Note on Terminology
DiversityEdu makes every effort to use terminology and definitions that are advocated by members of the communities under discussion and that accurately reflect the scholarship on which our courses are based. It should be noted, however, that identity terminology changes rapidly and definitions of terms often vary, including among individuals and groups that self-identify as members of such communities.

Among some communities, gendered pronouns are considered to be exclusionary and in conflict with how people identify themselves. In this course, you will hear non-gendered pronouns like “they” and “them,” as well as gendered pronouns like “he,” “she,” “him,” and “her.”

For some people, the term “minority” reinforces offensive notions of ethnic, racial, or other hierarchy. It can also be an inaccurate description of a particular community’s demographic reality. In this course, the term “minority” is used only in connection with scholarship that uses it.

A

Ableism: An overarching, unconscious bias or world view in favor of people without disabilities, which causes us to overlook interaction with the world from the point of view of people with disabilities.

Ally: An individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against.

B

Bisexual: A sexual orientation of a person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same or other genders.

C

Cisgender: A term that describes people whose gender identity corresponds with the gender they were assigned at birth.

D

Diversity: All of our differences and similarities, whether we see them right away or not.
Diversity resistance: A term that refers to behaviors and practices that overtly or passively interfere with diversity initiatives.

Environmental microaggression: An activity or overall climate in a given place that sends a hostile, degrading, or exclusionary message.

Gay: A sexual orientation of a person who is romantically and/or sexually attracted to members of the same gender; sometimes used as an umbrella term for the LGBQ community as a whole.

Gender expression: An individual’s presentation of their gender through behavior, clothing, hairstyle, voice, body characteristics, etc.

Gender identity: An individual’s sense of their own gender.

Gender non-conforming: An identity of a person who has gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal gender expectations.

Genderqueer: An identity term describing a person who does not subscribe to traditional gender distinctions but may identify with being both, either, or neither masculine nor feminine; sometimes interchangeable with non-binary.

Iceberg model: As used in DiversityEdu, a diagram for envisioning diversity between people. Differences and similarities we immediately see are referred to as “above the waterline,” those that are partly hidden from plain view or understanding are referred to as “at the waterline,” and those we cannot see or understand right away are referred to as “below the waterline.”

Identity-first terminology: Some advocates and members of the disability community prefer this terminology because they see disability as an integral part of identity (e.g., disabled person).
**L**

**Ladder of inference:** A thinking process that refers to the way we use our past experiences to attribute meaning, draw conclusions, and form beliefs about certain people and situations.

**Latinx:** A term used to be more inclusive of Latin American gender non-conforming people; an example of a term that is evolving rapidly and is adopted by some people, but not everyone.

**Lesbian:** A sexual orientation of a person who identifies as a woman and is primarily attracted to other women romantically and/or sexually.

**M**

**Microaffirmation:** Subtle and seemingly small acknowledgements of a person’s value and accomplishments, displayed either publicly or privately; also referred to as “microkindnesses.”

**Microaggression:** Seemingly minor statements, behaviors, and environments that communicate exclusionary or derogatory messages and can have a lasting negative impact on people.

**N**

**Narrative strategy:** An analytical technique that brings forth alternative views and experiences and makes them imaginable; an element of a growing number of programs in research methodology, law, medicine, and other fields.

**Non-binary:** A term of self-identification describing an individual’s gender identity that may fall outside of the man-woman gender binary; may be both, either, or neither masculine nor feminine.

**O**

**P**

**Person-first terminology:** Some advocates and legislators prefer this terminology because it distinguishes between the person and the disability (e.g., person with a disability).

**Presumption of incompetence:** The false link of diversity to “lower quality” of minority-group employees.
**Q**

**Queer**: A self-affirming and inclusive term referring to an individual who identifies as LGBTQ, intersex, or non-binary, or who questions binary gender norms; can also refer to the sexual orientation of an individual for whom gender doesn't play a part in romantic/sexual attraction.

**R**

**S**

**Stereotype**: An oversimplification based on an individual's group membership.

**T**

**Transgender**: Most commonly used to describe people whose gender identity and/or expression is sometimes or always different from the gender they were assigned at birth.

**U**

**Unconscious bias**: Biases of which we are unaware.

**V**

**Virtuous circle**: As used in DiversityEdu, a cyclical process of reducing bias. Taking steps to bring more diversity into the community results in more frequent encounters with diversity and the breakdown of false assumptions about people from diverse or negatively stigmatized backgrounds—which, in turn, leads to more diversity in the community.

**W**

**X**

**Y**

**Z**