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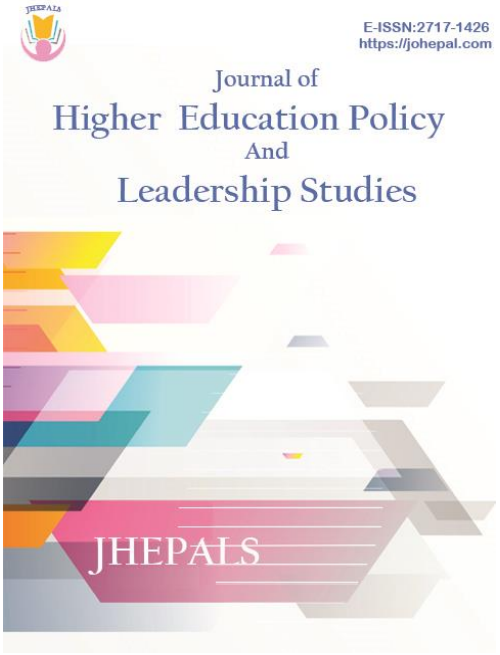

Diversities at US Colleges and Universities: Online Diversity Statements at Institutions Employing Chief Diversity Officers

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Abstract

In the contemporary U.S. higher education marketplace, college and university mission statements are profiled on almost every institutional website. The extent to which higher education institution (HEI) mission statements reflect isomorphism, attempts at defining market position or unique "conceptual ideas" (Kosmützky, 2012), and similarly, whether they are primarily aspirational, platforms for strategic implementation and institutional meaning-making, or relevant to the experiences of minoritized students are areas of debate in the international literature (Arcimaviciene, 2015; Cortés-Sánchez, 2018; Ortega et al., 2020; Santa-Ramirez et al., 2022). This paper applies quantitative textual analysis to the diversity statements of a subset of American HEIs: those employing a Chief Diversity Officer. We sought to interrogate how concepts such as "race" and "racism" were named and framed by those same statements (Bradley et al., 2018), and indirectly to evidence how students experiencing "race" and "racism" were made visible by institutional descriptions of systems of oppression.

Keywords: Diversity; Systemic Oppression; Campus Climate; Equity; Religious Colleges

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Introduction

In the contemporary U.S. higher education marketplace, college and university mission statements are profiled on almost every institutional website. The extent to which higher education institution (HEI) mission statements reflect isomorphism, attempts at defining market position or unique "conceptual ideas" (Kosmützky, 2012), and similarly, whether they are primarily aspirational, platforms for strategic implementation and institutional meaning-making, or relevant to the experiences of minoritized students are areas of debate in the international literature (Arcimaviciene, 2015; Cortés-Sánchez, 2018; Ortega et al., 2020; Santa-Ramirez et al., 2022). Thus mission statements are important with respect to organizational behavior (e.g., Othelia Lee, 2010; Serra et al., 2022), human resources practice (e.g., Miller, 1996; Sweem, 2009), leadership for equity (e.g., Lindsay, 1999; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015), student success (e.g., Gnage & Drumm, 2010; Kuh, 2005), and – if education is framed as a human right per the supranational diplomatic architecture – humanitarian engagement (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

This paper applies quantitative textual analysis to one sub-set of institutional statements of mission and/or commitment: the diversity statements of American HEIs employing Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs). Our application of textual analysis is molded by Ahmed's interrogation of diversity as institutional construct. While Ahmed questions whether "diversity" as a concept *can* be or *needs* to be institutionalized, pointing to examples of the term being strategically decoupled from "equity" and "justice" (Ahmed, 2007), she also expresses that "transformation, as a form of practical labor, leads to knowledge" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 173). The process of producing a diversity statement – or revisiting an existing diversity statement – may indeed be considered transformational practical labor in this sense; an assembled group of stakeholders at a given HEI convenes to produce text through a process of (re)visiting university activities, goals, constituents, and from this "data", filtered by their own experience and relevant external pressures, issues a fresh statement of diversity principles and/or practices for the organization as a whole. We understand diversity statements as the (potential) end product of (potentially) transformative work and knowledge building around "diversity" and related concepts including systemic oppression.

In addition, we consider diversity statements as the beginning stage of operationalizing institutional commitments to social justice and the dismantling of systemic oppression, with those commitments including the dedication of resources and transparency of relevant data. While such operationalization is by no means guaranteed by the existence of a diversity statement (Rezai-Rashti et al, 2021), we argue that a diversity statement is a prerequisite to comprehensive diversity, equity, or inclusion programs or policies that span the HEI and operationalize institutional goals into specific allocations of time, money, staff, research, and so forth. We examine the research questions:

1. How are diversity statements at US HEIs employing CDOs similar or different?
2. How do those diversity statements discuss systemic oppression?

