

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Kinesiology Departments and Allied Health Professions: Barriers, Facilitators, and Effective Strategies

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This paper critically examines diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions, with a focus on overcoming systemic barriers to participation for culturally diverse groups, including Indigenous peoples, individuals with disabilities, women, and LGBTQ2S+ individuals. Addressing recent declines in growth and enrollment alongside persistent underrepresentation, this review identifies the structural and perceptual challenges that hinder DEI within these fields. Analyzing empirical research, theoretical perspectives, and best practices, the study integrates diverse sources to elucidate barriers, such as stereotype biases, limited representation, and cultural exclusion, while also identifying facilitators like mentorship, inclusive recruitment, and cultural competency training. A comprehensive literature review reveals effective strategies to increase diversity and foster inclusivity within Kinesiology and Allied Health programs. For instance, one collaborative initiative highlighted is a community-based mentorship program that pairs underrepresented students with experienced professionals, enhancing career preparedness and fostering belonging. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research, such as examining the long-term impact of outreach programs on diverse population enrollment in Kinesiology. By actively promoting DEI through outreach, partnerships, and structural reform, the study advocates for a more equitable and inclusive framework to shape the future of these disciplines.

Keywords: Representation, diversity, exercise science, higher education, pedagogy, stereotypes, mentorship

Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Kinesiology Departments

Kinesiology, the scientific study of human movement and physical activity, has experienced significant growth and transformation as an academic discipline in recent decades (Dunn, 2009; Smith et al., 2019). Originally rooted in physical education and later exercise science, Kinesiology has expanded its scope to encompass a diverse range of sub-disciplines, including exercise physiology, biomechanics, clinical exercise physiology, coaching, sport psychology, and athletic training (Arora & Wolbring, 2022; Thomas, 2003). This expansion has led to increased recognition of the importance of Kinesiology in promoting human health, performance, and well-being (Gehrke, 1988; Joseph & Kriger, 2021; Williams & Smith, 2020).

It is crucial first to acknowledge that, on a national scale, undergraduate Kinesiology enrollments experienced a meteoric surge between 2000 and 2016 (Cairns, 2020), making it the second-fastest growing major in higher education in the United States. Yet, the landscape shifted very quickly following the Covid-19 pandemic, with enrollments either plateauing or declining in departments across U.S. public universities (Urtel et

al., 2022). Research conducted by Bassett et al. (2018) also illuminates a disconcerting decline in student numbers during the specified period, shedding light on the challenges facing Kinesiology programs in the post-pandemic era.

Underrepresentation of minority groups in science and engineering remains a significant concern, with Black, Hispanic, and Native American students collectively comprising a disproportionately small percentage of graduates in these fields. According to the National Science Foundation, Black students earned only 5% of engineering degrees and Hispanic students 12% as of 2018, figures that highlight systemic barriers affecting access and success for these groups (National Science Foundation, 2021; NCSES, 2023). This disparity is particularly problematic in allied health fields like Kinesiology, where diverse perspectives are essential for understanding and addressing the health needs of varied communities. A workforce that mirrors the diversity of the populations it serves is crucial in enhancing culturally competent care, reducing health disparities, and promoting wellness across different demographics. The persistent lack of representation underscores the urgent need for Kinesiology departments to implement targeted diversity, equity,

and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, including mentorship programs, financial support, and community outreach efforts. These DEI strategies not only aim to attract and retain students from underrepresented backgrounds but also strengthen the field's overall capacity to deliver inclusive, culturally sensitive health-care solutions.

Kinesiology and Exercise Science hold tremendous potential to contribute to human health and well-being by promoting physical activity, fitness, and preventative care strategies. Given this potential, there is a critical opportunity for Kinesiology programs to play an essential role in advancing health equity and reducing health disparities, especially by addressing gaps in meeting physical activity recommendations across diverse populations. However, the persistent underrepresentation of marginalized groups, such as racialized minorities, women, LGBTQ2S+ individuals, people with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples, limits the field's ability to serve diverse communities effectively. A recent review by Arora and Wolbring (2022) highlights these representation gaps in Kinesiology and allied health disciplines, underscoring the urgent need for increased efforts in equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion (EEDI) initiatives within these programs. By fostering an inclusive academic environment that reflects the populations they aim to serve, Kinesiology departments can not only support the academic success of underrepresented students but also contribute to a more culturally competent and responsive healthcare workforce. This approach aligns with broader objectives to address health inequities and ensure that all individuals have the resources and opportunities to achieve optimal health outcomes.

Kinesiology departments in higher education institutions play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the discipline (Campbell, 2007; Clark, 2021). They create spaces for aspiring professionals, researchers, and educators, preparing them to contribute to the advancement of physical activity sciences (Bulger et al., 2016). As the field of Kinesiology has grown however, there exists a persistent disparity in the cultural and racial demographics of Kinesiology majors and professionals compared to the general U.S. population (Barfield et al., 2012; Gill, 2021). As such, a diverse and inclusive representation within the Kinesiology ranks which reflect the multifaceted needs of an increasingly diverse society is needed (Richards et al., 2019). To meet the needs of our ever-changing society, it is essential to promote inclusivity and ensure representation from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences within the field of Kinesiology. Addressing the issue of diversity in Kinesiology departments could lead to a more robust and flourishing future for this critical discipline.

Importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Kinesiology Departments

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental principles that underpin the strength and vitality of any academic discipline (Chun & Feagin, 2019; Fassinger & Hensler-McGinnis, 2005). In

the context of Kinesiology, fostering diversity is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for the future growth, relevance, and success of the field (Hodge & Wiggins, 2010; Lewis et al., 2022). Embracing diversity brings unique perspectives, experiences, and talents that enrich the learning environment, research endeavors, and practical applications of Kinesiology (Clouten et al., 2006). Equity can be seen as creating fair and just opportunities for all individuals to access and engage in Kinesiology education and professions, regardless of their background or identity, (Chester et al., 2013; Russell et al., 2022). Inclusion, on the other hand, entails creating an environment that fosters a sense of belonging, respect, and support for all members of the Kinesiology community, ensuring that each voice is heard and valued (Russell et al., 2022).

