

 LEADING STRATEGIES

Positionality Awareness and Training for College Admissions Recruiters

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College admissions recruiters are important for attracting a diverse group of students. To engage with different socio-demographics, these recruiters need to be aware of their positionality and understand the perspectives of others. This awareness helps them limit their biases and foster stronger connections with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

At colleges, there is one group of employees whose job primarily entails engaging, evaluating, recruiting, and admitting students to join their institutions. College admissions recruiters are instrumental in the search for applicants and the recruitment process. Although recruitment is every college employee's responsibility, admissions recruiters play an essential role in ensuring educational opportunities for students. These professionals serve as the front-line ambassadors for their respective institutions, connecting prospective students to the resources and programs that best fit their needs (Wright 1995). However, one critical factor that impacts the work of admissions recruiters is their positionality, which can influence how they understand and interact with various student populations. It is essential that these recruiters have a thorough understanding of positionality to effectively recruit a diverse pool of students. Positionality refers to an individual's social location concerning certain characteristics, primarily race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and being the first person in their family

to attend college to name a few examples (Byrd 2019; Secules, *et al.* 2021; Bourke 2014).

College admissions recruiters play a critical role in shaping the future of institutions' student body and, ultimately, society at large. Interactions with prospective students and their families during the admissions process have the potential to significantly impact their lives, both in terms of their educational attainment and their social mobility. Therefore, it is crucial that admissions recruiters approach their work with a keen sense of positionality awareness, which involves recognizing how their identities, experiences, and biases shape their perspectives and interactions with others (Betha 2016).

Recruiters should be aware of how their positionality and biases impact their interactions with students (Sadler 2002). While a recruiter's background can serve as an asset in connecting with students, it can also create unintentional barriers and challenges. For example, a recruiter who grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood may assume that all Black students have similar experiences, which can lead to a lack of under-

standing of the diversity that exists within the Black community. These assumptions can halt the connection being formed between the recruiter and the potential applicant, as no culture is monolithic.

A recruiter's positionality can have both positive and negative impacts on their effectiveness in recruiting students. Understanding how internalized oppression, racial identity development, and other factors shape their interactions with students can help them better connect with prospective students and create more inclusive recruitment processes. The following text will offer information on the key demographics that recruiters should keep in mind in relation to their position. This is not a comprehensive list and will include certain intersecting identities with examples for better understanding. Following this list, there will be some training strategies to enhance position awareness.

Positionality Awareness for Multiple Socio-Demographics

Race

One of the most critical aspects of positionality awareness is understanding how racism operates in society and how it affects the work of college admissions recruiters. Racism is pervasive, systemic, and deeply ingrained in society, and it affects every aspect of life, including educational institutions. College admissions recruiters must recognize the ways in which their own racial identity and experiences influence their perceptions and interactions with prospective students (Griffin and Muñiz 2015). Recruiters must also actively use their agency to address and dismantle the systemic barriers that prevent racially-minoritized students from accessing higher education, such as unequal educational funding and biased standardized testing practices (Henderson, *et al.* 2021; Briscoe, *et al.* 2020; Valadez 1996).

Race is an essential factor in considering positionality. Racism and racial biases can create obstacles for racially-minoritized students in obtaining higher education (McNair, Bensimon, and Malcolm-Piqueux 2020; Paris 2020). College admissions recruiters must have an awareness of several types of racism, such as struc-

tural and institutionalized racism (Nadal, *et al.* 2021). Structural racism refers to the societal systems that perpetuate inequality among races. Institutionalized racism consists of policies and practices that stem from these systems and, in turn, maintain the disparities between races.

One major factor that can influence a recruiter's positionality is internalized oppression. Internalized oppression is the internalization of negative messages about oneself and one's identity group, often as a result of systemic oppression (Froehlich and Thornton-Marsh 2020; Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne 2009; Nadal, *et al.* 2021). It can lead individuals to believe that their race or ethnicity is inferior, which can impact their interactions with others. For example, a recruiter from a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) who has internalized oppression may have difficulty recruiting students who come from schools that have high populations of students who identify as white, as they may feel inadequate or inferior in those environments. Additionally, an HBCU recruiter who did not attend an HBCU who struggles with internalized oppression may unknowingly convey their biases toward attending HBCUs to students who may be interested.