In the pages that follow, we parse diversity statements that vary by length, prominence, number of languages used, and citation of other HEI statements, among other features. We also begin to differentiate diversity statements by institutional type. In short, this paper outlines how even the HEIs that may be seen as most engaged in "diversity work"

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through their employment of a CDO and membership in the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) produce diversity statements that elide neat categorization and do not consistently attend to the racisms, sexisms, heteronormativities, and other exclusions that affect the daily lives of students, faculty and staff alike. Our discussion considers the implications of that range of diversity statements and points towards a future, critically-oriented research agenda.

Conceptual Framework

Lykes et al. (2018) have noted that "neoliberal institutional commitments to diversity and/or affirmative action belie post-colonial higher educational institutions' support for, and maintenance of, the social reproduction of White hegemony in structural, pedagogical, and knowledge generation practices" (p. 3). We draw on this understanding of the contemporary American higher education sector in molding the conceptual lens for our study. Further, we reference Ahmed's (2012) notion of diversity work as a non-performative: that is, inasmuch as an institution articulates commitment to diversity and inclusion, they also forego the possibility of doing work that addresses structural forms of disadvantage embedded within the organization. Thus, diversity work comes to be understood as a technology of aesthetic rather than structural redress. Through this framework, an explicit acknowledgement of "racism" is distinct from the importance of "racial diversity," insofar as the former signals a structural form of race-based oppression whereas the latter foregrounds the aesthetic importance of race-based communal difference. Therefore, we understand "diversity" as problematic, but diversity statements as informative and (potentially) transformational.

Our research group proceeded to select a sample of diversity statements at HEIs that empirically value diversity (through their employment of CDOs, who are tasked with influencing institutional discourses (Ruiz-Mesa, 2016)). We sought to interrogate how concepts such as "race" and "racism" were named and framed by those same statements (Bradley et al., 2018), and indirectly to evidence how students experiencing "race" and "racism" were made visible by institutional descriptions of systems of oppression. As Migliarini (2018) has observed in the Italian case, "banishing the word 'race' does not make racism go away" (p. 440). We wondered: how useful can diversity statements be if they tend not to name pervasive systems of marginalization?

Research Methodology

Data Sources

This study examines higher education institutions that held membership in NADOHE as of spring 2019 and employed CDOs. At that time, there were 293 American HEIs meeting this search criteria, and of this grouping we excluded a handful of member institutions that represented university systems (rather than a single HEI) or schools or faculties within a university (for example the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University). Six NADOHE members were omitted, leaving us with a sample of 287 HEIs for analysis.

The text analyzed is the pool of diversity statements provided on relevant HEI websites in fall 2019, which ranged from a few sentences to many paragraphs in length. In identifying a single diversity statement -- whether explicit or implicit -- at each of the HEIs, we used a blunt instrument: a content search of the suite of institutional webpages. We used the

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search feature on each HEI website to search first for "diversity", then combing through search results to identify the relevant statement. When a college or university clearly delineated a "diversity statement" on an institution-wide webpage, we stopped our search for that given institution. If, after examining all search results for "diversity" such a statement of principles was not clear, we then searched for "equity", also reviewing search results. If no relevant pages were found, we moved to review the "About Us" section of the HEI's website, which occasionally included a diversity statement nested within a description of the institution. Of the 287 HEIs queried, our research team was unable to identify a clear diversity statement at 49 institutions, leaving a working sample of 238.

The institutional diversity statements were captured alongside descriptive features of the statement including whether it was an explicit diversity statement (i.e. titled as such), had an identified author (i.e. president, provost, diversity committee), whether the statement was dated, as well as location within the institution's website structure (Foste et al., 2022). These data were coupled with institution level descriptive data gathered from IPEDS. These institutional characteristics included Carnegie classification, public and private control, region, religious affiliation, institutional size, percentage of underrepresented minority, percentage Hispanic, and MSI designated and/or eligible. These additional data elements enriched the research teams' ability to segment analysis by various diversity statement and institutional attributes, discussed further below.

This process, which was systematic but also subjective, may be seen as an enabling constraint of this study (Manning, 2008, p. 8): while we do not consider every instance of a specific faculty or department's diversity, equity or inclusion principles, we apply a relatively broad understanding of institution-wide diversity statements reflected by NADOHE institutional websites. Our data analysis proceeded to conduct quantitative textual analysis of our sample of 238 statements by NADOHE colleges and universities.