The purpose of this paper then, is to explore the barriers and facilitators such as biases and lack of representation that influence the diversity of women, ethnicity, culture, and sexual orientation of Kinesiology majors. Allied health professionals within Kinesiology departments, as well as those in related academic programs such as Engineering and Nursing, play a critical role in fostering interdisciplinary approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). By integrating insights from these fields, Kinesiology can better address the multifaceted challenges of underrepresentation and cultural competency, thereby creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for both students and professionals across these interconnected disciplines. By shedding light on the challenges and opportunities associated with DEI in Kinesiology departments, the aim is to raise awareness among educators, administrators, and stakeholders about the need for proactive efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity in the discipline.

This paper proceeds with a critical examination of the existing literature, identifying both the obstacles and catalysts for enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions. The subsequent sections detail prominent barriers, such as systemic biases, underrepresentation, and cultural stereotypes, that hinder DEI progress in these fields. This is followed by an analysis of effective facilitators, including structured mentorship initiatives, strategic recruitment practices, and the implementation of cultural competency training for faculty and staff. The paper culminates in a set of evidence-based recommendations, offering a foundation for future research and actionable strategies aimed at cultivating a more inclusive and diverse environment within the discipline.

Literature Review

Evolution and Growth of Kinesiology as an Academic Major

The field of Kinesiology has experienced significant evolution and growth over the years, transforming from its origins in

physical education and exercise science to a multidisciplinary and dynamic academic major (Pennington, 2022). This transformation has been driven by advancements in scientific research, technology, and societal needs (Dunn, 2009). Historically speaking, Kinesiology programs have expanded their scope to encompass various sub-disciplines, including exercise physiology, biomechanics, coaching, sport psychology, and athletic training (Thomas, 2003). Sport Management is often integrated as a distinct component within many Kinesiology departments, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the field. As Kinesiology has diversified, its potential to contribute to human health, performance, and well-being has become increasingly recognized (Anderson, 2020; Gehrke, 1988).

Current State of Diversity in Kinesiology Departments and Allied Health Professions

Despite the growth and expansion of the Kinesiology field, the representation of diverse cultural and racial groups in Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions remains limited (Barfield et al., 2012; Bunn, 2023). Studies indicate that the demographics of Kinesiology majors have not kept pace with the changing population demographics of the United States (Park et al., 2023; Snyder et al., 2009). African American, Hispanic, Native American, and other underrepresented minoritized students continue to be underrepresented in Kinesiology programs (Donini-Lenhoff & Brotherton, 2010). This lack of diversity raises concerns about the inclusivity and relevance to the discipline addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse society (Baldwin et al., 2006; Pennington, 2023).

Barriers to Diversity in Kinesiology Program

While there are barriers and much work remains, it may be overly generalized to state that efforts towards inclusion have been uniformly delayed. Recent initiatives demonstrate progress within Kinesiology programs, such as the implementation of diversity-centered mentorships and targeted recruitment strategies aimed at reducing disparities in student representation (Bunn, 2023). These efforts underscore a proactive shift, though challenges to equitable inclusion persist. It would be important to first discuss potential barriers which have contributed to a delay in Kinesiology programs efforts towards inclusion of diverse populations. When considering the current state of diversity in Kinesiology, research has shown a consistent lack of representation of students and professionals from diverse backgrounds. This is due to complex racial and cultural components associated with higher education or historically relevant stereotypes or biases which have prevented diverse populations from inclusion in the Kinesiology field (Urciuoli, 2009).

Lack of representation and role models. One of the key barriers to diversity in Kinesiology departments is the lack of representation and role models from diverse backgrounds (Brown et al., 2005; Pennington, 2023). Underrepresentation of

diverse faculty, staff, and students can foster an environment where individuals from marginalized groups perceive limited belonging or reduced potential for success within the field (Barfield et al., 2012). This lack of representation can perpetuate systemic barriers, hinder inclusivity efforts, and reinforce stereotypes, ultimately impacting recruitment, retention, and achievement among marginalized populations. Additionally, the absence of diverse role models can also limit the aspirations of underrepresented students, leading to a decreased interest in pursuing careers in Kinesiology (Nachman et al., 2022; Richards et al., 2017).

Systemic racial and cultural variables. Systemic racial and cultural variables also contribute to the disparity in diversity within Kinesiology programs (Arroyo-Rojas et al., 2022; Chester et al., 2013). These variables are long known to encompass broader societal factors, historical contexts, and institutional practices that perpetuate inequalities and hinder the inclusion of marginalized groups in academic settings (Spector, 2004). Some examples of these could include biased admission criteria, unequal access to resources, and discriminatory practices that affect the recruitment and retention of diverse students (Clouten et al., 2006; Urtel et al., 2022).

Stereotypes and biases. Unconscious biases such as gender and unconsciously associating certain stereotypes with different genders that can significantly influence decision-making processes related to recruitment, admissions, and faculty hiring in Kinesiology departments (Ford Foundation, 2020; Russell et al., 2019). These biases can extend to the perception of athletes, potentially discouraging some from pursuing Kinesiology as a major due to assumptions about their academic abilities or interests (Bulger et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2021). Addressing these biases and stereotypes is essential to foster an inclusive and equitable environment that supports the success of all students and professionals in Kinesiology (Neilson & Lauder, 2008; Powell et al., 2023). Inclusive institutional policies and practices are essential for improving equity and representation within academic environments, as they have been shown to significantly influence the engagement and success of marginalized groups (Carrard et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2019).

Intellectual Diversity. A dearth of intellectual diversity constitutes a significant barrier to enriching kinesiology programs. When the spectrum of ideas, theories, and methodologies within a curriculum are homogenous or narrowly focused, it inadvertently stifles the holistic development of students and restricts the advancement of the discipline (Smith & Calasanti, 2005). For instance, a program heavily tilted towards biomechanics might neglect the psychosocial elements of human movement, which are critical to understanding the complete picture of physical activity and its impacts (Williams & Andersen, 1998). Moreover, a lack of intellectual diversity may lead to an echo chamber effect, where only certain viewpoints are amplified, thereby marginalizing alternative perspectives that could challenge and potentially enhance existing paradigms

(Taylor et al., 2019). This monoculture not only hampers the ability to foster critical thinking among students but also restricts the program's capacity to cater to a diverse student body with varied intellectual and cultural backgrounds (Brett et al., 2017). Ultimately, embracing a multifaceted approach that integrates various sub-disciplines and encourages interdisciplinary discourse is crucial for the field of kinesiology to thrive in both academic and applied settings (Thomas & Lochbaum, 2018).

