

The Elliott School Hosts Annual Inclusive Excellence Week

The theme for the 2024 Inclusive Excellence Week was “Can We Talk: The Global Language of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion.”

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Alexa Alice Joubin and Lakeisha R. Harrison hosted a discussion focused on understanding DEI terminology across global lines.

The Elliott School of International Affairs is hosting its fourth annual diversity conference, which includes a week of expert-led discussions on how diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) resonates and differentiates worldwide.

Wednesday’s session, held at the Lindner Family Commons, was titled “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Around the World” and focused on understanding DEI terminology across global lines.

The week-long event began on Monday with the Spring 2024 Elliott School Student Organization Fair followed by panel discussions on the language of DEI around the globe. Other sessions included “The First Black Nation in the Americas: Haiti's Global Contributions” and “Understanding Cultural Values to Guide Interactions with Students.”

[Lakeisha R. Harrison](#), the assistant dean for student services, diversity, equity and inclusion, at the Elliott School, introduced the event on Wednesday. “The speakers here today join us to take a deep dive into our conference about the language of diversity, equity and inclusion around the world,” Harrison said.

[Alexa Alice Joubin](#)—a professor of English, women's, gender and sexuality studies, theatre, international affairs, and East Asian languages and literature--moderated the discussion. Joubin explained that although the language of DEI may differ across the globe, the aim of finding language to bring people together remains the same.

“And above all else, what can we learn from different cultures about inclusive practices? There are always lessons to be learned about how things are done differently,” Joubin said.

The speakers were [Fatiah Touray](#), the executive director of inclusion and equity at New York University in Abu Dhabi, and [Shehzad Charania](#), the director of legal affairs and international relations at Government Communications Headquarters, which is part of the United Kingdom's Intelligence Community.

“I get excited about having the opportunity to do this work, in this region, in this way,” Touray said. “To give you a little bit of context about NYU Abu Dhabi, we have about 2,000 students coming from over 126 different countries. This means they're often coming in with different perspectives of what diversity means.”

For example, she said, they have a lot of students who come from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and in those nations, using terms like “ethnic minority” is seen as discriminatory.

“They focus a lot on cohesion, and they're just kind of moving away from that language,” Touray said.

In the United Arab Emirates, one of the terms used in conversations about diversity is tolerance.

“And if you don't speak Arabic, people find the term to be offensive,” Touray said. “But its meaning is rooted in cohesion.”

In the United States, many conversations on diversity tend to center on racism due to the history of enslavement and the treatment of Indigenous people, Touray said. But in India, it's not about Black or white but the caste system.

Touray said because she works with students, faculty and staff from various countries around the world, it's important to understand that everyone is coming in with different perspectives and assigning varying meanings to these DEI terms. Part of her role at NYU is to make meaning of those differences and find unifying concepts.

“One of them is colonialism. Colonialism has impacted almost every single person in the world. In many cases, either you've come from a country that has been colonized, or you come from a country that did the colonizing,” Touray said. “And we talk about that when we talk about equity. And equity is important because it doesn't mean talk about just contemporary differences, but it considers history.”

Another topic that is relevant across global lines is colorism, Touray said. She said it's pervasive in countries across many continents including Asia, Africa and the Americas.

“Colorism is a byproduct of racism and colonialism,” Touray said. “It helps to examine how that happened within one’s cultural group and understand there is a historical record for why.”

Charania spoke about the acronyms that group nonwhite racial and ethnic groups in the UK. He explained that a commonly used acronym was BME, which stands for Black and minority ethnic.

“That of course excluded the largest ethnic group in the UK, which was the Asian population,” Charania said.

The acronym was later updated to BAME, which stands for Black, Asian and minority ethnic.

“I think in some ways those acronyms work well by seeking to understand this kind of shared experience that people from nonwhite backgrounds have in the UK. But it also has a lot of flaws,” Charania said.

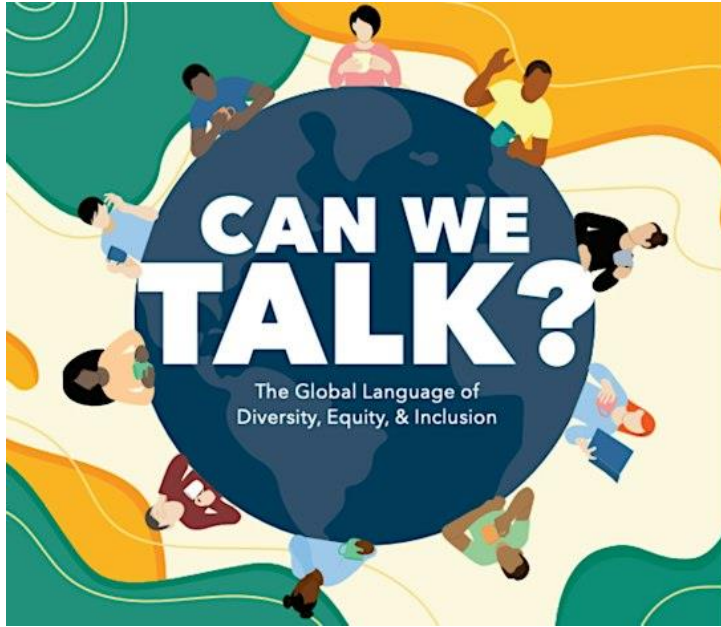
He explained by clumsily grouping people based on wide parameters, there is a lack of nuance that ignores important cultural differences and experiences. He said those acronyms aren’t used often in the UK anymore, which is a positive sign.

“I think it is a testament to the increasing sophistication in our understanding of race and ethnicity and acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't do justice to that rich tapestry of individual and collective narratives,” Charania said.

He explained it is also important to understand people’s lived experiences and how race plays a role, sharing the example of workplace discrimination.

“When we think about equity, diversity, inclusion, we have to recognize that these aren't just lofty ideals but integral to the performance of successful organizations,” Charania said.

“So it's not simply enough to recruit a diverse workforce. We also must cultivate an inclusive culture where every individual has the opportunity to thrive,” he said. “And so it’s not the case that diversity and inclusion can be achieved just through chance. It requires deliberate positive interventions. It requires us, for example, to examine our recruitment processes in the workplace or university.”



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