

IMPACT VS. INTENT: DIVERSITY EVALUATION GUIDE FOR WEPAN AND WIE PROGRAMS

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Abstract $\frac{3}{4}$ “Equity Filters” is a dramatic and flexible educational tool to help raise awareness about the main “ism’s” in our society and institutions. Equity Filters focus on issues pertaining to Gender, Economics, Race, Specialized Needs, and Education - the inter-play between these areas, and the multiple challenges that ensue. Based on the diversity training and writings by Phyllis Brady, the Equity Filters concept inspired the WEPAN Multicultural Committee to develop a WEPAN Diversity Evaluation Guide (DEG) that will serve as a sensitivity model, an assessment tool, and a base for other models, programs, curricula, and research. This nascent Diversity Evaluation Guide will be explained and discussed in small groups facilitated by Multicultural Committee members Arleen Anderson, Barbara Bogue, Phyllis Brady, and Marie Reyes. Participants will have the opportunity to make suggestions about WEPAN’s Diversity Evaluation Guide, and its potential applications in their programs, institutions, and literature.

Index Terms $\frac{3}{4}$ Classism, Diversity Evaluation Guide, Equity Filters, Racism

EQUITY FILTERS

In the field of diversity and educational equity, access and relative entitlement are variables that depend upon a complex “filtering” system. *Equity Filters*, as the term is used in this paper, was developed by the author, a diversity and anti-bias educator, and Principal Investigator/Director of a six-year project, Early Equity in Science and Mathematics, funded by the National Science Foundation. *Equity Filters* is a conceptual model, a classifying tool, which is useful in recognizing and analyzing personal, institutional, and societal “isms”, common biases, stereotypes, and inequities. Filters can provide specific pointers to help us assess and understand how we perceive and present information, interact within diverse settings, and participate in cross-group interactions.

Filters can be thought of as each person’s special lens, or as groups’ collective lenses, through which they view themselves and others. Lenses are “colored” by our own experiences and acquired messages, both about us, and about others. Example: “I know most men (women, people of color) don’t trust women (men, whites)”.

These lenses, or filters, may be out of focus - distorting our picture of people and the world. The longer the lenses are out of focus, the more distorted data we collect – and the more our vision accommodates to the distortion, making our view seem “normal”. Example: “Everyone knows that males are aggressors and females are nurturers”.

When this view is shared by a group of people, it can easily become the *standard* view, appearing “normal” because “*everyone* sees it that way”. Example: “All Americans are spoiled and egocentric”. In this way, filters are cumulative in their distortion impact. These distortions become entrenched in mainstream (or “other” stream) legacy, often justifying conflict between groups.

Perpetuated distortion, out-of-focus views, can become “standardized”, or internalized, within the target group as well. An example of this is when a woman believes she and other women are not as intelligent as men in areas such as mathematics. This woman’s beliefs not only cloud her own mathematical skills, but are used as evidence by others that “women *know* they are not as smart as men in math.” In this example, when a woman denies herself or another woman credit for mathematical achievement, or even a job, because of the pervasive attitudes, we witness “internalized oppression”[5]. In this case, women have been socialized to become both victims and perpetrators, either actively or passively.

Filter focus, or clarity, is usually based upon proximity to the subject, field of vision, and amount of data about the subject. The more immediate, varied, and extended are our experiences, and the more facts we have, generally the clearer is our focus. Example: “I mistrusted Arabs until I lived in the Middle East, and I learned firsthand about their values and heard different Arab perspectives.”

Towards the general WEPAN mission to serve as “a catalyst for change to enhance the success of women in the engineering profession”, and towards a specific means of assessing materials, programs, and attitudes that affect women in engineering, the Equity Filters can be categorized into the following five general areas. Each of the general focus areas are followed by a few related sub-topics:

- **GENDER:** equity; stereotypes; institutionalized sexism; internalized sexism; gender expectations; role model
- **ECONOMICS:** class; financial security (and insecurity); privilege versus restrictions; safety and protection; access to life support systems (such as

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medical care, housing, legal support); amount of freedom and unstructured time; hours and years at work; retirement; access to resources and materials; access to excellent education and information

- **RACE, ETHNICITY:** equity; discrimination; stereotypes; institutionalized racism; internalized racism; disparate access to personal and social security based upon racial and ethnic identification; cultural messages
- **SPECIALIZED NEEDS:** physical, emotional, and mental challenges and conditions; health; language; age; moral values; family composition & stability; sexual orientation; lifestyles
- **EDUCATION:** informal; formal; access; resources; integrated/segregated; school structure; school funding; family support; family and cultural messages; educational values; backgrounds; early exposure and experiences; traditions; parents' level of education

LAYERED FILTERS

Each Filter carries different weight, and has variable impact, depending upon its *significance within a context*. Examples of context variables are:

- Relevance (e.g., number of women of color in a predominantly white college vs. a historically black college)
- Proximity to parity (e.g., approach towards a critical mass, such as 10% vs. 35% female students)
- Evidence of change (e.g., steady increase in number of women faculty)
- Options and flexibility (e.g., non-traditional student admissions, flexible student schedules and degree programs)
- Tangible outcomes (e.g., increase in admissions, retention, and hiring of underrepresented groups).