Ideological Diversity. The absence of ideological diversity within kinesiology programs can act as a substantial impediment to cultivating a rich academic environment conducive to diverse thinking and innovation. Ideological diversity refers to the inclusion and engagement with a broad range of belief systems, values, and philosophies within an educational context. When kinesiology programs possess a uniform set of ideological viewpoints, it limits the scope of discussion, enquiry, and scholarly debate a foundation necessary for critical thinking and the progression of knowledge (Haidt & Jussim, 2018). Such a limitation is especially constraining in a multidisciplinary field like kinesiology that inherently intersects with social sciences, health, and public policy (Knapp, 2017). Furthermore, a homogeneity of perspectives can undermine the representation of culturally distinct approaches to health and physical well-being, impairing the development of culturally competent practitioners (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force, 2017). This absence of varied ideological standpoints can inadvertently reinforce biases and diminish the potential for students to engage with and solve real-world issues that require a multiplicity of perspectives (Mitchell & Soria, 2016). For kinesiology programs to fully reflect and serve an increasingly pluralistic society, they must actively champion and integrate an ideological breadth that can inspire robust and inclusive academic discourse (Durham, 2014).

Language Diversity. Language diversity is a crucial facet of overall diversity in educational programs, including those in the field of kinesiology. The absence of language diversity can pose a significant barrier to inclusivity and equitable learning within such programs. When kinesiology curricula and resources are only available in a dominant language, it can marginalize students who are non-native speakers or who possess varying levels of linguistic proficiency (Estrada et al., 2016). This single-language approach can lead to academic disadvantages, impede full participation in learning activities, and limit critical understandings of global health perspectives that are often embedded within different linguistic contexts (Capers et al., 2017). Furthermore, a lack of language diversity fails to prepare students for working with diverse populations, which is especially problematic given the global nature of health and fitness and the emphasis on cultural competency in kinesiology-related professions (Dodson et al., 2016). To truly reflect and accommodate the rich tapestry of global voices and promote full participation in kinesiology education, programs must strive to

include multilingual resources, support, and curricular content (Kosoko-Lasaki et al., 2009).

Facilitators of Diversity in Kinesiology Departments

While barriers to DEI efforts in Kinesiology and Allied Health programs are pertinent to the ongoing discussion, facilitators of diversity should also be discussed. In essence, there are existing efforts which could be highlighted and adopted by Kinesiology programs to reflect the current state of a dynamic society. Previous research has shown that incorporating mentorship and support programs, inclusive recruitment and retention strategies, and cultural competency training facilitate diverse growth in a variety of disciplines, including Kinesiology. By discussing these facilitators, we hope to highlight opportunities for Kinesiology and Allied Health programs to engage with diverse populations and encourage meaningful growth towards a more inclusive and diverse Kinesiology discipline.

Mentorship and Support Programs

Both earlier and recent accounts emphasize that mentorship and support programs play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusion in Kinesiology departments (Awaya et al., 2003; Pennington, 2023). Effective mentoring programs provide guidance, encouragement, and professional development opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds (Campbell, 2007; Tietjen-Smith et al., 2020). They offer a sense of belonging and connection, help navigate academic and career challenges and inspire underrepresented students to pursue careers in Kinesiology (Gehrke, 1988; Long, 1997; Urtel et al., 2022).

Therefore, these programs are essential for promoting the growth and retention of diverse students in the field of Kinesiology. Mentorship programs foster positive relationships and create a supportive environment to encourage diverse individuals to pursue their academic goals. These programs can help address barriers and obstacles faced by students leading to increased engagement and success within the discipline (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). To ensure the effectiveness of mentorship and support programs, higher education institutions and Kinesiology departments must actively promote and encourage participation from both faculty members and students. By establishing structured mentoring initiatives, workshops, and networking opportunities, institutions can enhance the sense of community and inclusivity within their Kinesiology programs. Additionally, regularly assessing and refining these programs based on feedback from participants can lead to continuous improvement and better outcomes for all involved (Chesler & Chesler, 2002).

Inclusive Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Implementing inclusive recruitment and retention strategies is essential to attract and retain diverse students in Kinesiology programs (O'Neil & Richards, 2018; Smith & Fairbrother, 2021).

Outreach efforts that engage diverse communities play a significant role in increasing the representation of culture and ethnicity in Kinesiology majors (Bell, 2023; Pennington, 2021). Actively reaching out to schools, community organizations, and youth programs in diverse neighborhoods allows Kinesiology departments to raise awareness about the discipline and its potential career paths. These outreach initiatives can also serve to inspire and encourage students who might not have considered Kinesiology as a viable option for their academic and professional pursuits.

Additional initiatives including targeted scholarships and financial aid can also play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining diverse students in Kinesiology programs. Reducing the financial burden of a Kinesiology education eliminates a significant obstacle for underrepresented students. By offering scholarships aimed at supporting underrepresented students, Kinesiology programs can help mitigate these obstacles.

There are several exemplary initiatives available to support minoritized students in their educational and career pursuits on college campuses (Urtel et al., 2022). These Indiana University based programs reported by Urtel et al. (2022), include the Minority Scholars Program, now recognized as the Diversity Research Scholar Program (DRSP). This program fosters diversity in Kinesiology and Allied Health research fields. The National Science Foundation's Lois Stokes Midwest Center for Excellence (LSMCE) provides opportunities for minoritized students in STEM disciplines. The Post-Baccalaureate Research Education Program (IPREP) offers support for underrepresented students pursuing biomedical research careers. Additionally, the Health Careers Opportunities Program (IU-HCOP) aims to increase diversity in healthcare professions (Urtel et al., 2022). Lastly, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Mentoring Women to Fellowship Program is one of several Diversity, Leadership, and Training Awards offered by the ACSM Foundation, specifically designed to empower women from underrepresented backgrounds to advance in sports medicine. These awards not only provide critical financial support but also play a vital role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion across Kinesiology and Allied Health fields by fostering mentorship, leadership development, and professional growth for emerging scholars and practitioners from diverse backgrounds.