Voyant Analysis

This examination of HEI diversity statements uses the open-source textual analysis platform Voyant to conduct an indexing and correlation of the words contained in relevant statements. Voyant is a powerful tool with a vital limitation: the wielders of Voyant are responsible for not only defining content but also interpreting context (Rockwell & Sinclair, 2016). This relates to Rockwell and Sinclair's warning of "the disappearance of the author" (2016, p. 20) and, by extension, intentionality, in quantitative textual analysis.

Diversity Statements and Chief Diversity Officers

Diversity Statements

The discourse of diversity was brought to the forefront in the US context during the 1960s and 1970s, framed in large part through the narratives of non-discrimination and affirmative action policy (Williams, 2013). Over time these legally mandated processes, driven by efforts such as the Equal Employment Opportunity laws of the 1960s, have expanded to consider the experiences of students, faculty, and staff holding myriad marginalized identities. In this process, HEIs have seen the rhetoric of diversity expand: it has been suggested that "the umbrella term diversity appears to gather at its table all those who are not White, male, European in ancestry, able bodied, native born, Christian, and heterosexual" (Morrish &

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O'Mara, 2011, p. 975). Within this current diversity landscape it is thus possible to look at the various ways in which institutions present their commitment to institutional efforts advancing diversity via web-based content (Dozier et al., 2022), interrogating in parallel the extent to which "diversity" frameworks offer a "positive" alternative to directly addressing systemic oppressors (Lentin, 2016).

Are diversity statements ubiquitous? A 2011 study found that over half of the institutions surveyed had established some form of diversity statement and of those, nearly half were characterized as an authoritative official's statement (president, provost, CDO) or institutional statement (Wilson et al., 2012). Both types of statements strongly leverage a narrative of compliance (NADOHE, 2021). Further, Carnes, Fine and Sheridan (2019) identify several challenges related to how campus discourse is shaped by diversity statements, including that through a statement's suggestion that diversity goals have been achieved, diversity behavior and ultimately the advancement of a colorblind rhetoric is dictated. Two bodies of work are particularly relevant for this work: scholarship considering narratives of diversity within mission statements and distinct diversity plans.

Mission Statements

Mission statements are a now-universal aspect of American higher education, often shifting in scope and focus over time as institutions navigate dynamic higher education backdrops. It is suggested that mission statements both serve to articulate relevant institutional objectives and unite institutions around a shared purpose (Hartley, 2002). However, they can also be seen as a synthesis of "stock phrases that are either excessively vague or unrealistically aspirational" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p.457). Given their potential to convey institutional focus, research has sought to make meaning regarding what is included and excluded from these public statements (Wilson et al., 2012). In a study considering Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), all failed to mention their HSI status in the mission statement itself (Contreras et al., 2008). Thus, institutional mission statements provide insight into one way in which institutions articulate their efforts surrounding diversity.

Diversity Plans

Diversity plans, whether stand-alone or embedded within a strategic plan, play a vital role as a foundation and language for organizational change (Schauber & Castania, 2001). As Ching et al. (2020) note, "as artifacts [policies] infused with values people hold about equity, examining the plans with a critical eye is needed to elicit their actual meaning" (p. 7). Key questions probed in extant scholarship include how diversity plans shift towards colorblind language and position students (as central or peripheral; as agentic or passive) (Carnes et al., 2019; Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Iverson, 2007). Further, Iverson (2005) asserted that these plans were not neutral and instead served to position students of color as outsiders, disadvantaged, and at-risk. Thus, diversity plans have been shown to play an important role in how institutions position students and to cultivate an often-narrow version of diversity. In one study of two US universities, Parker (2019) found that the development of diversity plans served as precursor to the development of the CDO position, though it is also the case that established CDOs are often tasked with leading the creation and/or iteration of diversity plans or related collateral.

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Chief Diversity Officers

Existing research situates Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) as potentially central figures shaping institutional narratives articulated through diversity statements but acknowledges that CDO roles vary widely across HEIs (Holcombe et al., 2022). Williams & Wade-Golden (2007) posit that despite an increasing number of such roles in the early 2000s, most CDOs did not have a formal title but instead were the individual identified as the de facto senior authority in this organizational area. In the intervening years, organizations such as National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) have further codified the CDO role to identify best practices related to reporting structures, scope, and resources, though those guidelines have been critiqued for using "passive and color evasive language, support[ing] slow-moving incremental change, and … absent of language associated with racism, sexism, gender bias, homo- & transphobia, ableism, and xenophobia among other discriminatory practices" (Allen et al., 2020, p. 1).

The further professionalization of the position resulted in the emergence of CDOs at both the institutional and system levels and the concurrent development of policies mandating CDOs. Recent scholarship has considered the different organizational structures under which the role operates as well as how different professional and personal identities shape the CDO's experience (Maraña, 2016; Nixon, 2017; Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007). It has also probed the extent to which CDOs are provided with resources to implement programs for change, facilitating work as a "concrete change maker" rather than "symbolic actor" (Holcombe et al., 2022) and combating "institutional preferences to avoid courageous conversations around race and racism" (Tesfay, 2021, p. 141). Finally, it has considered the relationships among CDOs and mid-level diversity officers at the same institution (Grim et al., 2019).

