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Faculty perceptions of teaching diversity: Definitions, benefits, drawbacks, and barriers

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Abstract

Many U.S. universities have committed to teaching topics of diversity as part of their core curriculum. The purpose of the present investigation is to identify faculty definitions of diversity and the perceived benefits, drawbacks, and barriers of incorporating diversity components in university level teaching. Few other studies have examined how higher education faculty subjectively define diversity or perceive the incorporation of diversity into the curriculum they are responsible for teaching. Instructors-of-record completed a survey asking how they defined diversity as well as the benefits, drawbacks, and barriers of incorporating diversity issues into their teaching. Results show what is meant by the term "diversity" is not cohesively communicated to faculty, and faculty need additional training to prepare them to teach about these issues. Further, data also show the need for institutional-level support for faculty via training, preparation, and providing time to ensure faculty can adequately carry out the university's directive in the courses they teach.

Keywords Diversity · Teaching · Higher education · Curriculum

Teaching about multicultural issues diversity in college is critical to prepare students for a global society (Bigatta et al., 2012). Diversity within U.S. institutions of education is often characterized by variation in race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and values and belief systems (Gao & Mager, 2011). In response, most institutions have a statement about valuing diversity and/or its incorporation across the campus. Further, many U.S. universities have committed to teaching topics of diversity as part of their core curriculum. One difficulty in implementing such objectives is that they are often subjective. As a result, there may be disconnect between the university and those charged with teaching such courses. Further, many different terms have been used to address the concept of diversity as a learning component of higher education, including *multiculturalism, intercultural sensitivity, cultural intelligence, global competence, cross-cultural awareness,* and *global citizenship* (Deardorff, 2011). The result is that many instructors–and, by extension, institutions–are left unsure of what diversity means and mixed experiences when including diversity-related discussions and activities in their courses. The purpose of the present investigation is to identify faculty definitions of diversity and the perceived benefits, drawbacks, and barriers of incorporating diversity components in university level teaching.

The general public, parents, and scholars have expectations that institutions of higher education should facilitate student experience by including diversity perspectives in curriculum (Griffith, Wolfed, Armon, Rios, & Liu, 2016). Cultural competency is an important, highly sought-after work-force skill (Bigatta et al., 2012), and many believe that learning about diversity issues in college will enable students to be successful in an increasingly global employment market (Griffith et al., 2016). Further, higher education provides a platform to not only through curricular content, but also through interactions both inside and outside the classroom (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The presence of diversity on college campuses broadens the range and variety of viewpoints collectively upheld by students, instructors, thus contributing to the quality of higher education (Ryder, Reason, Mitchell, Gillon, & Hemer, 2016).

As a result of these experiences and expectations, institutions are committed to implementing diversity through course material and discussing issues related to diversity awareness

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and knowledge (Mayhew & Grunwald, 2006). Some of the other means of accomplishing engagement with diversity issues at the institutional level include the creation of (administrative) divisions for institutional diversity, incorporation of a mandatory diversity course, increased emphasis on general education programs, and integration of diversity throughout the curriculum. However, despite the need for, and movement toward, including diversity issues as a part of the higher education experience, there are a great deal of difficulties and challenges associated with understanding diversity work at educational institutions. There are inconsistencies with how diversity has been understood, interpreted, and supported in practice by educators (Moses & Chang, 2006). Further, there is persistent uncertainty surrounding how and why to include diversity education in higher education classrooms (Bigatta et al., 2012).

Researchers have asked the question as to who is ultimately responsible for the success of institutionalized effort on diversity (Clark, Fasching-Varner, & Brimhall-Vargas, 2012). If colleges and universities desire to increase awareness and their commitment to diversity, the support of faculty is critical (Mayhew & Grunwald, 2006), as they are counted on (or required) to include diversity content within the courses they teach. Multicultural pedagogy is not a part of the training in many disciplines (Bigatta et al., 2012), yet graduate students go on to become faculty who are expected to teach these courses and/or incorporate diverse perspectives into the courses they teach. Not surprisingly, Valentine, Prentice, Torres, and Arellano (2012) reported that faculty members often feel unprepared or uncertain about incorporating diversity topics as part of college-level instruction.