Attracting diverse students, however, is only part of the equation; creating an inclusive and supportive campus environment is crucial to retaining and graduating a diverse pool of Kinesiology majors (Kahu, 2013; Russell, 2019). It is therefore essential to cultivate a campus culture that embraces diversity, promotes equity, and provides students with a sense of belonging. This can be achieved through diverse representation in faculty and staff, culturally responsive curricula, and inclusive co-curricular activities that celebrate diverse perspectives. To further perpetuate a diverse campus culture, diverse faculty and staff could engage in the mentorship and support programs previously discussed. Pairing students with mentors

from similar experiences fosters a supportive community built on guidance, encouragement, and a sense of belonging within a Kinesiology department.

In conclusion, and perhaps unsurprisingly, attracting and retaining diverse students in Kinesiology programs requires a multifaceted approach. Implementing inclusive recruitment strategies, partnering with schools and organizations, providing targeted scholarships, and fostering an inclusive campus environment are essential steps toward creating a more diverse and vibrant Kinesiology community. By prioritizing diversity and inclusivity, Kinesiology departments can nurture a new generation of professionals who will contribute to the advancement of the field and address the diverse needs of society.

Cultural Competency Training for Faculty and Staff

Providing cultural competency training for faculty and staff is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment that supports the success for students of color (Chester et al., 2013; Ross & Thomas, 2022). In today's diverse society, Kinesiology departments must equip their educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively engage with students from various cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Richards & Templin, 2019).

Cultural competency works in a myriad of ways for faculty and staff to work towards an understanding of their own backgrounds, while connecting and understanding different cultural backgrounds of those they educate. Ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff create spaces to connect and strengthen their commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment. Cultural competency training for educators facilitates an exploration and challenging of biases which could inadvertently influence interactions with students and negatively affect their learning experience. Furthermore, cultural competency serves to emphasize students unique experiences and knowledge they bring to the classroom. By engaging in cultural competency training, educators integrate those diverse perspectives into their teaching practices.

The integration of diverse perspectives encourages open dialogue, critical thinking, and an environment where students feel valued and respected. Incorporating cultural competency training in Kinesiology departments fosters a climate of respect, empathy, and mutual understanding. Cultural competency training equips faculty and staff with the skills to communicate effectively across cultural barriers, promoting clearer exchanges of ideas and expectations with students. By developing strong interpersonal connections with their students, educators create a sense of trust and support, which is essential for promoting academic success and overall well-being. As educators become more culturally competent, they model inclusive behaviors and attitudes that positively influence the broader campus community. This ripple effect can extend beyond the classroom, encouraging students and colleagues to embrace diversity and engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions.

Cultural competency training for faculty and staff is a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity and supporting the success of diverse students in Kinesiology departments. By challenging biases, understanding diverse perspectives, and improving communication, educators can create a welcoming and supportive learning environment that nurtures the potential of every student. Implementing cultural competency training in Kinesiology departments signifies a commitment to embracing diversity and preparing students for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

Next, through a literature review that highlights the current state of diversity in Kinesiology departments, we attempt to identify key barriers and facilitators to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance diversity in Kinesiology programs and Allied Health professions. We also explore several effective strategies implemented within Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions that address barriers and promote diversity and inclusion in the field.

Facilitators of Diversity in Kinesiology Departments

Point Counterpoint. The point-counterpoint teaching method engages students in structured debates where they examine and articulate opposing sides of an argument, enhancing their critical analysis and fostering a comprehensive understanding of differing perspectives on a given issue. One salient approach to deepening students' understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is through engaging them in perspective-taking exercises that require presenting viewpoints divergent from their own. This pedagogical strategy fosters empathy and promotes an intricate comprehension of complex DEI issues. When students articulate positions that contrast with their personal beliefs, they are urged to conduct thorough research and critically analyze both the arguments they naturally support and those they oppose. This dual-sided enquiry not only broadens their cognitive engagement with the topic but also dismantles echo chambers that may inhibit growth and mutual understanding (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). By grappling with contrasting ideologies, students can develop a nuanced insight into the underlying values and experiences shaping diverse perspectives, consequently fortifying their critical thinking and discourse skills (Hess, 2009). Additionally, these exercises can instill a sense of informed inclusivity, preparing students to navigate and contribute to increasingly pluralistic societies and workplaces with greater sensitivity and effectiveness (Gurin et al., 2002).

Mentorship and support programs. Mentorship and support programs have emerged as effective facilitators for promoting diversity in Kinesiology departments (Awaya et al., 2003; Pennington, 2023). For underrepresented students, mentorship provides valuable guidance, encouragement, and networking opportunities that enhance academic and professional success in any field (Bonifacino et al., 2021; Bulger et al., 2016). Specif-

ically, research suggests that mentorship can positively impact students' self-efficacy, academic achievement, and retention rates (Liu et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2017).

Implementing best practices for mentorship programs is essential to maximize their effectiveness. Structured mentorship initiatives with clear goals and expectations can foster meaningful relationships between mentors and mentees (Campbell, 2007; Hillier et al., 2019). Additionally, mentorship programs should aim to match underrepresented students with mentors from similar backgrounds to enhance relatability and cultural sensitivity (Fassinger & Hensler-McGinnis, 2005; Kricorian et al., 2020). To that end, regular training and support for mentors can further strengthen the mentor-mentee relationship and contribute to the success of these programs (Chester et al., 2013).

Inclusive recruitment and retention strategies. Inclusive recruitment and retention strategies are vital components of promoting diversity in Kinesiology departments. Proactive outreach to diverse communities can attract underrepresented students to consider Kinesiology as a viable academic and career option (O'Neil & Richards, 2018). Collaborating with community organizations and local schools can help create pipelines that encourage a diverse range of students to pursue Kinesiology majors (Baldwin et al., 2006; Bunn, 2023). Partnerships, such as dual enrollment programs, mentorship initiatives, scholarship opportunities, and summer bridge programs, aimed at attracting and supporting minoritized students in their academic journeys could be powerful in promoting diversity within Kinesiology.