The landscape of diversity has shifted significantly over the past 10 years since much of this research had been undertaken. As such, the paper at hand aims to build upon and advance our descriptive understanding of the diversity statement at a subset of HEIs. The present research also extends this scholarship by explicitly considering discourse addressing systemic oppressors. Further, the present study seeks to expand the scholarship surrounding the impact of CDOs. We presume that HEIs employing CDOs are more likely to invest in the transformational labor of diversity statement creation and iteration, and may therefore offer diversity statements that are more detailed, expansive, progressive, or clearly aligned with goals or outcomes. We believe that an understanding of the range of statements themselves is generative in working towards the goal of diversity statement impact evaluation.

Findings

In this section we outline key findings from our analysis of 238 diversity statements before reviewing results among HEIs grouped by percentage of underrepresented minority (URM) students enrolled as well as by institutional religious affiliation. We note that work presently underway extends this analysis to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), public and private institutions, and HEIs grouped by geographic region. Broadly, we find expressions of aspirational diversity/diversities among HEIs with a lower proportion of URM students enrolled, and an explicit connection between religious principles and commitment to

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diversity among the religious HEIs surveyed. Further, we find that the diversity statements identified in this research cannot be considered comparable documents, and we outline selected areas of variation to demonstrate that dissonance.

Table 1 illustrates that among the 238 institutions in our sample, 87% of the HEIs are designated as 4-year institutions, likely speaking to the longer history of CDO employment by 4-year institutions. Exactly half of the HEIs in question (119) used what we designate *named statements*; the institutions leveraged terms such as diversity, equity, or inclusion to signal that this statement served the role of a diversity statement as opposed to offering an implicit diversity statement (that was generally less prominently placed). However, very few HEIs noted either a clear author of the given statement or indicated board of trustee approval. Ahmed might question whether an "anonymous" diversity statement might obscure a less than transparent or rigorous process of statement development. In short, why NOT name a statement to offer some indication of the transformational work done, units engaged, etc.?

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, corpus of 238 diversity statements identified and analyzed

Diversity Statement Characteristics	Percentage of Institutions
Named Statement	50%
Board of Trustee Approved	7%
Clear Authorship	11%
Institutional Characteristics	
Carnegie Classification	
2-year	87%
4-year	13%
Institution Control	
Public	57%
Private	43%
MSI Status	
MSI	10%
Non-MSI	90%

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Further, among the few named statements, we again identified a range of authors and levels of approval: Seattle University's statement (2019) was approved by its Board of Trustees on February 21, 2008, while Stanford's provost issued that HEI's diversity statement (2019). The Stanford approach seems to indicate that that text may not have been vetted by the campus community at large but rather represents a top-down approach to campus-wide definitions and commitments. Other HEIs include both a general diversity statement followed by a statement from the President on the same page (Mississippi State University, 2019). Here, there seems to be an acknowledgement that individuals assess and commit to diversities in different ways, and that the HEI president makes one such subjective interpretation in a public forum.

Just three of the institutions analyzed here offer diversity statements in languages other than English. These are Houston Community College (2019), which offers its statement in Arabic, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish and Vietnamese, as well as Saint Louis University (2019), which offers its statement in Arabic, German, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, and Spanish. Polk State College (2019) offers its equity statement in English, Spanish and Creole. As there is a rich literature on the need for key institutional documents to be available in multiple languages matching the linguistic preferences of the student body, this finding clearly indicates a gap between *de jure* and *de facto* diversity initiatives. Specifically, this is seen as a crucial support for international, migrant and refugee students alike (Yao et al., 2019) and existing campus resources may be harnessed at little to no cost to make a diversity statement among other key institutional documents available in multiple languages for access by campus constituents including student support networks (Evans & Unangst, 2020).

Further, the identity markers and equity groups (essentialist though they may be) outlined in the diversity statements surveyed vary widely. For example, Genesee Community College (2019) includes addiction/recovery status in its diversity statement, which may relate to a pressing crisis in the local area. Several institutions strive to support students' religious or spiritual identities (Whitman College, 2020). A handful of HEIs underscore a commitment to Indigenous students and communities (University of South Dakota, 2019; University of Washington, 2019). Other statements broaden normative conceptualizations of diversity to include family structure and learning style (University of Missouri-Kansas City), opinion (University of Wisconsin-Madison) or acknowledge the intersections of "a range of social groups" (University of Illinois, 2019). One statement references "genetic information", though this may reflect attention to legal mandates for protection rather than the result of a transformative process (University of Nevada, Las Vegas). Finally, still other diversity statements including SUNY Oswego (2019) avoid mentioning any category at all, also excluding race, class, and gender.