Research reveals that faculty have a very limited view of diversity education (Sciame-Giesecke, Roden, & Parkison, 2009). For example, Maruyama, Moreno, Gudeman, and Marin (2000) found a substantial agreement among faculty respondents that diversity in the classroom changes the dynamic and increases the degree of focus on issues of diversity. This finding was stronger for faculty members who taught diverse classes and who were more involved in diversity issues (Maruyama et al., 2000). They further asserted that if instructors find diversity irrelevant, they are unlikely to address diversity issues in their teaching. Further, research also supports the idea that the institution and the faculty/instructors at an institution do not always place the same value on diversity education. For example, Astin (1993) examined faculty pedagogical practices to address diversity topics and found a low correlation between the emphases that faculty place on diversity and that of the institution.

The Present Study

While many studies focus on students' experiences with diversity in their college education (a few of which include Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999 Lee & Espino, 2010; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011), very few have focused on faculty perspectives. Little research has investigated the possibility of how higher education faculty and instructors subjectively define diversity or perceive the incorporation of diversity into the curriculum. The purpose of present study is to understand how instructors define diversity and the perceptions they have in teaching about diversity issues at an institution that requires students to take at least one diversity-designated course. The research questions guiding this study are: (a) How do instructors and faculty members define 'diversity' as it relates to the content of the courses they teach? and (b) What are instructor and faculty perceptions of the benefits, drawbacks, and barriers of incorporating diversity issues (as they define them) into their classes?

It should be noted that this study is qualitative in nature; while not generalizable, the results of this study may be transferable to other contexts and groups, and as such we aim to provide sufficient context to allow the reader to make a determination regarding transferability. This study was conducted at a large, land-grant university in the U.S. southern plains with an undergraduate enrollment of approximately 20,000 students (the institution has a Carnegie classification as a doctoral university with high research activity). Approximately 74% of undergraduates are considered "in-state" students and approximately 75% identify as Euro-American. Diversity is considered a general education outcome and is formally built into the undergraduate curriculum by two course designations—'D' ('diversity') for courses that focus on domestic diversity issues. For D courses, more than half of the course content must be related to at least one socially-constructed group in the United States. Goals for diversity courses are that students would (a) critically analyze historical and contemporary examples of the group(s), (b) critically analyze the distribution of benefits and opportunities afforded these groups, (c) understand how the group(s) relate to the student's discipline, and (d) demonstrate this understanding through written work. This formalized portion of the curriculum is important to point out as one interprets the results of the study, as it demonstrates a formal commitment on behalf of the university to prioritize diversity issues as a part of the curriculum—faculty and staff are assumed to be aware of this "requirement."

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that provides a foundation for this study is Bennett's (1984) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The DMIS posits that people from different cultures vary in their views of the world and

asserts that as people accept the differences between cultures and interpret events according to these differences, intercultural communication effectiveness increases (Bennett, 1984). Thus, the DMIS model suggests that intercultural sensitivity can be taught and learned. The model assumes that intercultural sensitivity increases as one moves from left to right on a continuum, with the stages on the leftmost part of the continuum being the most ethnocentric (e.g., denial and defense) and the stages on the right being the most intercuturally sensitive (e.g., adaptation and integration; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; see Fig. 1).

In short, when individuals improve in their ability to subjectively understand and experience cultural differences, their intercultural sensitivity improves (Bennett, 1984). The DMIS has been included in higher education curricula due to the model's implication that intercultural sensitivity can be taught and learned. It also suggests that exploring faculty members' perceptions of diversity issues and perceptions of the teaching experience related to these issues is a worthwhile and an important endeavor.

