aims to inspire greater accountability, dialogue, continuous learning, and strategic decision-making as faculty, students, and staff work together towards a more inclusive CU Denver community. This initial version of a Policy Equity Review: A Tool for Inquiry document is an important step towards inclusive excellence at CU Denver.

For members of the CU Denver community who represent historically marginalized backgrounds, a commitment to policy equity invites staff, faculty, and students to raise justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) concerns about the enactments or language of CU Denver policies that affect their learning and working experiences. By ensuring that all university policies reflect our commitments to DEI, we can significantly increase the likelihood of the individual and collective wellbeing and support of members of the CU Denver community.

Reviewing university policies with a focus on equity requires understanding of key principles and terms. The following guiding principles informing this PER are aligned to three CU Denver strategic priorities:

- Equity-Serving Institution
- University for Life
- Best Place to Work

(IEAC) Principles for Policy Equity

Shared Responsibility: CU Denver employees responsible for policy implementation should be aware of the experiences of students, staff, and faculty who are implicated in the university's policies. Without paying attention to outcomes of policy implementation or enforcement, policy owners at CU Denver may increase the burden experienced by members of CU Denver. Thus, as a principle, attention to sharing responsibility for policy equity reflects CU Denver's commitment to Inclusive Excellence.

Attention to Power: Power emerges in various forms. Thus, policy equity must support a distribution of power that reflects and represents the needs, experiences, and identities of those directly affected by any CU Denver policy in practice. By attending to power in this way, we are actively engaged in reducing harm and making CU Denver a safe place to work and learn.

Strengths Focus: As a principle, CU Denver policies should be seen as resources to guide performance and growth for our employees, students, and community members. Such an orientation to policy reflects our collective commitment to enacting justice and equity and offers opportunities for deep and creative thinking about equity. In this way, policies should be perceived as supportive rather than punitive tools.

Planfulness: By being planful, CU Denver policies are implemented in a way that is consistent and supportive; reflects an orientation to learner and professional growth; and is supported by strategies, budgeting, and planning to reduce inequitable consequences for those who represent institutionally or/and historically marginalized identities. In other words, CU Denver policy equity should be apparent in accompanying budgeting, training, practices, procedures, and guidelines.

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(IEAC) Principles for Policy Equity cont.

Safety: Safety is both the practice and condition of ensuring that within an interpersonal or collective environment, individuals experience (feel, think, believe) fair and reasonable opportunities to share their perspectives, including those that differ from dominant perspectives. In practice, safety is a pillar of policy equity evident in the freedom of all members of the CU Denver community to raise DEI concerns about policies without retaliation.

Belonging: Belonging is the experience of acceptance, support, connection, value, and respect within a community, for each member, where one feels valued and respected from a built foundation of shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics. As a principle of policy equity, the cultivation of **belongingness** should characterize all policy enforcement practices and include those individuals from historically marginalized backgrounds. By encouraging and supporting the full and authentic participation of all members of CU Denver's community as physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social, and cultural beings, policy equity should enhance the likelihood of success and retention of staff, students, and faculty.

Harm Reduction: In practice, policies should seek to lessen or eradicate (where possible) any harmful psychological, emotional, physical, or intellectual experiences of members of the CU Denver community, whether intentional or unintentional. For individuals and groups representing historically marginalized backgrounds, instances of harm should be reduced, including those that reverberate with past instances of collective or targeted threat and can often result in compounded consequences.

![CU Denver logo]

Key Terms

The following terms are intended to provide clarity and guidance for terms related to policy equity at CU Denver.

Equity requires attention to impact, access, and opportunities afforded to various communities, as well as structural and systemic barriers that limit potential and possibilities (Alina S. Wong and DeLuca Fernandez, 2018). Equity means that resources and opportunities are distributed based upon individual needs. In this way, equity differs from equality; equality means that individuals and groups receive the same resources and opportunities, a practice which does not respond to differences in circumstances.

Inclusion refers to the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in decision making, sense-making, curriculum, the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect—in ways that increase awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions. (Adapted from AAC&U).

Social Justice is "both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a mutually shaped society to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is fair, and all members are psychologically and physically safe and secure." (Bell, 2013, p. 21).

Key Terms Cont.

The following terms are intended to provide clarity and guidance for terms related to policy equity at CU Denver.

Restorative Intent offers a framework to nurture community well-being through a) harm reduction by prioritizing the healing, wholeness, and restoration needs of individuals and groups who have experienced harm, and b) the accountability and earned redemption of the person or group that caused harm. By centering the experiences of persons and groups that have experienced harm related to their minoritized statuses, we can act in ways that examine impact while demonstrating empathy and accountability.

Perspective-Taking The act of perspective-taking (considering the perspectives of those different from one's self) is vital to practicing and institutionalizing a commitment to equity. Consider the following bases or identities likely to be disproportionately impacted by policy inequities, particularly when absent from policy development or review:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Indigeneity
- Faith (spiritual or religious expression)
- Disability (visible and non-visible)
- Neurodiversity
- Age
- Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, and other Indigenous populations
- Citizenship and/or tribal affiliation status
- Guardianship/parenting status
- Pregnancy status
- Parenting or guardianship status
- Caretaking status

- Gender identity and expression
- Veteran status
- First-generation status
- Socioeconomic status
- Housing status
- English-language proficiency
- Sexual/Affectional orientation
- Immigrant status
- Other underserved groups

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Policy Equity Review Questions

Participating in a policy equity review process at CU Denver requires thoughtful attention to the ways in which the University's strategic goals and priorities are achieved through our policies in practice. Thus, the review process outlined here utilizes an inquiry approach rather than a scoring/matrix system.

Emphasis 1: Equity-serving university context

- What is the intent behind the policy being reviewed?
- Are resources channeled towards policy enhancements or expansions that could reduce racial/ethnic disparities?
- How does the policy align with CU Denver's mission and commitments?
- Are outcome assessments and monitoring standards appropriate for different populations (i.e., perspective taking)? And is there overreliance on outcomes that overlook the unique circumstances of individuals who may be invisible in the aggregate?

Emphasis 2: Awareness and management of bias

- Whose perspectives have not been sought to determine the need for the policy?
- Are there individuals, groups, or communities that will be adversely affected or burdened by this policy?
- If adverse or discriminatory outcomes are identified, how can this policy be modified (or eliminated) to end those outcomes?
- How does this policy perpetuate or help to dismantle historical, legal, or other barriers to equity?

Emphasis 3: Harm reduction through implementation

- What changes to this policy will help to promote safety and belonging throughout CU Denver?
- What does past feedback reveal about the policy's promotion of equity or inequity?
- How is equity achieved through the implementation of the policy (e.g., procedures and guidance)?
- Do implementation practices impose burdens (e.g., psychological, emotional, administrative) on members of historically or institutionally minoritized groups?

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Questions or Feedback:

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