Financial barriers can also significantly impact students' decisions to enroll and persist in Kinesiology programs. By offering scholarships and financial support specifically targeted at underrepresented students, Kinesiology departments eliminate financial constraints and improve access to higher education (Kahu, 2013; Urtel et al., 2022). Moreover, providing academic and career support services tailored to the unique needs of underrepresented students can enhance their sense of belonging and increase retention rates (Kerby, 2015; Kezar et al., 2020).

Cultural competency training for faculty and staff. Cultural competency training for faculty and staff is essential to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students (Brottman et al., 2020; Snyder et al., 2009). Faculty and staff need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to engage effectively with students from diverse backgrounds (Loria, 2021). This training can raise awareness about cultural differences and the potential impact of biases in academic settings (Brown et al., 2005). Training approaches for cultural competency can vary, ranging from workshops and seminars to ongoing professional development opportunities (Kaihlanen et al., 2019; Thomas, 2003). Integrating cultural competence principles into the curriculum and teaching practices can also help foster a culturally responsive learning environment (Garan & Werkmeister, 2013; Prescott & Nobel, 2019; Spector, 2004).

Furthermore, cultural competency training can extend beyond the classroom to administrative practices, ensuring that institutional policies and procedures are equitable and inclusive (Ford Foundation, 2020).

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It is therefore in our opinion that, by implementing these facilitators, Kinesiology departments can create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive educational environment that fosters the success and well-being of all students. The subsequent section will detail the methods employed in the literature review, including the systematic approach for selecting peer-reviewed sources, criteria for inclusion and exclusion, and the analytical framework used to identify and synthesize key barriers and facilitators impacting diversity, equity, and inclusion in Kinesiology and Allied Health fields.

Methods

Data Sources and Selection Criteria for Literature Review

A comprehensive search of peer-reviewed articles, books, reports, and institutional websites related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions was carried out for the literature review. The databases used for the literature search included PubMed, ERIC, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, and Sport Discus. The search terms used included “diversity in Kinesiology,” “inclusion in Allied Health professions,” “barriers to diversity in academic majors,” “mentorship programs in higher education,” and “cultural competency training for faculty.”

The inclusion criteria for selecting relevant studies were as follows: (1) studies published in the last 20 years to capture recent developments, (2) studies focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion in Kinesiology departments or Allied Health professions, (3) studies examining barriers and facilitators affecting diversity in academic majors, and (4) studies with a focus on

mentorship programs or cultural competency training in higher education settings. Studies that did not meet these criteria or were not peer-reviewed were excluded from the review.

Data Collection Methods for Identifying Barriers and Facilitators

To identify barriers and facilitators affecting diversity in Kinesiology departments, a mixed methods approach was employed. Content analysis was used to extract relevant information from the selected studies. The barriers and facilitators were identified through in-depth examination and coding of the literature, which allowed for the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in Kinesiology and Allied Health programs (Bulger et al., 2016).

The data collection process involved systematically reading and analyzing each selected study to extract key findings and insights related to barriers and facilitators related to diversity in Kinesiology departments. Themes and sub-themes were identified and organized into categories to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing diversity in the field.

Research Design and Approach

The research design for this literature review was a systematic and integrative approach that aimed to synthesize the existing body of knowledge on diversity, equity, and inclusion as they relate to Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions. The methodology of this review followed guidelines for conducting a rigorous and comprehensive literature search (Ford Foundation, 2020).

The present approach involved analyzing and synthesizing information from a diverse range of studies, including empirical research, theoretical perspectives, and best practices in the field of DEI. By integrating various sources of evidence, this literature review aimed to provide a holistic and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to diversity in Kinesiology and Allied Health programs (Richards et al., 2019).

The present approach also incorporated a critical examination of the selected studies to assess their methods rigor and validity. This process ensured that the findings presented in this paper were based on accurate and reliable resources, ultimately enhancing the trustworthiness of the review’s conclusions.

What follows are the findings of the literature review, highlighting the key barriers and facilitators affecting diversity, equity, and inclusion in Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions. The insights gained from the literature will inform the discussion on effective strategies being implemented to address these challenges and promote diversity in the field.

Results

Barriers to Diversity in Kinesiology Departments

Lack of representation and role models. One of the prominent barriers to diversity in Kinesiology departments is the lack of representation and role models for various students in different ethnicities (Hodge & Wiggins, 2010; Pennington, 2023). Underrepresented students often face challenges identifying with and envisioning themselves in academic majors where individuals from their racial or cultural backgrounds are scarce. The absence of culturally diverse faculty and staff in Kinesiology departments can limit the sense of belonging and hinder the academic and professional aspirations of underrepresented students (Barfield et al., 2012; Ransdell et al., 2021).

Research indicates that the presence of role models from similar backgrounds can positively impact the career aspirations of underrepresented students in general (Kricorian et al., 2020) as well as in Kinesiology and Allied Health professions specifically (Chester et al., 2013). Role models serve as sources of inspiration and support; a lack of diverse role models can perpetuate the stereotype that multiracial or individuals who share a set of beliefs and values are not suited for careers in Kinesiology, leading to reduced representation in the discipline (Russell, 2019; Spector, 2004).

Systemic racial and cultural variables. The historical context and institutional practices within academic settings contribute to the systemic barriers faced by underrepresented groups in Kinesiology departments (Ford Foundation, 2020). Historical discrimination and exclusion have created structural barriers that continue to limit the access and opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds in higher education, including Kinesiology programs (Harrison et al., 2021; Palumbo et al., 2008; Thomas, 2003).

Addressing deeply embedded systemic barriers could be important for the promotion of diversity initiatives in Kinesiology departments. Financial constraints, limited access to educational resources, and discriminatory admission practices could perpetuate the underrepresentation of certain racial and cultural groups (Loria, 2021). Addressing these systemic variables requires comprehensive strategies that go beyond individual-level interventions and encompass institutional changes to promote equity and inclusivity in Kinesiology programs (Gill, 2021).

Stereotypes and biases. Racial and cultural variables are often a result of implicit biases in admissions and hiring processes which act as significant barriers to diversity in Kinesiology departments (Bradburn & Sikora, 2002; Nachman et al., 2022). Unconscious biases held by faculty, administrators, and admission committees may lead to the inadvertent perpetuation of stereotypes about certain racial or cultural groups, influencing their representation in Kinesiology majors (Pennington, 2021).