Method

Procedure and Participants

This study used a qualitative, descriptive research design. Descriptive (or interpretive) designs aim to understand how participants make meaning of a situation and describe collective experiences (Billups, 2021). Descriptive qualitative research "attempts to answer the question of "What is…" rather than seeking to uncover a lived experience, an in-depth assessment of a process or event, or the narrative story of an individual" (Billups, 2021 p. 5). This design was most appropriate given the purpose of this inquiry is to understand how instructors define diversity and the perceptions they have in teaching about diversity issues. Data were collected via an online, open-ended survey sent to all instructors-of-record for undergraduate courses at our university. The survey instrument was developed by the researchers in accordance with the theory and literature on this topic, and questions were specifically constructed to help understand faculty's perceptions about whether diversity-focused teaching should be a part of their jobs, as well as their opinions on the definition of the term "diversity," and what it is like to teach diversity-focused content. Questions included:

- Do you consider a part of your job to have discussions about diversity issues a) in the courses you teach? b) in individual interactions with students? c) In departmental/faculty meetings? d) in committees you are a part of?
- How do you define diversity?
- In your opinion, what (if any) are the benefits of diversity-focused teaching?
- In your opinion, what (if any) are the drawbacks of diversity-focused teaching?
- In your opinion, what (if any) are the barriers of diversity-focused teaching?

All instructors-of-record for undergraduate courses (N = 1604) at a large, land-grant university in the U.S. southern plains were recruited for participation in Spring 2017 (see above for a description of the university). Three-hundred thirty-six agreed to participate, with 209 answering some or all of the survey questions relevant to this study. The "typical" participant was a Caucasian (n = 125), female (n = 83), between the ages of 30–39 (n = 55), at the rank of Assistant Professor (n = 36).

Analysis

The open-ended survey responses were analyzed using Saldaña's (2013) and Creswell's (2014) open coding guidelines. Researchers reviewed the qualitative responses to the above survey questions and assigned coded the data separately. After all data had been coded, two researchers came together to compare codes and create themes (taking care to use in vivo terms whenever possible). Two other members of the team served as 'auditors' to assure consistency and credibility and provide triangulation in analysis to aid in trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Each auditor flagged data they perceived to be miscoded or had the potential to receive multiple codes. Their notes were then given to the coding team for further discussion and analysis. The researchers discussed and re-categorized all codes and themes until consensus was reached, and the team of researchers discussed the meaning and interpretation of all themes as a group (Creswell, 2014).

Results

Analysis of the closed-item survey question—Do you consider it a part of your job to have discussions about diversity issues?—revealed that most respondents did consider it part

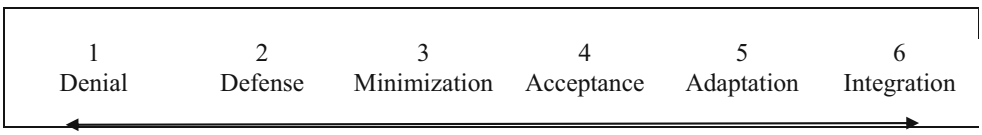

Fig. 1 Bennett's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

of their job to have these discussions in the courses they teach ($n = 152$), in individual interactions with students ($n = 142$), in departmental/faculty meetings ($n = 146$), and in committees they were a part of ($n = 154$).

Open-ended survey responses were analyzed according to the six open-ended questions that were asked in the survey (see Table 1).

Definition of Diversity

Responses to *How do you define diversity?* were coded into three categories: (a) diversity as division/differences/exclusion, (b) diversity as an outcome/action/transformational experience, and (c) diversity as representation. Referencing Bennett's (1984) DMIS model and the stages of personal development, responses coded as "diversity as difference" represented more ethnocentric (akin to a 'lower' stage on the model), and "diversity as representation" as more ethnorelative (akin to a 'higher' stage on the model) ends of the intercultural sensitivity continuum, with "diversity as an outcome/action/transformational experience" as somewhere in between.

Diversity as *difference* The majority of participants' personal definitions of diversity were characterized by discussions of *differences*. These responses mentioned different categories of diversity (e.g., race, sexual orientation) and also referred to diversity as any general differences that exist among people. For example, one participant wrote that diversity is "A group of people that come from different backgrounds and with different experiences." Other responses still noted diversity as "differences," but furthered this definition by viewing the differences as a continuum or a varying mixture. As one participant wrote, "Diversity represents the variety of cultures, ideas, genders, and ethnicity found in any heterogeneous group in our society, community, classroom, etc." Some responses that defined diversity as differences were characterized by an emphasis on the differences individuals bring with them by way of experience and background. For example, "Each individual is unique and brings different experiences, cultures, ways of knowing, and background knowledge to an interaction."