In engineering, where traditionally women have had less access and support than men, female under-representation has increased significance when it is compounded by relatively inadequate access and support in other areas. For instance, women's opportunities in engineering, while not equitable to men's, are still greater in a context of affluence than in the context of poverty. Or, stated more generally, poor women have less access to education and careers than do affluent women. Furthermore, poor women of color have even less access and support than do affluent, white women. And so the effects accumulate, with each layered societal filter compounding the obstacles to women entering and succeeding in engineering.

Through increasing our awareness of this Equity Filter process, we can also use Filters as a *reality check*. By breaking down, analyzing, and describing the filter components, we can learn more about our own, others', and "standard" perceptions. This process assists us to adjust our focus, and even correct the lens. In this way, Equity Filters can serve as an assessment, or evaluation tool, to specify key

questions that should be asked about materials, programs, policies, and practices.

DIVERSITY EVALUATION GUIDE

WEPAN's Multicultural Committee, formed at the NAMEPA/WEPAN Conference 2001 in Arlington, VA, agreed to develop the Filters concept into an evaluation tool for assessing how we are doing in the area of diversity. We started by reviewing WEPAN publications.

Our goal is to develop a Diversity Evaluation Guide, beginning with a structural model that will be enhanced by WEPAN members sharing their diverse experiences, perspectives, and expertise.

As we continue to develop the Equity Filters concept into a Diversity Evaluation Guide (DEG) we expect to become more proficient in assessing WEPAN's progress in the area of diversity and equity, particularly in regards to current and future WEPAN publications, materials, and presentations. The committee believes this Guide could be useful for all members in their own positions, and could be used to help sensitize departments, faculty, and institutions.

Our ultimate goal is to achieve parity for women in engineering. This parity will extend to *all* women of varied backgrounds, identities, and talents. Formerly underrepresented people will become more equitably represented in engineering. Formerly limited engineering fields will become enriched.

DIVERSITY EVALUATION GUIDE CONSIDERATIONS

To introduce the practical Diversity Evaluation Guide, the following preliminary indicators and questions are offered in each of the five main Diversity categories. The Multicultural Committee encourages WEPAN members to participate in the development of this Diversity Evaluation Guide by contributing other questions and concerns, from their own experiences and perspectives.

GENDER: Addressing bias, progressing towards parity and balance

Pointers for Reviewing Materials (written and graphic)

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Are females always represented in publications, graphics and photos, and presentations (e.g., articles by women, graphics and photos representing a cross-section of females, topics about females and relevant issues)?
- b) Is the female representation equitable in number and prominence?
- c) Are the females of diverse backgrounds, identities, and perspectives (e.g., by race and ethnicity, age, physical model, class background)?

- d) Are females represented in all levels of leadership, authority, and economic compensation? Are females over-represented in low-level positions?
- e) Are females represented as active, strong, and confident people?
- f) Are females equitably decision-makers about the purpose and content of publications and presentations?
- g) Are females equitably responsible for soliciting and selecting contributors to publications and presentations?

Pointers for Reviewing Programs and Practices

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Are females represented on all important committees and decision-making bodies?
- b) Are females *equitably* represented on important committees and decision-making bodies? Are the female representatives of varied backgrounds, identities, and perspectives?
- c) Are females equitably represented in hiring processes, and are they equitably in key positions (e.g., Selection Committee Chairs)?
- d) Are females expressly informed and encouraged to apply for open faculty and key staff positions? What communication and recruitment targeting avenues are used (e.g., announcements through WEPAN)?
- e) Are females represented equitably (at least approximating a critical mass) in determining institutional and program goals and objectives, policies, practices?
- f) Are females afforded equal access to information, decision-makers, and funding sources (e.g., grants, scholarships)?
- g) Are programs specifically designed to increase the recruitment and retention of female students, staff, and faculty protected in times of cutbacks, political changes, and shifting priorities (e.g., Women in Engineering programs)?

ECONOMICS: Addressing bias, progressing towards parity and balance

Pointers for Reviewing Materials (written and graphic)

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Is the female representation diverse by class background and perspective (e.g., visible portrayal of varied dress and life style, perspectives by women of different economic status)?
- b) Is the economically diverse female representation equitable in emphasis or prominence (i.e., females of apparent less economic means afforded equal exposure and prestige in publications and photos, representation of *all* women's voices)?
- c) Are the represented females of diverse economic backgrounds, identities, and perspectives also varied by race and ethnicity, age, and physical model? (i.e., are

the "better dressed" and more "powerful" females also of color, or are they white? Are the more "powerful" females always able-bodied, or are females with physical handicaps also represented as economically diverse?)