While we by no means expected to find identical diversity statements, such strong variation in statement presence as well as type, authorship, language, and scope of statements was surprising to us. It seems likely to indicate vastly different processes for statement development – offering the potential for transformative work – and quite distinct understandings of diversity statement function. We will return to this point in our discussion section.

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Reflecting, Dismantling, or Omitting Systemic Oppression?

We continued our analysis by examining the pool of diversity statements for terms related to systemic oppressors and marginalized identity markers (which we recognize are essentialist and employ as a provisional tool for social justice-oriented analysis in the mode of McCall (2005)). As outlined in Table 2, gender was the most commonly referenced identity marker, though it is difficult to evaluate how class is dealt with given that the same term refers to a key unit of university life: classroom instruction.

Table 2
Count of terms related to systemic oppressors/marginalized identity markers

Term	No. Occurrences
Gender* (gender 146, genders 2)	148
Rac* (race 99, racial 21, races 10, racism 5, racist 1)	136
Ethnic* (ethnicity 73, ethnic 31, ethnicities 6, ethnically 1)	111
Religio* (religion 66, religious 36 religions 4 religiousity 1)	107
Age (age 78, ages 4)	82
Disabilit* (Disability 61, Disabilities 15)	76
Socioeconomic	39

Next, we probed the corpus by searching for the occurrences of terms directly describing experiences of oppression. Our findings in this area: among 238 diversity statements there were a combined 11 mentions of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and xenophobia. This list is not exhaustive, but is remarkable in that diversity (778 occurrences) is used about 70 times more often than any of the oppressors listed in Table 3.

Table 3
Count of terms related to phenomena of marginalization

Term	No. Occurrences
Racism	5
Sexism	3
Classism	1
Heterosexism	1
Xenophobia	1

Thus, our overall finding with respect to whether diversity statements at HEIs employing CDOs center systemic oppression is that they do not, consistent with much of the extant literature; we, like Foste et al. (2022) "are left to question how one could possibly detail institutional objectives related to diversity without also talking about whiteness or the toxic and constraining realities imposed by the gender binary" (p. 12). Rather, statements tended to be general rather than detailed, laying a foundation for some version of campus diversity that omitted specific issues/goals around specific, marginalized identities.

HEIs by URM Population

Our analysis of HEIs based on the proportion of URM students proceeded using a subset of the overall sample, as we were able to match 209 institutions with a URM percentage listed in IPEDS. The overall average among these 209 institutions for URM students enrolled was

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28.84% and the median was 25%. We did not find strong correlations at an absolute value of 0.7 at either .01 or .05 levels of significance (*p*-value) among HEIs with URM of 75% or over (six HEIs total) or among the HEIs with URM of 50% to less than 75% (18 HEIs fell into this category). However, Table 4 (below) indicates correlations with words beginning with "divers" among the statements identified at the 82 HEIs with URM proportions of 25 to 49% (these statements reflecting 290 occurrences of divers*) and among 103 HEIs with URM proportions of 0 to less than 25% (these statements reflecting 382 occurrences of divers*).

Table 4
Strong correlations (minimum absolute value of 0.7) with Divers* at 0.05 level of significance

Quartile	Referent	Co-occuring term	Correlation (rounded to nearest thousandth)	Significance (*p*-value)
0-25% URM	Divers*	Celebrates	0.883	0.0006993
		Collaborate	0.883	0.0006993
		Cultivate	0.720	0.018818904
		Appropriate	0.700	0.02417963
25-49% URM	Divers*	Beyond	0.786	0.00697944
		Classroom	0.769	0.009284261
		Aim	0.737	0.014978544
		Carry	0.737	0.014978544
		Classes	0.737	0.014978544
		Challenge	0.737	0.015053535
		Commonalities	0.708	0.02200447
		Best	-0.906	0.0003004
		Agencies	-0.737	0.015053552
		Asset	-0.700	0.02410515
		Allowing	-0.700	0.02410515
		Affirms	-0.700	0.02410515
		Affirm	-0.700	0.02410515

There is an interesting divide among these two categories of HEIs. Those with a lower proportion of URM students produce diversity statements reflecting strong positive correlations between divers* and what we might call celebratory or aspirational terms: celebrates, collaborate, cultivate, and appropriate. Those with a higher proportion of URM students (25-59%) seem to be identifying areas in which diversity is at play (e.g. the classroom), while also positioning the institution (and its stakeholders) as seeking to "affirm" diversity/diversities in parallel to an acknowledgement of challenges. This may indicate an area for future research: probing how HEI constituents understand "celebratory" language around diversity in combination with present or absent institutional commitments to action.