Internalized oppression can be alleviated by increasing a recruiter's awareness of their positionality and racial identity development. Racial identity development is the process by which individuals come to understand their racial identity and its importance in their lives (Wijeyesinghe and Jackson 2012). Racial identity encompasses one's sense of self, including one's beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and affiliations related to their racial/ethnic background. Individuals who have experienced significant challenges related to their racial identity development may struggle to interact effectively with student populations of different races or ethnicities (Helms, Jernigan, and Mascher 2005). Recruiters who have a strong racial identity and understand the importance of HBCUs in uplifting and empowering Black communities may be more effective in their work. They can leverage their own experiences to connect with prospective students and demonstrate how attending an HBCU can positively impact their lives and their communities.

The influence of racial identity development within recruitment is not limited solely to HBCUs. The development of racial identity can have a significant impact on the perspective and role of community college admissions recruiters. This is because more than half of students from racially-minoritized backgrounds have their initial exposure to higher education at community colleges (Bragg and Durham 2012; Ma and Baum 2015). The positionality of community college admissions recruiters can significantly impact their effectiveness in serving diverse student populations. Recruiters who possess cultural humility, self-awareness, and a deep understanding of their racial identity may be better able to connect with and support racially-minoritized students. Conversely, recruiter positioning, which is devoid of these elements, may perpetuate harmful stereotypes and further marginalize student populations. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the role of positionality when recruiting students and to work to support recruiters with positive and empowering experiences.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity also plays a significant role in positionality. Ethnicity and race may often overlap, but it is essential to recognize the differences. While race refers to biological characteristics, ethnicity relates to cultural connections. This definition of ethnicity acknowledges diversity within a group of people who share the same racial background. College admissions recruiters should be aware of ethnic diversity and understand how to communicate with students from diverse cultural backgrounds effectively (Kelly 2019).

One example is that some students who identify as Latine/o/a don't recognize themselves as Hispanic. This is because the term Hispanic has mainly been used to identify those who speak Espanol/Spanish (Gonzalez 2018). Students who reside in Latin America could speak Portuguese and may consider themselves Latine/a/o and not Hispanic. Inversely, a student from Spain may identify as Hispanic and not Latine/o/a. Recruiters should do their best not to consolidate students into minimal categories based on the limited awareness of their positionality.

Another instance is that some students may identify as Black and not African-American, African-American and not Black, both African-American and Black, or neither depending on their lived experiences (Hilliard 1995). Students from various Caribbean nations may also express their identities in other ways that partially align with these categories. It is critical that recruiters recognize this reality and not lump all students with African descent into one category.

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Gender identity and sexual orientation are also an aspect of positionality that must be considered in the recruitment process. A recruiter's positionality on gender identity and sexual orientation can significantly impact the recruitment process and the experiences of marginalized individuals. Gender and sexuality biases can lead to discrimination in higher education. Students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and others (LGBTQIA+) may feel isolated or stigmatized, making it harder to enter higher education (El-Azar 2016; Beasy, Grant, and Emery 2021). It is essential for college recruiters to understand the diverse range of gender identities and sexual orientations that exist among prospective students. By demonstrating an awareness of various gender identities, recruiters can send a clear message to potential applicants that they will be valued and supported within the college community. College admissions recruiters should prioritize keeping an inclusive orientation in mind while recruiting students. However, it is not enough for recruiters to simply be aware of gender identity and sexual orientation; they must actively promote inclusivity. This can be done by engaging in educational initiatives and workshops that address the challenges faced by marginalized individuals. By equipping themselves with knowledge about these issues, recruiters are better equipped to serve as allies and advocates for LGBTQIA+ students during the recruiting process.

Recruiters should also be mindful of the language they use when interacting with prospective students. Using inclusive language that affirms various gender identities and sexual orientations helps to create a safe

and welcoming environment (Hernandez 2022; Strayhorn 2019). This means avoiding assumptions about individuals' identities or orientations and using gender-neutral terms whenever possible. Respecting individuals' chosen names and pronouns is also crucial in demonstrating acceptance and support.