- d) Are there real-life representations of females with varied and relatively less financial security (e.g., single working and student mothers, challenges for women who hold temporary and non-tenured positions)?
- e) Are issues pertaining to economic inequities for females addressed?

Pointers for Reviewing Programs and Practices

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Are females from diverse class backgrounds and economic access represented in all levels of leadership, authority, and economic compensation? Are working class females over-represented in low-level positions, and upper class females over-represented in leadership positions?
- b) Are females from economically impoverished backgrounds, or who currently face less secure financial positions, equitably considered in policies, decisions, and practices (e.g., are first-generation college graduates, single mothers, non-tenured, and casual employees recognized and supported for promotions)?
- c) Is there an educational or training process for women who may have less fiscal experience and acumen (e.g., managing grants, personal finances, investing)? Is this fiscal education equitably available to all women regardless of their backgrounds or identities?
- d) Are opportunities for career rewards, such as promotion and leadership roles, accommodated by tangible support (e.g., housing options, childcare)?

RACE, ETHNICITY: Addressing bias, progressing towards parity and balance

Pointers for Reviewing Materials (written and graphic)

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Are females of diverse racial and ethnic identities represented in all publications, graphics, photos, and presentations?
- b) Are females of diverse racial and ethnic identities *equitably* represented (i.e., not just token representatives)?
- c) Are females of color and ethnic diversity supported to share their experiences of victory, as well as their stories of struggle?
- d) Are women of color and diverse ethnic identities assumed to *always* be experts on their own experiences – and recognized for having information and perspectives that non-target people need to hear?
- e) Are females of diverse racial and ethnic identities represented in all levels of leadership, authority, and

economic compensation? Are females of color over-represented in low-level positions?

- f) Are females of color and ethnic diversity equitably decision-makers about the purpose and content of publications and presentations?
- g) Are females of color and ethnic diversity equitably responsible for soliciting and selecting contributors to publications and presentations?
- h) Are females of color and ethnic diversity represented as active, strong, and confident people?

Pointers for Reviewing Programs and Practices

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Is institutionalized and systemic racism addressed, and consistently re-addressed, within the program and within the organizational and societal context? Is ethnic discrimination addressed, and re-addressed, within the program and context?
- b) Is there an accountability process, with incentives, for reducing racism and ethnic discrimination? Is this accountability process reviewed periodically? Is accountability accompanied by genuine corrective strategy building?
- c) Are the responsibilities for educating, diversifying, and equalizing institutions, programs, and organizations addressed and assumed by the whole body, particularly by those with relative privilege (i.e., males, whites, middle-class)?
- d) Are people in the target groups (people of color and ethnically under-represented) consulted as experts on their own experiences, and not expected to correct a flawed and oppressive system?
- e) Are females of color and different ethnic groups represented equitably on all important committees and decision-making bodies (i.e., all main groups are represented, and the percentages reflect the larger population)?
- f) Are females of color equitably represented in hiring processes, and are they equitably in key positions (e.g., Selection Committee Chairs)?
- g) Are females of color expressly informed and encouraged to apply for open faculty and key staff positions? Are relevant recruiting avenues sought (e.g., NAMEPA, NSBE, SHPE, AISES, SACNAS, etc.)?
- h) Are females of color represented equitably in determining institutional and program goals and objectives, policies, and practices?
- i) Are females of color afforded equal access to information, decision-making, and funding sources (e.g., grants, scholarships)?
- j) Are programs specifically designed to increase the recruitment and retention of diverse and underrepresented students, staff, and faculty protected in times of cutbacks, political changes, and shifting priorities?

SPECIALIZED NEEDS: Addressing bias, progressing towards parity and balance

Pointers for Reviewing Materials (written and graphic)

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Is consideration taken about diverse females' specialized needs, such as varied abilities and "disabilities" (and handicap'ism), health limitations, diverse language and communication modes (and bilingual issues), age (and age'ism), family composition and stability, sexual orientation and life-style?
- b) Are females of diverse "abilities" and challenges, and with multiple identities, represented equitably in publications, graphics and photos, and presentations (e.g., females who are physically challenged, women of color varied in age)?
- c) Are females with diverse abilities, languages, values, family compositions, and sexual orientations encouraged to share their experiences, including their "specialized" approach to issues and their needs?
- d) Are females of diverse abilities, conditions, and needs represented in all levels of leadership, authority, and economic compensation?
- e) Are females of diverse abilities and needs represented as able, strong, and confident people?
- f) Are females of diverse abilities and needs equitably decision-makers about the purpose and content of publications and presentations? Are they equitably responsible for soliciting and selecting contributors to publications and presentations?