Religiously Affiliated and Non-religiously Affiliated HEIs

We next compared the diversity statements of our sample's 185 non-religiously affiliated HEIs to the 36 HEIs with a religious affiliation (ranging from the Church of the Brethren to Baptist). Of the 185 HEIs without a religious affiliation, we were able to identify 140 diversity statements and include strong correlations at the $p < 0.01$ level in Table 5 below.

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Table 5
Strong correlations (absolute value of 0.7 or greater) with Divers* at 0.01 level of significance across statements at HEIs without a religious affiliation

Referent	Co-occuring term	Correlation (rounded to nearest thousandth)	Significance
Divers*	Deeply	-0.819	0.0037533
Divers*	Develop	0.836	0.0026058
Divers*	Competency	0.778	0.008090123

Similarly, we identified 33 diversity statements from the pool of 36 religiously affiliated HEIs, with selected strong correlations indicated in Table 6.

Table 6
Selected strong correlations (absolute value of 0.7 or greater) with Divers* at 0.05 level of significance across statements at religiously affiliated HEIs

Referent	Co-occuring term	Correlation (rounded to nearest thousandth)	Significance
Divers*	Create	0.812	0.004319692
Divers*	Affirms	0.761	0.010581759
Divers*	Center	0.705	0.0227713
Divers*	Creation	0.705	0.0227713
Divers*	Confront	0.700	0.024123492

In comparing tables 5 and 6, it seems quite clear that religious affiliation plays an important role in an HEI's construction of diversity. Specifically, creation is explicitly connected to diversity: Azusa Pacific (2019) notes that "We continue our efforts to recruit, hire, and support a diverse community in an effort to create a milieu that reflects the mosaic of God's kingdom" while Baylor University (2019) observes that "We will develop the whole person within the context of God's creation - a rich, complexity of life and diversity". "Affirms" is also connected to religious mission, for example in the phrase "St. Norbert College strives to be a community that is welcoming to all and affirms the sacred dignity of all by engaging in practices of inclusion" (St. Norbert College, 2019).

In sum, we observe a tailoring of diversity statement to religious context: though these techniques of aesthetic may not be connected to structural transformation at any given HEI, they may equally well represent a distinctive transformative process of change as suggested by Ahmed, and thus represent an area for further inquiry. An additional area of focus in parsing the diversity work of religiously affiliated institutions may be the range of institutional "diversity" activity: as is also the case for non-religiously affiliated HEIs, the occurrences of divers* and words beginning with rac* vary widely among the statements surveyed (Figure 1).

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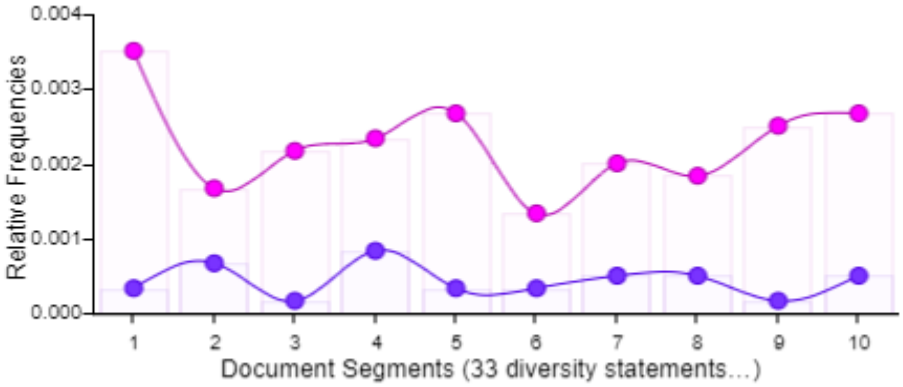

Figure 1. Occurrences of Divers* (pink) and Rac* (purple) across 33 diversity statements of 36 religiously affiliated HEIs surveyed

Discussion

One of our research questions probed how diversity statements at US HEIs employing CDOs are similar or different, and indeed we identified such a wide range of statements that we must conclude these texts are really not comparable documents. We do think that the question should be posed: if the range of diversity statements across this small subset of invested institutions is so large, what is it likely to be across the US higher education landscape as a whole? Whether it is the NADOHE itself, or another organization such as the Association of American Colleges & Universities – which is referenced as an authority in some of the statements analyzed (e.g., Gettysburg College, 2019) – a more comprehensive study establishing a typology and index of statements seems useful for prospective students, critical researchers, and policymakers alike.