Furthermore, stereotypes about physical abilities and characteristics associated with racial or cultural groups can influence

the design of Kinesiology curricula (Clouten et al., 2006; Mahar et al., 2021). These stereotypes may lead to the development of curricula that are not culturally responsive and do not reflect the diverse experiences and needs of students from various backgrounds. Addressing stereotypes in Kinesiology curricula requires intentional efforts to create inclusive and culturally competent educational environments (Geisler, 2003; Sullivan & Ali, 2023). DEI elements are often insufficiently examined, necessitating a more structured approach to integrate these concepts meaningfully across the curriculum to challenge stereotypes and foster cultural competence.

Within the field of Kinesiology and other Allied Health professions, DEI has often been embraced as a conceptual framework to enrich professional practice and educational landscapes. However, there remain elements that are insufficiently examined or concealed within the structural confines of these fields, perpetuating latent disparities. One such under-explored area is the nuanced experiences of individuals with invisible disabilities, such as chronic pain conditions, whose needs and challenges are often marginalized due to the lack of physical manifestation of their disability (Davis, 2005). In the context of Kinesiology, this oversight could lead to inadequate adaptations in exercise prescription and a lack of targeted support services.

Moreover, the pervasive underrepresentation of linguistic diversity within patient-education resources and scholarly publications significantly impedes knowledge dissemination among non-English speaking populations. This systemic shortfall engenders an exclusionary landscape, wherein linguistic barriers give rise to inadvertent biases that contravene the core tenets of inclusivity, effectively ostracizing a significant segment of the global community from engaging with critical health information and advancements in research (Segalowitz & Kehayia, 2011). Additionally, an often overlooked yet crucial determinant in molding the fabric of the Kinesiology profession is the presence of socio-economic obstacles, which throttle the entry and ascension of underprivileged groups within professional and academic realms. This in turn attenuates the heterogeneity of practitioners and scholars, constricting not only the demographic representation but also stifling the breadth of intellectual discourse and innovation that is borne from a myriad of cultural and socio-economic perspectives (Bhalla, 2019).

This critical analysis obliges us to collectively confront these understated aspects, acknowledging that authentic inclusivity goes beyond quantifiable indicators to embrace the subtleties of diverse experiences and needs (Wood & Su, 2021). To engender a more equitable environment, Kinesiology professionals can pioneer initiatives to create and disseminate resources for individuals with invisible disabilities, advocate for multilingual access in educational resources, and develop outreach programs that ensure diverse socio-economic groups have a pathway into the profession (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017). Ultimately, by shining a light on and actively engaging with these under-examined elements of DEI, the Allied Health professions can

not only embody the comprehensive values of diversity, equity, and inclusion but also tangibly elevate the quality and reach of their contributions to society.

The entrenched deficit of linguistic plurality in patient-education materials not only hampers equitable access to vital health information for non-native English speakers but also undermines the very ethos of inclusive healthcare practice. These are the silent yet substantial biases that demand exposure and redress. The following discourse extends scrutiny to the catalysts fostering diversity within Kinesiology departments and the wider spectrum of Allied Health professions. Initiatives such as robust mentorship frameworks, strategic inclusivity in recruitment and sustained retention endeavors, alongside a comprehensive cultural competency curriculum, are illuminated as means to empower both faculty and staff. By navigating both the obstacles and facilitators, this examination seeks to distill and elucidate efficacious methodologies that fortify the infrastructure of DEI within the kinesiological domain. In the subsequent section, the focus will be on the facilitators of diversity in Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions which emphasize mentorship programs, inclusive recruitment and retention strategies, and cultural competency training for faculty and staff. By allowing an understanding of the barriers and facilitators which exist, we will attempt to highlight effective strategies which will be highlighted for promoting DEI in the field of Kinesiology. The subsequent section will discuss strategies for increasing diversity and the significance of amplifying DEI initiatives in the field.

Recommended Strategies for Increasing Diversity

Fostering an Inclusive and Welcoming Environment

Creating an inclusive and welcoming environment within Kinesiology departments is crucial for retaining students from diverse backgrounds and promoting their success (Bunn, 2023; Kahu, 2013). Faculty and staff can adopt culturally competent teaching practices and curricular content that reflect the experiences and perspectives of a diverse student body (O'Leary et al., 2020; Spector, 2004). Diverse representation among faculty and staff can also be instrumental in cultivating an inclusive environment, as it provides students with role models who understand and appreciate their unique experiences (Brown et al., 2005; Porter & Serra, 2020). Encouraging open dialogue, promoting diversity training, and establishing affinity groups can further contribute to a supportive and inclusive campus climate (Perrin, 2000; Russell, 2019).

Implementing Mentorship and Support Programs

Mentorship and support programs have demonstrated significant potential in increasing diversity across various academic fields, including Kinesiology, by providing critical resources such as financial assistance, academic advising, and professional networking opportunities (Awaya et al., 2003; Fadeyi et

al., 2020). These programs offer underrepresented students the opportunity to receive personalized guidance, encouragement, and career development support, which has been shown to boost students' confidence, persistence, and sense of belonging within their fields (Richards et al., 2017; Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). Effective mentorship programs are designed to address the unique challenges faced by diverse students, including financial burdens, lack of social capital, and limited access to professional networks, thus helping them navigate academic and professional pathways more successfully (Beanlands et al., 2020; Campbell, 2007). Furthermore, by fostering supportive relationships between faculty, staff, and students, these initiatives contribute to building an inclusive and welcoming environment that is crucial for student retention and success (Dowling et al., 2021; Fassinger & Hensler-McGinnis, 2005).

Enhancing Recruitment Efforts

Inclusive recruitment strategies play a crucial role in attracting a diverse pool of candidates to Kinesiology programs (O'Neil & Richards, 2018). Efforts should be made to actively recruit students from underrepresented groups through targeted outreach, scholarship opportunities, and community engagement (Bulger et al., 2016; Smith, 2003). Collaborating with high schools, community colleges, and community-based organizations can yield valuable partnerships that aid in recruitment and ensure that students from diverse backgrounds are aware of and encouraged to pursue Kinesiology as a career path (Richards & Templin, 2019).