Recruiters may face challenges in implementing these strategies. In some cases, institutional or cultural barriers may hinder their ability to fully embrace policies and practices that support gender identity and sexual orientation inclusivity (Parker 2021; Roberts, *et al.* 2020). Recruiting efforts may be hindered by stigmas, biases, or a lack of resources within the college or community. Overcoming these challenges may require recruiters to work collaboratively with other stakeholders, such as administrators, faculty, and student organizations, to ensure a comprehensive approach to inclusivity. Recruiters can seek guidance from LGBTQIA+ student organizations and use their insights to inform their recruitment strategies. Additionally, recruiters can partner with LGBTQIA+ community organizations, attend events, and build relationships with potential applicants from marginalized backgrounds. By actively engaging with these communities, recruiters can demonstrate their commitment to creating an inclusive and affirming college environment.

Sexism and gender discrimination are also significant issues that must be addressed by college admissions recruiters. Sexism refers to the unfair and discriminatory treatment of individuals based on their gender, while gender discrimination encompasses the differential treatment of individuals due to their gender identity. Both phenomena can manifest in various ways within the college recruiting process. Recruiters' positionality on sexism and gender discrimination can also be influenced by external factors such as institutional norms, pressure from stakeholders, and societal expectations. Educational institutions that fail to address systemic gender biases may inadvertently perpetuate discriminatory practices within their recruiting process. This can lead to the exclusion of talented individuals based solely on their gender, exacerbating the gender gap present in various academic disciplines.

It is crucial to acknowledge that recruiters themselves may possess covert and overt biases that influence their decision-making (McCabe, Dragowski, and Robinson 2013; Nadal, *et al.* 2021). These biases can manifest in the form of preconceived notions about a student's abilities in certain fields or assumptions about their commitment to academics due to societal gender roles. Such biases can prevent qualified students from securing admission into certain programs or receiving the same opportunities as their counterparts.

Additionally, recruiters may unintentionally perpetuate gender stereotypes during the selection process. For instance, traditional gender norms and expectations may lead recruiters to prioritize male candidates for STEM-related programs while relegating female candidates to more "traditional" female-dominated fields. Progress toward gender equality is further hindered by perpetuating the existing gender divide within these industries. This example even fails to address the perceptions and misconceptions surrounding transgender students.

The pervasive gender stereotypes and biases that exist in society can impact interactions with students and their families, particularly regarding expectations surrounding gender roles and career paths. Recruiters must work to ensure that institutions are inclusive and welcoming to students of all genders, including providing support for LGBTQIA+ students and actively working to dismantle gender biases and stereotypes (McCabe, Dragowski, and Robinson 2013). If recruiters are unsure of where to start, they begin by evaluating the verbal and written communication used in recruiting students. An example is ensuring that their college applications use the noun 'they' in lieu of her/his. This practice is more inclusive and welcoming to all genders versus binary nomenclature.

Religion and Spirituality

Religious affiliation is another critical factor in a recruiter's positionality. Religion can influence students' values, beliefs, and practices, making it essential for recruiters to understand the impact of religion on students' decision-making processes (Hodum and James 2010). Re-

cruiters ought to acknowledge the variety of religious faiths and comprehend their potential influence on students' standings within various communities.

Conservative, religious, or homogenous students are often seen as the norm at private colleges (Crane 2003; Bowen, *et al.* 2006; Griffin and Muñiz 2015). These characteristics can often impact private college admissions recruiters, both positively and negatively. Religious students are often drawn to private, faith-based institutions that align with their religious beliefs. This homogeneity of religious values can unite these students and provide them with a feeling of safety in a world that may not always align with their values. Admissions recruiters at private colleges that can display the school's religious values and create a sense of belonging can increase interest and enrollment rates.

On the positive side, conservative students tend to have a keen sense of school pride and are loyal to their institutions (Lerner 2020). As admissions recruiters search for the right candidates, these conservative students will often be committed to attending and making a significant contribution to the school. College admissions recruiters who can effectively highlight their institution's conservative values and appeal to prospective students' sense of tradition can increase the probability of enrollment.

However, these characteristics can also have negative impacts on college admissions recruiters. Admissions recruiters may struggle to attract students who value diversity and inclusion over tradition and homogeneity. A lack of diversity can deter potential applicants from applying due to concerns about the quality of education and the campus environment. Private colleges may often be viewed as restrictive to students with different beliefs and traditions, leading to a lack of diversity in the student population. Potential applicants may not feel comfortable attending a school that values homogeneity over a diverse cultural exchange. This can deter high-performing students from applying, which can result in a decrease in the quality of the applicant pool. Additionally, the preconceptions on conservative and religious students can create a stigma around the private college admissions process.