Diversity as an *outcome, action, or transformation* The idea that diversity was an *outcome, event, or transformation* of a person, organization, or society was also evident in the data; this was the second most common way participants discussed the definition of diversity. Those who defined diversity in this way tended to include ideas of understanding, respect, celebration, appreciation, and/or recognition. Responses coded into this theme focused on the idea of action or change as a part of understanding diversity. For example, one participant wrote, diversity is "The process of taking multiple opinions, viewpoints, people and variables into account; the act of willingly stepping out of your comfort zone."

Table 1 Questions and themes

Question	Themes
How do you define diversity?	• Diversity as Division/Differences/Exclusion • Diversity as an Outcome/Action/ Transformational Experience • Diversity as Representation
In your opinion, what (if any) are the benefits of diversity-focused teaching?	• Better learning environment and society • Empathy • Bettering the field of study • Preparing students for 'real world' experiences • Critical thinking • Growth • Increased awareness and understanding
In your opinion, what (if any) are the drawbacks of diversity-focused teaching?	• Backlash • Bias and student resistance • Perceived ineffectiveness • Difficulty of teaching diversity content • Uncertain or none
In your opinion, what (if any) are the barriers to diversity-focused teaching?	• Administrative/ institutional support • General classroom/and social climate • Curricular issues • Characteristics of the instructor

The subcategory of *inclusion* also emerged from these outcome-oriented answers. The Reponses coded in this category defined diversity as a specific action—to not only recognize differences but also indicate the differences are accepted by ensuring all people are included as exemplified by this participant: "The inclusion of different types of people, things, qualities, or ideas in a group."

Diversity as *representation* The final category that emerged from the data was *representation*. This category was characterized by discussion of underrepresented groups, authority, decentering of authority, and other political-oriented or "power" words. This type of definition was the least common of the three. Responses coded into this theme went beyond recognizing differences and transforming thoughts/action and into recognizing privilege and marginalization. For example, one participant noted:

Because of the historical and systemic exclusion of marginalized persons… diversity is something to be realized or achieved; it does not merely exist. Consequently, diversity means the full inclusion of marginalized persons, voices, and perspectives. As such, diversity results in a diminished presence and prioritization of previously privileged and dominant perspectives, i.e. is persons and voices who are and have always been present and heard.

Benefits of Diversity-Focused Teaching

The themes that emerged from perceived benefits of diversity-focused teaching were: (a) better learning environment and society, (b) critical thinking, (c) empathy, (d) growth, (e) bettering the field of study, (f) increased awareness and understanding, and (l) preparing students for 'real world' experiences.

Better Learning Environment and Society Some participants perceived that the benefits of diversity-focused teaching as providing a *better learning environment*. One participant commented that one of the benefits was that this teaching "appreciates all the ideas/people/backgrounds in the room and gives people a place to see how they can interact in college—and beyond—to become better collaborators and communicators." Another participant also expressed the opinion that, "more inclusive [curricula] inspires those typically marginalized by mainstream curriculum, makes everyone more sensitive to others experiences. [It] improves campus climate." Finally, some participants shared their view that diversity-focused teaching promotes peace. One participant wrote that a benefit is that "it reduces unnecessary friction within the society and should help the US to grow, both as an economy and from a societal point of view."

Critical Thinking Other participants wrote that diversity-focused teaching helped develop *critical thinking* skills by providing "alternative ways to consider problems," while supporting students to "become more open minded by learning to critically think about themselves and about others." Other participants noted that courses that cover diversity issues allow students to develop "better critical thinking skills by having students hear multiple claims before evaluating the merits of each claim" and that covering diversity issues in class plays "some small part in helping students learn tools for thinking—and learning—for themselves."

Empathy *Empathy* was also mentioned as a benefit of diversity-focused teaching by participants. Several instructors indicated their optimism that teaching about diversity issues supported "more tolerance of others who are different from oneself. Empathy for issues faced by minorities." Another participant believed these courses enable students "to empathize and not pity. To try to understand that while we are all different we all have feelings and basic needs. We are all human."