Collaborative Initiatives with Allied Health Professions

Collaborative initiatives with Allied Health professions offer opportunities to promote diversity across healthcare disciplines (Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce, 2021). Partnering with professions like nursing, physical therapy, and occupational therapy can facilitate the sharing of best practices and resources for promoting diversity and inclusion (Donini-Lenhoff & Brotherton, 2010; Mahar et al., 2021). Joint efforts between Allied Health and Kinesiology professions can lead to the development of interdisciplinary diversity programs and initiatives which address challenges and foster a more comprehensive approach to DEI in those professions (Geisler, 2003; Marcelin et al., 2019).

Using Technology to Facilitate Collaboration

Utilizing technology, like Zoom, to expose Allied Health and Kinesiology students to role models from underrepresented marginalizing can be a transformative strategy in promoting diversity and inclusion within the discipline. Virtual platforms like Teams, WebEx, and Zoom offer unique opportunities to connect students with professionals and experts from diverse backgrounds, who can serve as inspiring role models and mentors. By incorporating features such as breakout rooms

for small group discussions, live Q&A sessions, and real-time polls, Kinesiology and allied health programs can create interactive and personalized learning experiences that foster DEL. Additionally, these platforms support recorded sessions, allowing students to revisit discussions with mentors and reflect on key insights. Leveraging these technologies, programs can transcend geographic limitations, bringing a broader range of perspectives to students and enriching their understanding of Kinesiology in a global context.

Representation and visibility. Seeing individuals from underrepresented minority groups succeed in the field of Kinesiology can profoundly inspire and motivate students, reinforcing their sense of belonging and potential for success in the field. It provides representation and visibility to those who may not have traditionally seen themselves as part of the discipline. Exposure to role models who share similar backgrounds and experiences can help students envision themselves pursuing successful careers in Kinesiology.

Breaking stereotypes. Role models can help challenge stereotypes and biases that may exist in the discipline. By showcasing the diverse talents and achievements of individuals from underrepresented groups, students can gain a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the breadth and depth of Kinesiology as a field (Lockwood, 2006). In Kinesiology and allied health professions, where understanding varied physiological and cultural factors is essential for effective patient care and community health initiatives, exposure to diverse role models can also prepare students to approach their future practice with greater cultural sensitivity and adaptability. This awareness is critical for developing a workforce that can address the unique needs of diverse populations within healthcare.

Inspiration and motivation. Interacting with role models who have overcome obstacles and achieved success in their careers can be incredibly motivating for students. Their stories of perseverance and resilience can inspire students to stay committed to their academic and professional goals, even in the face of challenges (Yancey et al., 2002). In Kinesiology, where practical and applied experiences are crucial, seeing role models who have excelled despite adversity can also encourage students to pursue innovative paths within the field, fostering a sense of purpose and a vision for contributing meaningfully to diverse communities.

Mentorship opportunities. Virtual platforms can facilitate mentorship relationships between students and role models.

Broadening perspectives. Exposure to role models from diverse backgrounds can broaden students' perspectives on Kinesiology and its applications. It can open their eyes to the unique contributions and insights that individuals from different cultures and communities can bring to the field (Sanchez et al., 2015). To help universities without a diverse faculty or student body in Kinesiology, virtual mentorship programs and guest lecture series can be established to connect students with professionals from a variety of cultural backgrounds across the

field. By using online platforms to bring in role models and industry experts from diverse communities, students gain exposure to a wider array of perspectives, expanding their understanding of Kinesiology's applications and the unique ways it can serve different populations and address health disparities (Sanchez et al., 2015). This approach fosters an inclusive educational experience and demonstrates the impact of diversity on professional practices and health outcomes.

Creating inclusive learning environments. Incorporating virtual interactions with role models can contribute to a more inclusive learning environment in Kinesiology departments. It signals to students that their institution values diversity and actively seeks to provide opportunities for all students to learn from a wide range of professionals (Shultz et al., 2022).

To implement this strategy effectively, Kinesiology departments can collaborate with professional organizations, diversity and inclusion offices, and community networks to identify and invite role models from underrepresented minorities to participate in virtual events. They can also host panel discussions, webinars, or virtual conferences that feature diverse professionals sharing their expertise and experiences.

Leveraging web-based technology to expose Kinesiology students to role models from underrepresented minority populations can foster diversity, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging within the discipline. By providing opportunities for students to connect with professionals from diverse backgrounds, Kinesiology departments can help cultivate the next generation of inclusive and culturally competent leaders in the field.

Cultural Competency Training for Students

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of cultural competency training for students in academic institutions, including Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions (Khanna et al., 2009; Hyett et al., 2019). This section explores the significance and potential benefits of implementing such training to foster inclusivity and create a more equitable learning and working environment.

Promoting cross-cultural communication. The findings presented in this paper underscore critical implications for Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions, especially given the need to foster diversity and inclusivity within these fields. Research indicates that students from underrepresented backgrounds often face unique barriers, including limited access to mentorship, financial constraints, and fewer visible role models, which can hinder their educational and career progression (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). Providing structured mentorship programs that connect students with culturally similar mentors has shown promise in increasing retention and supporting the success of minority students.

Kinesiology departments can further address these barriers by implementing cultural competency training, which equips students, faculty, and staff with skills to engage effectively across diverse cultural contexts. This training not only supports

inclusivity within the academic setting but also enhances the successful implementation of telehealth initiatives, which are essential for addressing rural health disparities (Brottman et al., 2020). Such efforts can significantly contribute to developing a culturally competent healthcare workforce better equipped to meet the diverse needs of patients, ultimately promoting a more equitable healthcare system.

Reducing implicit biases. Unconscious biases can influence decision-making and interactions within academic settings. For Kinesiology departments, where diverse physical and cultural perspectives are essential to understanding human movement and health, cultural competency training helps students and educators recognize and address these biases. This training promotes more impartial judgments in admissions, evaluations, and mentorship, ultimately creating a more equitable environment that supports diverse pathways within the field. By fostering awareness of implicit biases, Kinesiology departments can cultivate inclusive academic and professional spaces that reflect the diversity and cultural needs of the communities they serve.

Enhancing student and employee satisfaction. When faculty and staff in Kinesiology departments demonstrate cultural competence, it significantly enhances students' sense of belonging and satisfaction, as students feel that their diverse perspectives on health, movement, and wellness are respected and integrated into the curriculum. This inclusivity in learning helps students connect theory with their own cultural contexts, enriching their educational experience and retention rates. Likewise, culturally competent staff members foster a positive and inclusive workplace, which not only improves employee morale but also enhances departmental productivity and collaboration, creating a dynamic environment that reflects the diversity of the populations served by the Kinesiology profession.