Pointers for Reviewing Programs and Practices

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Are institutionalized assumptions about, and impediments to, people's specialized needs addressed, and consistently re-addressed, within the program and societal context?
- b) Is there an accountability process, with incentives, for reducing impediments and discrimination? Is this accountability process reviewed periodically? Is accountability accompanied by genuine corrective strategies?
- c) Are the responsibilities for educating, diversifying, and equalizing institutions, programs, and organizations addressed and assumed by the whole body, particularly by those with relative privilege (i.e., able-bodied, English speaking, heterosexual people)?
- d) Are people in the underrepresented groups (i.e., disabled, English language learners, homosexuals) consulted as experts on their own experiences and needs, and not expected to correct an exclusive system?
- e) Are there opportunities for females with specialized needs to be represented on all important committees and decision-making bodies?

- f) Are females with specialized needs represented in hiring processes, and are they in key positions (e.g., Selection Committee Chairs)?
- g) Are females, regardless of specialized needs, informed and encouraged to apply for open faculty and key staff positions?
- h) Are females with specialized needs represented equitably in determining institutional and program goals and objectives, policies, and practices?
- i) Are females with specialized needs afforded equal access to information, decision-making, and funding sources (e.g., grants, scholarships)?
- j) Are programs specifically designed to reduce impediments and to help recruit and retain females with specialized needs protected in times of cutbacks, political changes, and shifting priorities?

EDUCATION: Addressing bias, progressing towards parity and balance

Pointers for Reviewing Materials (written and graphic)

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Is consideration taken ... About females' informal and formal educational background? About the quality, structure, and resources in their schools prior to college? About family support for higher education, messages (and mixed messages), parental educational experiences and levels, family concerns and expectations? About early exposure to education generally, and mathematics, science, and pre-engineering specifically?
- b) Are females of diverse educational backgrounds and expectations represented equitably in publications, graphics and photos, and presentations (e.g., females who are first generation college-bound; females from small, rural schools)?
- c) Are females of diverse educational backgrounds and expectations encouraged to share their experiences, including their unique struggles and strategies? Are they encouraged to share with prospective students and their families?
- d) Are females of diverse educational backgrounds and expectations represented in all levels of leadership, authority, and economic compensation?
- e) Are females of diverse educational backgrounds and expectations represented as able, strong, confident, and successful students and professionals?
- f) Are females of diverse educational backgrounds and expectations equitably decision-makers about the purpose and content of publications and presentations? Are they equitably responsible for soliciting and selecting contributors to publications and presentations?

Pointers for Reviewing Programs and Practices

Some key questions, concerns, alerts, and points of discussion:

- a) Are institutionalized assumptions about, and impediments to, people's diverse educational backgrounds and expectations addressed, and consistently re-addressed, within the program and societal context?
- b) Does the whole institution, particularly those people who have had relative access and privilege to formal education, assume the responsibility for educating and hiring females of diverse educational backgrounds? Are people in the underrepresented groups (i.e., first generation college bound) involved as experts and models for others with similar backgrounds, but not held responsible for the institutional inequities?
- c) Are there opportunities for females with diverse educational backgrounds and expectations to be represented on all important committees and decision-making bodies?
- d) Are females with diverse educational backgrounds and expectations represented in hiring processes, and are they in key positions (e.g., Selection Committee Chairs)?
- e) Are females, regardless of their educational backgrounds and fluency in the system, informed and encouraged to apply for open faculty and key staff positions?
- f) Are females with diverse educational backgrounds and expectations represented equitably in determining institutional and program goals and objectives, policies, and practices?
- g) Are females with diverse educational backgrounds and expectations afforded equal access to information, decision-making, and funding sources (e.g., grants, scholarships) – including training on how to access such opportunities?

CONCLUSION

As we progress through some of the Filter categories and considerations, it becomes strikingly more complex to address biases and inequities when the targeted people face multiple challenges. The Filter layers become heavier and more intertwined. And it becomes tempting to avoid the complications. But, for us to make progress towards parity and balance in WEPAN, we must be willing to focus our lenses and scrutinize our organization, as well as our own programs and institutions. We must acknowledge that single "standard" models and perspectives are limited, isolating, and divisive. Just as we know that a "male model" does not suit many females, we need to remember that a sanctioned and sole "female" model does not work for many females either. Once we fully recognize, and embrace, multiple models and perspectives, we can more equitably evaluate and plan. And, more importantly, we can begin the liberating process of seeing each other for who we are, for what we have to offer each other, and for the positive changes we can evoke together, diversely and collaboratively.

For related reading and discussion, these selected references are suggested.

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