Growth Several participants stated *growth* as a perceived benefit of diversity-focused teaching—"Anytime we can develop the maturity levels of our students, it is a good thing." Others noted that diversity-focused teaching was a means "the benefit of enriching a student's educational experience, resulting in a more well-rounded graduate." Others saw the benefit of *growth* as.

…teaching our students to be interested in ideas, cultures, approaches, and ways of understanding that were not necessarily defined for them in their lives as they have experienced them so far and that it's making them less fearful, hostile people overall because they are developing a more open ability to grasp the differences in others without perceiving them as dangerous.

Further, some participants described *growth* is a benefit when students "start to think 'What's the rest of this story?'"

Bettering the Field of Study Several participants acknowledged that teaching about diversity issues benefited their field of study because it helped ensure a more diverse body of scholars. One faculty member noted, "benefits [of diversity-focused teaching] are that more people who could contribute to the field of study will stay in that field of study. If we manage to exclude people, we risk losing those contributions. Another participant also mentioned that, "students want to see that people like them have been successful in their chosen field. Sharing sources and elevating deserving underrepresented scholars makes diverse students feel included. Additionally, majority students see minorities as worthy of classroom discussion.

Increased Awareness and Understanding Participants shared their view that diversity-focused teaching enables students to *increase awareness and understanding*. One faculty member stated that, "Many of our students are white females so they are not aware of potential issues that other students may face, so explicit conversations are important to broaden their thinking and ideally making them more aware." Many participants echoed the idea that "consideration of other viewpoints" was an important contributor to *increasing awareness* among students.

Increased understanding was also mentioned as a benefit. One participant wrote, "It helps us understand one another and our social worlds much better. It can promote more accurate perceptions of reality. It can facilitate a reduction of conflict in regards to 'contentious' issues." Interestingly, another participant wrote.

> In education, we have a tendency to promote the dominant culture through our teaching. This minimizes many cultures and experiences our students share outside of the classroom. By focusing on diversity in teaching, students see their worlds, inside and outside of the classroom, as one place of learning. Also, we as teachers may hold implicit bias and intentionally focusing on diversity allows teachers to recognize and address those biases.

Preparing Students for "Real World" Experiences Preparing students for "real world" experiences was a perceived benefit of diversity-focused teaching. One participant wrote, "Informed students who are ready to contribute to international workplaces and engage with diverse colleagues" and another participant stated that these courses, "Not understanding diversity is like being in a river and not caring about swimming."

Drawbacks of Diversity-Focused Teaching

The themes that emerged regarding the drawbacks of diversity-focused teaching were: (a) backlash, (b) bias and student resistance, (c) perceived ineffectiveness, (d) difficulty of teaching diversity content, and (e) uncertain or none.

Backlash Participants who perceived that *backlash* from students and administration was a major drawback regarding diversity-focused teaching expressed the notion that there could be repercussions for having discussions about diversity issues. One faculty member wrote:

> Our society is built on powerful structures and ideologies that support social stratification, and individuals from dominant groups and identity positions benefit from those systems. As long as diversity-focused teaching seeks to expose those systems and their effects on marginalized groups, it risks alienating and inviting backlash from students, colleagues, administrators, lawmakers, and members of the public who benefit from and/or wish to uphold these systems.

Some also feared "that the administration would not be supportive of such discussions. Or that a student may be offended when asked to challenge assumptions and complaining to administration." Another instructor echoed the sentiment that backlash can come from people across the campus, noting, "a possible drawback is a backlash from the 'in group' that don't understand that their standing is from bias and privilege. And that this privileged group may believe that diversity means 'lowering standards.'"

Bias and Student Resistance Bias, or as one participant put it,

> Misinformation, presentation and acceptance of unbiased non-factual based information, and generally what some might refer to as 'brainwashing' by those of some authority and power (e.g., the instructor) who don't allow the student to critically explore or communicate their own ideas, views/perspectives, etc.

was stated as a drawback of these courses aimed at diversity component. In addition, biases could arise when students perceive, as one participant put it, "indoctrination from liberally minded people to conservatively minded people." Interestingly, one participant informed the researcher that, "the perception among some students that you are inappropriately trying to tell them what thoughts they are allowed to have in their heads. This is mostly a defensive reaction, I think, but it happens as a possible source of bias in teaching diversity-focused courses."