Nurturing inclusive pedagogies. Cultural competency training in Kinesiology encourages educators to adopt inclusive teaching practices that accommodate the varied learning styles and cultural backgrounds of students, particularly in fields focused on health, exercise, and human performance. By incorporating culturally relevant examples, such as diverse case studies in biomechanics or community-centered approaches in public health, faculty can make curriculum content more relatable and impactful. This approach not only enhances student engagement but also prepares future Kinesiology professionals to understand and address health disparities within different populations, enriching the educational experience while fostering a workforce attuned to diverse community needs (Brottman et al., 2020).

Building cultural awareness in Kinesiology. Cultural competency training in Kinesiology raises critical awareness of the diverse experiences, challenges, and health beliefs that students, faculty, and patients from varied cultural backgrounds may bring to the field. For students, this training fosters empathy and respect, creating an academic environment where

different perspectives on health, movement, and wellness are valued and integrated into learning experiences. For faculty, heightened cultural awareness enables them to approach teaching, mentorship, and research more inclusively, leading to course content and engagement strategies that reflect the diversity of the populations served by Kinesiology professionals. Ultimately, this deeper cultural understanding strengthens Kinesiology's ability to prepare a workforce attuned to the social and cultural nuances essential for addressing health disparities effectively across communities (Brottman et al., 2020; Silén-Lipponen & Suvi, 2021).

Recap of Key Findings

In this paper, an examination of the status of DEI within Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions was conducted. While Kinesiology has evolved as an academic major, the demographic composition of Kinesiology majors has remained relatively unchanged, creating a disparity between the actual diversity of the American population and the representation in higher education Kinesiology and Allied Health programs (Pennington, 2022). Herein, this paper identified barriers to diversity, including the lack of representation and role models, systemic racial and cultural variables, as well as stereotypes and biases. On the other hand, facilitators, such as mentorship and support programs, inclusive recruitment and retention strategies, and cultural competency training for faculty and staff were discussed. Additionally, the importance of actively promoting Kinesiology to diverse populations through outreach, addressing cultural barriers, and forging partnerships with community organizations and schools was explored.

Implications for Kinesiology Departments and Allied Health Professions

The findings presented in this paper carry significant implications for Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions, especially considering the critical need to foster diversity and inclusion in these fields. Studies highlight that students from underrepresented backgrounds face unique barriers in health-related disciplines, including limited access to mentorship, financial support, and professional networks (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). Mentorship programs that connect students with role models and professional networks have been shown to improve retention and success rates, particularly for minority students (Beanlands et al., 2020). As the field of Kinesiology increasingly intersects with public health, physical and occupational therapy, and other health sciences, it is critical to address specific barriers to diversity that may deter underrepresented students from pursuing careers in this discipline.

Kinesiology departments can play a transformative role by implementing structured mentorship and financial assistance initiatives tailored to the needs of underrepresented students, fostering environments that enhance students sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy (Fassinger & Hensler-McGinnis,

2005). Additionally, outreach programs that build partnerships with schools in underserved communities have proven effective in creating pathways for students into health and Kinesiology fields, thus helping to diversify the professional pipeline (Williams & Smith, 2020). One effective way to provide financial assistance to underrepresented students in Kinesiology is through targeted scholarships that cover tuition, textbooks, and professional certification fees, helping to reduce financial barriers and support students' academic and career advancement.

By addressing these critical barriers, Kinesiology departments not only enhance the educational experience for all students but also contribute to a culturally competent healthcare workforce, better equipped to meet the needs of diverse populations. This commitment to diversity can directly impact fields such as physical therapy, exercise physiology, and athletic training, where culturally informed care practices improve patient outcomes and community health. These efforts are essential to advancing both the inclusivity and the overall effectiveness of Kinesiology and allied health education, ultimately contributing to a more equitable healthcare system and bridging gaps in health disparities across various populations.

Recommendations for Future Research and Action

To advance the state of DEI in Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions, further research and action are necessary. Future studies could explore the long-term impact of mentorship programs on the academic and professional success of underrepresented students in Kinesiology. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of inclusive recruitment and retention strategies could inform best practices for attracting and supporting diverse student populations. Evaluating the outcomes of cultural competency training for faculty, staff, and students could shed light on the most effective approaches to enhancing inclusivity in higher education. Moreover, Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions should actively collaborate and engage with each other to share insights and resources for promoting diversity and inclusion. Collaborative initiatives can lead to comprehensive and effective strategies for addressing common challenges related to DEI.

Limitations

While numerous programs, initiatives, strategies, and resources are frequently highlighted and recommended to promote DEI, educational institutions, departments, and programs may face significant challenges in their implementation due to limited resources, competing priorities, and organizational constraints. Evaluating the impact of these DEI initiatives requires careful consideration of potential limitations that may affect the consistency, accuracy, and applicability of findings across various educational contexts. A major limitation within the current body of research is the lack of standardized definitions and measurements of DEI, resulting in variability across studies and making it difficult to draw cohesive conclusions. Furthermore,

many studies concentrate on specific populations or academic disciplines, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader and more diverse educational environments. Future research must prioritize the development of standardized DEI metrics and adopt a more comprehensive, cross-disciplinary approach to fully understand and enhance the effectiveness of DEI initiatives in diverse settings.

Conclusion

Prioritizing DEI within Kinesiology departments and Allied Health professions is not only an ethical imperative but also a strategic necessity to equip a healthcare workforce that can effectively address the multifaceted health needs of an increasingly diverse society. DEI initiatives within these fields enhance the educational experiences of all students by exposing them to a range of perspectives, which is critical for fostering cultural competence, empathy, and a commitment to reducing health disparities. By adopting evidence-based strategies, such as targeted recruitment, mentorship programs, and culturally relevant curricula, and fostering an environment that values continuous research and adaptive practices, Kinesiology departments can act as catalysts for systemic change. This commitment to DEI not only paves the way for greater representation within the field but also strengthens its impact on the health and wellness of communities served, setting a foundation for a more inclusive, effective, and responsive healthcare system.

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