By employing quantitative textual analysis, we were able to evaluate diversity statements of a subset of more invested HEIs, offering insight into how diversities are defined and opportunities for inclusion are framed in those settings. Our finding that 49 HEIs employing CDOs did not have identifiable statements may be seen in several ways. In one respect, it may connote (potential) inattention to the transformative work of crafting diversity statements, though statement absence might also reflect institutional turnover, entrenched silos, a process in place that is not reflected on the HEI website, or an institutional preference for a separate discussion of diversity perhaps to be found in, for example, minutes from campus town hall meetings. And if systemic oppressors similarly tend to be absent, can we indeed say that diversity as aesthetic rather than indication of transformative work and learning seems to be codified across the U.S. context?

Our analysis also underscores the construction of an abstract idealism cultivated through diversity statements. In contrasting institutions with 0-25% URM to those with 25-49% URM student enrollment there are notable differences in how "diversity" is constructed. Among institutions with few URM students, an aspirational language is cultivated. Diversity as an abstract is presented as something relevant and of value to the institution, an ideal not requiring specific definition (Friedensen, 2017). This framework serves as tool to construct a rationale or focus of diversity work that is removed from the structures and realities of the institution. To put it another way, diversity work even at HEIs

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with CDOs is sometimes quite removed from the current "state of play" that indicated the need for a diversity statement in the first place. Alternatively, HEIs with higher URM student enrollment use diversity statements to discuss diversity as central to core efforts, with those diversity statements more likely, per Ahmed's framework, to reflect transformative learning processes.

How do diversity statements discuss systemic oppression? Whether they are aspirational or strategic roadmaps, diversity statements reflect formalized processes that recognize difference and, in some cases, exclusion. Diversity statements can both name entrenched oppressors including racism, sexism, and heteronormativity and indicate specific histories of those oppressors on campus communities as well as specific, actionable commitments to dismantle them. As Ahmed (2007) puts it, "diversity work is not only about accumulating the value of diversity, as a form of social currency, but also re-attaching the word to the other words that embody the histories of struggle against social inequalities" (p. 254) and therefore markers of oppression are not only markers in and of themselves but references to specific institutional historicities (Heidegger, 1962).

Why this particular focus? "The legacy of racism is embedded in every social institution in America, including the education system that continues to tout ideologies of meritocracy and equal opportunity" (Mungo, 2017, p. 233). Indeed, the entrenchment of racism in the tertiary sector demands the continued critical analysis of institutional discourse, both qualitative and quantitative. Without this critical examination, diversity efforts become technologies that (re)produce systemic inequities and fail to call into question the misalignment between espoused values of inclusion and campus actions. Diversity statements thus represent one site through which the espoused rhetoric of diversity, and its attention to questions of social justice, can be considered.

Conclusion

Evatt-Young and Bryson (2021) have argued that "higher education needs bold, courageous anti-racist leaders who have the vision, commitment, and skills to transform our institutions into equity-minded places of learning" (p. 77). The exploratory research at hand, which considers a subset of American HEIs that employed CDOs in 2019, demonstrates that there is enormous heterogeneity among institutional diversity statements. Future work might well address basic structural differences in the statements themselves, as well as the processes of creation that seem to be indicated (working alongside the research of Gasman et al., 2015 in considering how institutions reflect diversity). Further, as our sample is U.S. based and our analysis U.S. focused, international and comparative work on this topic is certainly warranted and would require due attention to the iteration of "diversity" in those respective systems (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020; Boatca, 2012; Scott, 2020).

Diversity statements across national contexts might be considered, for example, for how they signal an understanding of diversity "'being global'…[or] a means by which certain others, who are 'global citizens', can be appealed to: it is about a variety of people, as a variety that takes some forms and not others" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 244). In other words, diversity work may be intentionally intertwined with an international or internationalization plan or policy at least on a surface level. Whether diversity and international offices do in fact receive similar funding, research support, etc. is another emerging area of scholarship

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(e.g., Olson et al., 2007; Özturgut, 2017). Similarly, attention to how some "equity" groups are privileged over others as well as to discussion of colonial histories is indicated.

Implications for Future Research

Having already emphasized the importance of further study on the construction and content of HEI diversity statements, we will focus briefly on related areas for future research.

Use of Video and Graphics

It is notable that many institutions use graphics or video to express the HEIs diversity statement or set of guiding principles, whether exclusively or in combination with text (e.g., SUNY New Paltz (2019)). Still others offer extensive "diversity mapping" visuals prepared by an external consultant (California State University San Marcos, 2015). Though our focus in this paper is on text-based content analysis, we call for additional research targeting these visualizations. Participatory work in this area may be indicated: a photo-elicitation project with select HEI community members might facilitate a comparison between an existing visual representation of diversity mission with the imagined or experienced mission. That work might probe whether non-traditional, expansive pieces of diversity collateral (videos, visualizations) tend to center or obscure attention to entrenched abuses of power more so that a written diversity statement.