Participants also shared their concern regarding *student resistance* as a potential drawback of diversity-focused teaching. One faculty member felt that "[diversity-focused teaching] doesn't have drawbacks except in that some students may feel threatened because they are outside of their comfort zones," and another "noticed some students immediately 'turn off' when the word, 'diversity,' is mentioned. I think they have grown tired of the many conversations and have been somewhat desensitized." Resistance also came in the form of strong emotions. One instructor mentioned that "sometimes, some students are really resistant to learning about diversity, to the point that they focus on their own anger rather than the course material."

Perceived Ineffectiveness Diversity-focused teaching was also viewed as *ineffective* because some felt it misdirected the course content. These instructors felt that focusing on diversity was a waste of time, with one instructor noting they did not like "spending class time on mandated diversity training when that time could be better spent teaching the course material."

Others also expressed that "focusing on diversity doesn't necessarily 'fit' into some subject areas."

Difficulty of Teaching Diversity Content Another concern pertained to the *difficulty* of engaging in diversity-focused teaching. One participant noted that, "It is difficult and sensitive. It takes effort to encourage people to open their minds and be accepting. Not for the faint of heart." Some participants also felt that diversity-designated courses provided a very narrow perspective regarding the meaning of diversity—"[these courses place] too much emphasis placed on superficial 'diversity' issues such as gender, ethnicity, and lifestyle." Others noted that diversity-focused teaching is difficult because it required instructors to take a different approach to teaching. Similarly, participants also conveyed the idea that it may not be so difficult if there were training or preparation for instructors, but there often is not. As one participant noted, "If such teaching is forced upon individuals without skilled teaching methods/principles resentment could arise."

Uncertain or None When asked about drawbacks to diversity-focused teaching, some participants indicated they were uncertain, most often because they weren't sure how diversity issues fit in their class(es). For example, one instructor wrote they were "not sure how [diversity-focused teaching] can be implemented in my class specifically, therefore, I don't have a good answer for this." However, while some were unsure, others were quite certain—that there were no drawbacks to diversity-focused teaching. One participant commented:

> I do not see any drawbacks. By making it a natural part of the course instead of one topic in it, you emphasize that it is a natural part of what we do as educated members of a society. Hopefully, they will embrace the complexity and seek out the views of others.

Barriers to Diversity-Focused Teaching

Themes that emerged regarding barriers to diversity-focused teaching included (a) administrative/institutional support, (b) general classroom and social climate, (c) curricular issues, and (d) characteristics of the instructor. It should be noted that some responses included more than one barrier and/or fell into multiple categories. Further, some of the answers regarding perceived barriers were similar to those participants gave when asked about drawbacks (see previous section).

Administrative/Institutional Support A few participants indicated that a lack of *administrative/ institutional* support created a barrier. These responses mentioned a lack of support and a lack of resources. As one participant wrote, "Buy-in is the biggest barrier. It's not enough for administration to say diversity is important. They have to actually mean it… that it's not just a box to be checked." Another noted, "institutional support tends to focus on politically accepted speech codes and not developing empathy for other people's experiences."

General Classroom and Social Climate Classroom barriers were also mentioned by participants. These included the general classroom climate and large class sizes that often prohibit building relationships with students. As one participant wrote, a barrier to diversity-focused teaching is "not having an understanding of the backgrounds of the students' in your class or the special viewpoints they bring so that you can address their needs." Relatedly, others reported that the *socio-political climate* as a barrier, especially as it affects what goes on in the college classroom. One participant wrote:

> The "post-truth" problem and how it is impacting the way students evaluate (or fail to evaluate) sources and the ways in which echo chambers facilitate selection and confirmation bias. Also, politicization and the idea that conversations about "contentious" issues are not important or relevant to the college learning experience. Lastly, the individualized nature of our society makes it difficult for people to put themselves in others' shoes and encourages us to blame individuals rather than examining structural conditions and influences.