Overall, the impact of positionality on private college admissions recruiters is complex, as it can positively and negatively impact the recruitment process. It is up to college enrollment professionals to design effective recruitment strategies that highlight the benefits of their institutions while addressing the concerns of potential applicants. By promoting diversity, inclusion, and academic excellence, private college admissions recruiters can attract top-tier students from diverse backgrounds and promote a positive view of their respective institutions.

First Generation

Being the first person in their family to attend college is common for numerous students (Baldwin, *et al.* 2021; Karp, *et al.* 2020). These students often face unique challenges and barriers throughout the college application and decision-making process. Therefore, it is imperative that college recruiters understand and acknowledge the positionality of first-generation students in order to effectively reach out and support them. First-generation students may face different challenges than students with a family history in higher education (Baldwin, *et al.* 2021). These challenges can range from a lack of family support and guidance to financial constraints and limited access to resources. College recruiters need to be aware of these barriers and actively work toward minimizing their impact on the recruitment and enrollment of first-generation students (Bensimon and Gray 2020). These students may be unfamiliar with some higher education policies, procedures, and language that recruiters might take for granted. College admissions recruiters should maintain awareness of these differences and seek to support these students.

It is essential for college recruiters to recognize and appreciate the nuances and complexities associated with being a first-generation student. By doing so, they can develop strategies that are sensitive to student needs and aspirations, fostering a more inclusive and supportive recruitment process. College recruiters can leverage their positionality to advocate for and implement policies that support the success of first-generation students. This can involve collaborating with other

stakeholders such as faculty and academic advisors to create academic support programs, mentoring initiatives, and financial aid opportunities specifically designed for first-generation students (Baldwin, *et al.* 2021). By actively engaging in these efforts, college recruiters can contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive campus environment that empowers first-generation students to thrive academically and socially.

An example that recruiters can put into practice is examining how their positionality influences their communication. Higher education, like other industries, uses a lot of jargon and technical terms used by employees within higher education. Terms such as bursar, registrar, and FAFSA are a small sample of language that is mainly used in the higher education lexicon. This can create communication barriers, and if prospective students don't understand their positionality, recruiters can exacerbate these challenges.

Accessibility and Accommodations

The positionality of college recruiters regarding accessibility and accommodations is multi-faceted. On one hand, they serve as ambassadors of their institution, representing its values and commitment to diversity and inclusion. Recruiting students with disabilities is an opportunity to create a diverse student body that reflects society and promotes a culture of acceptance and understanding. Ensuring equal access to education for students needing accommodations has become a priority for colleges and universities. Another area in which positionality awareness is essential is ableism, which refers to the discrimination and marginalization of people with physical, intellectual, or developmental limitations. Promoting accessibility and providing reasonable accommodation for students needing them is not just a legal obligation; it is a moral imperative. College recruiters need to recognize and value the diversity of their student population, including students who need accommodation. By ensuring accessibility and accommodations, institutions can nurture an inclusive environment that facilitates the educational journey for all students.

Recruiters may face challenges in adequately addressing accessibility and accommodation during the

recruitment process. Limited resources, institutional policies, and lack of awareness regarding disabilities can hinder recruiters' ability to provide comprehensive information and guidance to prospective students. It is crucial for recruiters to be aware of these challenges and actively work toward overcoming them to ensure equal opportunities for all applicants.

Colleges must ensure that their institutions are accessible and inclusive to all students, regardless of their abilities. This includes providing support for students needing accommodations and actively working to dismantle the ableist attitudes and biases that perpetuate inequality. Recruiters should actively engage in ongoing discussions and training sessions related to accessibility awareness. Building partnerships with accessibility services offices and experts will enhance recruiters' capacity to respond to inquiries, provide guidance, and address concerns about accommodation options on campus. By actively seeking to understand and address the needs of prospective students, recruiters can demonstrate their commitment to creating an inclusive campus environment.

Here are examples of how an able-bodied recruiter, more aware of their positionality, would better gauge the design of recruitment events. They would be more vigilant in how information is communicated at an open house event for those visually or hearing impaired. This includes, but is not limited to, using closed captions for videos or the alt text functionality for images in a PowerPoint presentation. The recruiter would also take obstacles involving mobility into consideration if it is required to visit various parts of the campus.