Historical Context

The present study focuses on "live" institutional diversity statements -- those in evidence on college and university websites in the fall of 2019. This approach begs the question: how have those statements changed over time? Future work might well consider using past university collateral (admissions brochures, college catalogs, memos, etc.) or interviews to craft an historical case study of diversity statement evolution. This could point towards the trends and drivers of statement expansion, contraction, areas of focus, and would shed light on the opaque process we refer to here. It would be important to consider, for example, how whiteness has been centered in diversity statements and collateral over time. Further, the connection between diversity statements and contemporary reports addressing institutional histories of racism and violence (see: Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery, 2022) might be examined.

Operationalizing Diversity Statements

> To borrow a call to action,
> if the goals of an organizational diversity statement are to be realized, this statement is merely one small part of what must be a multilevel strategic plan that attends to nonverbal messaging, hiring practices, evaluative and performance procedures, and fostering evidence-based strategies to improve interpersonal interactions and department climate (Carnes, Fine, & Sheridan, 2019, p. 23).

In short, there is an obvious need for inquiry on the operationalization of diversity statements and plans. There are more and less resource intensive approaches that might be considered by HEIs in parallel with scholarly work on the topic. For example, diversity

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statements might be paired with not only contemporary histories (reflecting the viewpoints of multiple stakeholders) of "diversity" on the campus at hand, but also clear metrics defining progress with timetable and resources attached (Boykin et al., 2020), rubrics/frameworks for faculty to affirmatively acknowledge in constructing syllabi, and text for student affairs staff to consider presenting at the beginning of officially sponsored campus events. An examination of how the construction of new knowledge and related support of emerging scholars across identity studies is being supported by the HEI in question is also clearly indicated; "a university's curriculum is an expression of the coaction of the accepted narratives of historical context and their sanctioned interpretations" (Unangst & Martínez Alemán, 2021). Finally, both "top-down" and "grassroots" diversity work as reflected in diversity statements might be analyzed (López-Uribe, 2020); this could include the extent to which academic departments and other HEI units establish diversity statements/commitments independent of or complementary to overall HEI documents.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study necessitate mention. First, a clear limitation is the use of publicly available, website-based text; this study cannot be seen as evaluating all HEI policy programmatic and initiatives related to diversity. Nor can the results discussed here be seen as applicable to the American higher education sector as a whole, though indeed our sample does include a range of institutions from open access to research intensive, as well as both public and private HEIs. Additionally, the subjective selection of diversity statement and diversity "home pages" in the absence of a clearly delineated page is acknowledged as a limitation, though in many cases it was abundantly clear that only one page per institution could possibly be identified as such. Further, we acknowledge that by specifically excluding school-based mission statements, we forbear the examination of "the alignment between these statements and the disciplines or programs in these schools… [which display] many variances" between school, department, and degree or credential track (Wilkerson & Evans, 2018, p, 81). We would also be remiss if we did not mention that by focusing on a single national context, we preclude examination of what the extant literature indicates is a wider range of "diversity" constructions (e.g., Pineda & Mishra, 2022); this represents yet another area for further research.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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Human Participants/ Ethical Considerations

This research did not engage with human subjects; however, ethical considerations are observed in alignment with the JHEPALS ethical guidelines.

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Ms. Natalie Borg is a doctoral student of Higher Education at Boston College. In her current role, Natalie serves as an instructor for two undergraduate courses. While at Boston College, Natalie has also worked as a research assistant and as a teaching assistant for a graduate course. She holds an M.Ed. in Higher Education from the University of North Texas and a B.A. in Psychology with a minor in Spanish from the same institution. Natalie's research centers on the marginalization of legally vulnerable students, including refugees, migrants, and forcibly displaced persons, across and within systems of higher education. Specifically, Natalie is interested in systematic supports that are tailored to these populations. Previously, Natalie worked for the United States Census Bureau and the University of North Texas.

Dr. Ishara Casellas Connors is an assistant professor at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Department of Public Service and Administration at Texas A&M University. Dr. Casellas Connors' research examines issues of equity higher education, focused on state and institutional policy related to minority-serving institutions. This work addresses the organizational efforts to address diversity and equity within complex policy and organizational landscapes. Additionally, her work explores the experiences of displaced learners, such as refugee and asylum students, in U.S. higher education to frame how state and institutional policy create a context for student success. Dr. Casellas Connors holds a PhD from Boston College in Higher Education, an MA from Columbia University in Higher and Postsecondary Education, and a BA from Clark University in Business Management.

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