Other participants noted that general feelings of resistance, discomfort, stereotypes/ prejudice and disinterest were also barriers. For example, one participant noted how these issues were a culmination of resistance to the topic coupled with the current socio-political climate in the US: "Hate to say it, but the glorification of our current president's statements and actions has opened a floodgate of a lot of hateful rhetoric."

Curricular barriers were also mentioned. These responses were characterized by an emphasis on how the curriculum fit within the instructor's personal views and beliefs on diversity-focused teaching. For example, one engineering faculty reflected, "For engineering courses, social factors like diversity are often viewed as not appropriate for problem-solving based courses. I disagree and emphasize communication, teamwork… are important for success in the workforce."

Characteristics of the Instructor Some barriers participants mentioned were specific to the instructor (e.g., personal characteristics, skills, feelings). Specifically, participants made reference to fear, lack of skills and/or training, bias, self-awareness, personal resistance, credibility and confidence. One participant wrote: "Sometimes I'm not sure how to talk about diversity-related issues when the class is very diverse. I don't want to make students stand out or put them on the spot."

Another participant wrote, "For me, one barrier is my own privilege. I don't always recognize the problems that different groups of students are facing because they weren't problems for me."

Several participants acknowledged that teaching about diversity issues is difficult because it takes time and sometimes requires a different approach. One faculty member noted, "It requires more time to do more research to find examples of how women and minorities have changed the field for the better."

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to understand how faculty members define diversity as well as their perceptions of the benefits, drawbacks, and barriers of incorporating diversity issues into their classes at an institution that requires students to take a diversity-designated course. Though the scope was limited to faculty perceptions of diversity-focused teaching at one university, the findings of this study make several contributions to our understanding of faculty perceptions of teaching diversity to undergraduate students.

First, findings underscore that faculty have different definitions of the word diversity; some are limited to acknowledgement of variance among people while others are more complex (e.g., focusing on privilege, power, and marginalization). Bennett's (1984) DMIS model asserts that intercultural sensitivity exists on a continuum, but is not stable—it can change. Like undergraduate students who have different conceptions of diversity, our data reveal that this is true for instructors as well. The university in the present study does not offer a definition of diversity, but *does* set goals for mandated, diversity-designated courses. This lack of definition at the university level means that faculty/instructors operate without a cohesive direction and design courses, discussions, and activities based on their own definitions of the term.

Our data also support that without a clear definition at the institutional level, at least some faculty are uncertain about what should be addressed in classes. For example, when asked about drawbacks, several respondents indicated that they were not sure how diversity-focused teaching fit in their class(es) because they didn't know how to implement it in their course. Some outright indicated that they do not teach about diversity issues at all, nor do they believe it is their responsibility to do so. Further, it's also important to point out that although there is not a lot of clarity on the definition of the term and/or the purpose of diversity-focused teaching, the overwhelming majority of the faculty/instructors who responded to this survey indicated that they consider it to be their job to have these discussions in the courses they teach, in individual interactions with students, in departmental/faculty meetings, and in committees they were a part of.

Despite differences in understanding of the term and some believing it was not their responsibility to teach about diversity issues, the data in this study show that what faculty report as benefits to teaching about diversity issues in college align with what much of the previous research demonstrates. For example, research supports that including diversity perspectives in curriculum helps students in the job market (Griffith et al., 2016), promotes social interaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and expands student knowledge and viewpoints (Hurtado et al., 1999). In this study, faculty echoed many of those sentiments, indicating that the benefits of incorporating diversity issues into the college curriculum include student outcomes like critical thinking, personal growth, increased understanding and awareness of others, and preparing students for "real-world" experiences. Further, the university does set goals for diversity-focused courses; faculty in this study acknowledged that what the university has outlined as goals actually do occur in the classroom—for example, critical thinking and increasing awareness and understanding are benefits of diversity-focused teaching.

With regard to the data regarding faculty perceptions of barriers and drawbacks to diversity-focused teaching, data indicate a breakdown of support and communication at the institutional level. For example, while teaching about diversity is required, faculty indicate a backlash from students and a lack of administrative/institutional support. This finding supports previous work that indicates that many universities develop mission statements that mention diversity, but fail to discuss or provide adequate support for it to permeate day-to-day life on campus (Dumas-Hines, Cochran, & Williams, 2001). This also echoes the work of Plaut et al. (2011), who noted that it is reasonable to expect backlash to multiculturalism, especially from White people who see diversity efforts as a 'zero-sum game.'

