

# STANDARDS FOR INCLUSIVE POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES

Adopted by the Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity  
April 26, 2004

## Background:

This current draft of the Standards for Inclusive Policies, Programs, and Practices (SIPPP) emerges from the extended and comprehensive review process that took place over a period of nearly two years beginning in fall of 2002. The university community has had an opportunity to comment on the draft at numerous points, including the two Diversity Summits in January 2003 and 2004, and through publication in the *Virginia Tech Conductor* in February 2003. Various drafts have incorporated not only comments from students, faculty, staff, and administrators, but also evolving legal advice.

The Standards are intended to be broad in concept but flexible in application, providing a framework of expectation but leaving the details to those with the expertise and responsibility for program development and oversight. The Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity endorses and adopts these Standards as a guide to the university community for developing or revising a wide variety of programs, services, or practices that touch on the diversity of our community.

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## Preamble

"The core values of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University are freedom of inquiry, personal integrity, mutual respect, promoting personal and professional growth, fostering a lifelong commitment to learning, and contributing to society." (University Strategic Plan)

These Standards for Inclusive Policies, Programs, and Practices are established to guide the development, implementation and assessment of university programs and activities designed to support both the mission of the university, and these values, which address the common bond between, and the diversity among, all the members of the community.

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## Legal Standard

**The policy, procedure, or practice should not restrict or exclude any individual from accessing, participating in, or contributing to any program solely on the basis of race, sex, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, or political affiliation in accordance with federal and state laws and university policy.**

*Race exclusive programs are legally suspect and therefore generally prohibited. In the University of Michigan cases, the Supreme Court has upheld the use of race as a factor in admissions under certain narrowly defined conditions. Virginia Tech will adhere to the limited use of race as one of many factors in a whole-file review of applicants for undergraduate admissions. Except as federal and state law may allow, race will not be used as a factor in selection for other university programs or benefits, including private scholarship aid.*

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## Inclusion Standard

**Virginia Tech seeks to be an inclusive community that prides itself on the full participation of students, faculty, and staff from a wide variety of backgrounds. A sense of inclusion rather than exclusion should be conveyed to potential applicants or participants through program materials and the selection process and criteria.**

*The university recognizes that particular students or employees will have special needs or concerns that may be addressed most effectively by a targeted (but not exclusive) program. Research can identify and document the justification for a more focused approach. The university's obligation in such instances is to assure that targeted programs are only a part of a comprehensive array of services or programs addressing a wide variety of student or employee needs. Best educational practices would suggest that program directors are continually monitoring critical measures, adapting programs to meet identified needs very broadly defined, and looking for categories that reach beyond race, ethnicity, and gender whenever possible. The commitment to inclusion should also extend to the critical review of programs or policies that are race neutral in language and intent but result in outcomes that unfairly privilege select groups.*

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## Climate Standard

**University programs or activities should be designed to operate in and to promote a positive, welcoming educational and work environment, characterized by mutual respect, the right to express freely one's opinion, civility, cultural sensitivity, multiple perspectives, and a focus on creating and sustaining a just community.**

*High quality, productive and creative higher education programs are typically found in open, engaging, and inclusive teaching, learning and/or working environments.*

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### **Competency Standard**

**The program or activity should foster the individual and collective pursuit of excellence and effectiveness in all learning, teaching, research, outreach and/or support endeavors. Both excellence and effectiveness are enhanced by inclusiveness and sensitivity to justice and fairness issues.**

*By also attending to equity issues, individuals and groups increase their appreciation and understanding of differences (cultural, racial, gender, disabilities, religious, etc.), and develop their knowledge and skills in managing or negotiating relationships and other interactions within a diverse global environment. Development of inter-cultural competence should be a priority for all members of the university community and the responsibility of both programs and individuals to achieve.*

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### **Accountability Standard**

**A diverse university community is important to the educational environment at Virginia Tech. University entities at all levels must take responsibility for identifying the ways in which they can contribute to the diversity of the student body, faculty, staff, curriculum, pedagogy, research and outreach agendas, and be held accountable for such contributions.**

*Documentation of the contribution that diverse backgrounds and perspectives make to the vitality of our classrooms and work environments is a critical priority. Internal assessments and external reviews should reflect the unit's goals and progress with respect to equity and diversity issues. Senior administrators should also be held accountable for fostering achievement of a diverse working and learning environment as part of their required annual and periodic reviews.*

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### **Student Development Standard**

**Programs, activities, or services should foster constructive and frequent opportunities for students with different backgrounds and perspectives to engage in meaningful dialogue and reflection, and to acquire the understanding, knowledge, and skills to be proactive, competent contributors to a welcoming and just community. While**

**student development is a primary goal of our work as an educational institution, this standard of personal development is equally appropriate for faculty and staff.**

*Research shows that learning outcomes and social development are enhanced when students encounter perspectives that depart from their own worldview and past experience, causing them to think actively and to reassess long-held, and perhaps unexamined, assumptions. Greater exposure to diversity has been associated with gains in critical thinking, higher levels of motivation and engagement, and greater satisfaction with the college experience. Such gains are the result of active engagement rather than mere coexistence. To maximize the educational benefits of diversity, programs both in and out of the classroom should be designed to encourage interaction among a diverse group of peers, to model civil discourse, and to engage all members of the university community in considering perspectives different from their own.*