English as an Additional Language

College recruiters play a vital role in the admissions process, especially when it comes to recruiting students with English as an additional language (EAL) (Taylor, Chu, Li 2022). A college recruiter's positionality on EAL students can significantly impact their ability to recruit successfully. The awareness and knowledge that recruiters possess about the challenges and insecurities faced by EAL students can greatly assist them in tailoring their recruitment strategies effectively. Recruiters who

understand the additional support and assistance that EAL students might require are more likely to address these needs in their recruitment efforts. This can include providing information about English language proficiency requirements, language support programs, and cultural integration initiatives.

A recruiter's awareness of the specific language needs of EAL students is crucial in the recruitment process. EAL students may have different language backgrounds, levels of English proficiency, and needs for language support. Recruiters who possess this understanding can provide accurate information about language requirements and support services to potential EAL students. By addressing these language needs and highlighting the available resources, recruiters can build trust and confidence in prospective EAL students. EAL students may come from different countries, educational systems, and socio-cultural contexts. It is essential for recruiters to be open-minded and knowledgeable about these differences to connect with potential EAL students effectively. By recognizing the unique strengths, interests, and perspectives of EAL students, recruiters can engage in meaningful conversations that resonate with their personal aspirations and goals.

Understanding the cultural norms, values, and expectations of EAL students allows recruiters to create a welcoming environment that aligns with cultural identities. Recruiters who are aware of the potential challenges that EAL students may face in terms of cultural adaptation can offer guidance and support, which can facilitate the recruitment process. For example, they can highlight the availability of cultural clubs, mentorship programs, and resources that promote multicultural integration on campus.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status is another critical factor that must be considered by college admissions recruiters. Students from low-income backgrounds and marginalized communities often face significant barriers to accessing higher education, such as limited financial resources, inadequate support systems, and systemic discrimination (Gunther and Benson 2021). Therefore,

it is crucial for college enrollment professionals to understand these challenges and actively address them in their recruitment strategies. Recruiters should actively work to address these barriers by providing financial assistance, outreach programs, and support services to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access higher education.

College recruiters with privileged socio-economic backgrounds may unintentionally exhibit biases or assumptions when recruiting students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. These biases can manifest in subtle ways, such as a belief that potential students have access to the same resources or that financial concerns are not a major factor in their decision-making process (Valadez 1996). To mitigate these biases, it is essential for college recruiters to engage in self-reflection and to develop an awareness of their positionality.

Recruiters should possess a healthy understanding to provide accurate and transparent information about financial aid options and scholarships. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have limited knowledge of available financial support, which can impact their decision to pursue higher education. College recruiters need to be well-versed in the financial aid process and able to guide students through their options, ensuring they have access to the resources they need. College recruiters can actively seek out partnerships with community organizations, schools, and nonprofit agencies that serve students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These collaborations can provide recruiters with opportunities to connect with potential applicants and understand their unique needs and aspirations. Additionally, recruiters can leverage these partnerships to provide resources and support to students throughout the college application process.

Another issue concerning socioeconomic status centered within positionality, is how students from affluent backgrounds are perceived. It would benefit recruiters to be aware of how they engage with students from affluent backgrounds to ensure they are not covertly or overtly marginalizing those students (Jones, *et al.* 2019). Positionality awareness is intended to make recruitment efforts more inclusive for everyone seeking higher education.

Ageism

College recruiters are primarily responsible for identifying and selecting potential candidates for admission to their respective institutions (Swann, Henderson, and Officers 1998). While recruiters are expected to be objective and focus on merit, it is important to acknowledge that they are influenced by their own positionality, which can encompass their personal beliefs, attitudes, and biases (Briscoe, *et al.* 2020, Jones, *et al.* 2020; Byrd 2019). Ageism can be linked to a recruiter's positionality and their perception of age as a determining factor in academic success or social integration.

Ageism is a form of discrimination that manifests itself in varying ways across society. In the context of college recruiting, ageism refers to the biased treatment of individuals based on their age. It is essential to analyze the positionality of college recruiters with regard to ageism. Ageism is an often-overlooked aspect of positionality that must also be considered by college admissions recruiters. Older students, particularly those who are returning to education after a significant gap, face unique challenges in accessing higher education and may require additional support and resources. One potential source of ageism is the belief that older students may struggle to adapt to the college environment. Recruiters may assume that an older student will experience difficulties fitting in with younger peers, participating in extracurricular activities, or adjusting to the demands of a rigorous academic curriculum. Such biases can lead recruiters to favor younger applicants over older ones, effectively perpetuating age-based discrimination.