The data also reveal that faculty believe they need additional training to prepare them to teach about these issues—participants in this study repeatedly discussed the difficulty of teaching diversity content as both a drawback and a barrier. A barrier faculty reported in this study is time—several participants noted they don't feel they have the time to do the extra work it takes to incorporate examples and rework lectures to allow for diversity discussions. Further, some faculty in this study also indicated that they were not sure diversity issues applied to their field–focusing on diversity "wastes valuable time that should be devoted to learning subject matter and preparing for life after college." This supports Moses and Chang's (2006) assertion that there are contradictions in terms of how diversity has been understood, interpreted, and supported in practice by educators (Moses & Chang, 2006). Further, these data show the need for more time to be devoted at the institutional level to support faculty via training, preparation, and providing time to ensure faculty can adequately carry out the university's directive in the courses they teach.

Mayhew and Grunwald (2006) asserted that for universities to increase awareness and their commitment to diversity, the support of faculty is critical, especially since faculty are often required to include diversity content within the courses they teach.

Conclusion

Many institutions of higher learning incorporate statements regarding the value of diversity to the mission of the campus (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Further, many universities require students to take at least one course that explores diversity as a way to demonstrate the value they place on helping their students learn about global diversity issues (Brown, 2016). However, results of this study show that what is meant by the term "diversity" is not cohesively communicated to faculty responsible for teaching these courses, and without a clear definition at the institutional level, at least some faculty are uncertain about what should be addressed in classes. Additionally (and importantly), although there is not a lot of clarity on the definition of the term and/or the purpose of diversity-focused teaching, the overwhelming majority of the faulty/instructors who responded to this survey indicated that they consider it to be their job to have these discussions in the courses they teach, in individual interactions with students, in departmental/faculty meetings, and in committees they were a part of. As such, faculty in this study believed they need additional training to prepare them to teach about these issues and repeatedly discussed the difficulty of teaching diversity content as both a drawback and a barrier.

Faculty reported a number of drawbacks and barriers that come with teaching diversity-focused courses, and many of those drawbacks and barriers are tied to institutional issues (such as lack of institutional support). Understanding faculty's experiences in teaching these courses can better help prepare instructors and administrators in navigating some of the challenges they face in addressing issues of diversity. These data also show the need for more time to be devoted at the institutional level to support faculty via training, preparation, and providing time to ensure faculty can adequately carry out the university's directive in the courses they teach.

Finally, the data in this study suggest several benefits of diversity-focused teaching. Faculty in this study reflected on their beliefs that focusing on these issues benefits students, the classroom and campus climate, society, individual fields of study, and the faculty themselves. These outcomes are important but can be difficult to measure. It is critical for the university to conduct systematic collection of data on diversity courses both from the students and the faculty, and develop plans to document (and, when needed, improve) student learning. Exploring effective teaching methods and instructor/student qualities that influence those learning outcomes is also needed; this can help universities provide proper training and resources to faculty who are engaging in diversity-focused teaching and curricula.

Future research on this topic should continue to pursue the connection (or disconnection) between university directives regarding diversity initiatives in the classroom and the institutional supports for faculty via training, preparation, and providing time to ensure faculty can adequately carry out the university's directive in the courses they teach. Further, given the variety of definitions and perspectives surrounding what is meant by "diversity," future inquiries could pursue which of these definitions fit the purpose of diversity education at institutions of higher education. Clarifying an institution's purpose with regard to this topic may further inform training, resources, and supports provided to faculty, students, and staff. Future research can also continue to explore effective teaching methods and instructor/student qualities that influence diversity learning outcomes.

Declarations The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. All gathered data was confidential, and participants were informed about all the proper details about the study and their role in it, including that they can withdraw at any point. Attaining formal and written informed consent was not regarded as necessary as voluntary completion of the questionnaires was regarded as providing consent, and no medical information was gathered.

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University institutional review board (IRB approval number ED-17-23).

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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