

What is diversity?

Diversity in its most simple form can be defined as “all the similarities and differences amongst people.” In other words, it’s a combination of all the characteristics that make us individuals such as age, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, disability, military experience, and socio-economic background; ideas, attitudes, beliefs, educational background, perspectives, values, and so on. A culture of diversity embodies understanding ourselves and each other, moving beyond tolerance to acceptance, and wholly embracing the richness of each individual. The power of diversity is unleashed when we respect and value differences.

Isn’t diversity just another fancy name for Affirmative Action or Equal Employment Opportunity?

No. Affirmative action is a legally driven mandate that government contractors take positive steps (affirmative action) to ensure the recruitment and advancement of qualified minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and covered veterans, as in education and employment. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) is employment practices that ensure nondiscrimination, fairness, and equity in the workplace.

I often see the word “inclusion” with the word diversity. What is inclusion?

Inclusion is a state of being valued, respected, and supported. It’s about focusing on the essential needs of every individual and ensuring suitable settings are in place for each person to achieve her or his full potential. Inclusion should be reflected in an organization’s culture, practices, and relationships that are in place to support a diverse workforce. Hypothetically, diversity and inclusion is like a salad. Diversity would represent independent salad ingredients like vegetables and fruits; inclusion would be the integration of the assorted vegetables and fruits in a salad bowl, making for a great, varied salad!

As a student/faculty/staff member, why should I be concerned with diversity?

Because you are diverse! Because, if we work with people from different backgrounds, experiences, and working styles, we learn and acquire an alternative outlook that may aid us in making a well-rounded decision in our own lives. Diversity on campuses enables learning with people from a variety of experiences that encourages collaboration and fosters innovation, thus benefitting all. Research has revealed that “overall academic and social effects of increased diversity on campus are likely to be positive, ranging from higher levels of educational achievement to the improvement of near- and long-term intergroup relations.”

How can I contribute to (make a positive impact on) the university’s mission to be a diverse and inclusive campus?

You can make a positive impact by building collaborative and mutually beneficial working relationships with people of different backgrounds, and refer qualified diverse candidates to support the goal of enhancing our diversity on campus. You can support others to increase their awareness and acceptance of cultural differences, and establish a common understanding of cultural variances, through diversity training provided by the Office of Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics (CDE). The intent is to understand and remove barriers due to our differences, and to leverage the benefits our diversity has to offer.

Why are employees asked to designate their Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Protected Veteran Status, and Disability Status during Mason’s onboarding process?

George Mason University is a federal government contractor and is legally obligated to comply with a number of requirements and regulations. The Department of Labor (DOL) requires federal contractors to collect data on gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and veteran status. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) mandates that institutions of higher education that receive federal assistance collect and report race and ethnicity data for faculty, staff, and students using specific categories.

Do all differences matter?

The relevance of differences vary depending on a multitude of factors, like context and situation. Individuals could be of the same ethnicity and gender, yet their creed, age, family status, and perhaps the country they are from may differ significantly. These dissimilarities may impact how the individuals relate to one another. Indeed, all differences matter and everyone is diverse.

What do diversity and inclusion have to do with the “Search Committee” training?

It is the university’s philosophy that diversity creates an academic environment where intercultural skills are developed and enacted among diverse campus constituencies, with community partners, and within classroom and research practices. As such, prospective members of a Search Committee (SC) are trained on how to incorporate this philosophy into their new role; one example is learning how to conduct a fair, legal, and unbiased recruitment process. Intentionality in our efforts to recruit, develop, retain, and advance diverse talent creates opportunities for all employees to bring innovative ideas to the workplace in an environment that cultivates the exchange of broad intelligence.