Recruiters should ensure that institutions are welcoming and supportive of all students, regardless of their age, and are actively working to address the systemic inequalities that prevent older students from accessing higher education. To combat ageism in college recruitment, it is crucial for college recruiters to examine their positionality and be aware of potential biases they may hold. This can be done through self-reflection, ongoing training on diversity and inclusion, and exposure to success stories of older students who have thrived in the college environment. By challenging their assumptions and embracing a more inclusive mindset,

recruiters can play a significant role in dismantling age-related barriers and fostering a more inclusive campus community. Recruitment strategies should focus on highlighting the diverse experiences and perspectives that older students bring to the table. By emphasizing the unique strengths of older applicants, recruiters can counteract ageist stereotypes and display the potential contributions older students can make to the college community. Additionally, institutions can implement mentoring programs that connect older students with peers and faculty members, providing a support system that eases their transition into college life.

Positionality Awareness Training

Adequate training and education in positionality are essential for college admissions recruiters. Positionality training is a concept that is recently gaining more widespread attention. It is a type of therapeutic intervention that aims to awaken people to their position in society and how it affects their perception of the world. Positionality training is primarily used in the social sciences to educate students on how one's position in society can impact their interpretation of data and analysis. Recruiting a diverse pool of students requires an understanding of the different challenges that applicants may face. Recruiters should receive a training program that includes information about the different components of positionality. They should learn about social justice principles and practices, the importance of inclusive language, and understanding how to make campus tours and information sessions more accessible and inclusive, to name a few (Li 2022; Valadez 1996; Henderson, *et al.* 2021). Recruiters must understand the different stakeholders in college admissions and ensure that they themselves understand diverse experiences. Admissions counselors are the first representations of an institution that students and families are shown, meaning admissions counselors must have the proper training in order to uphold the institution's mission statement regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Positionality awareness is a complex concept and demands sound training. If executed poorly, it runs the risk of amplifying misunderstandings and thus further

crippling efforts to enhance equity and inclusion. At times, positionality training is poorly defined and implemented. The term “positionality” is open to interpretation and can vary depending on personal beliefs, experiences, and cultural background. The lack of a clear, universally-accepted definition of positionality can make it difficult to develop effective training programs that address the needs of unique individuals and groups. Moreover, the imprecise implementation of positionality training programs has the potential to create confusion and misunderstandings among participants.

Some critics argue that positionality training can lead to undue emphasis on an individual’s identity rather than their merits. In college admissions, the primary objective is to choose the best candidates based on academic merit and achievements. Positionality training places significance on an individual’s personal identity, including their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. If the training is not done correctly, it could result in a scenario where a candidate is chosen based on their identity rather than merit, which could have negative consequences for the students and the institution. It is of great significance that recruiters look at students holistically to have a more well-rounded recruitment class.

Implementation of positionality training could be costly and time-consuming. Colleges and universities need to allocate resources to develop or adopt the curriculum for such training, and this can come at an expense to other existing programs. College admissions recruiters already have many responsibilities, and adding another layer of training could have unintended consequences on the quality of the admissions process. It is vital that this training is not treated as an “add-on” and instead intertwined with existing efforts to diversify the class.

Finally, other critics argue that positionality training can be divisive and counterproductive. It may lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes, biases, and discrimination. Positionality training can result in people becoming more aware of their identity and position in society, leading to skepticism and suspicion of individuals outside their identities. Such an outcome is con-

trary to the goal of achieving inclusivity and diversity in society. This is why it is pivotal that those in charge of professional development ensure positionality awareness training aligns with the mission, vision, and goals of the college.

Biases and Stereotypes

Implicit/unconscious/covert biases are attitudes or stereotypes that affect understanding, decisions, and actions in an unconscious manner. These biases can positively or negatively affect admissions recruiters’ interactions with students, parents, and counselors. For instance, an admissions recruiter who implicitly believes that students from certain ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds are less capable or motivated may unconsciously communicate that bias in their interactions with those students. On the other hand, an admissions recruiter who is aware of their implicit biases and actively works to counteract them may be more effective in engaging with and recruiting a diverse range of students.

Explicit/conscious/overt biases, on the other hand, refer to conscious attitudes or beliefs that an individual holds toward certain groups of people. These biases can be harmful to the admissions process, as they can lead recruiters to unfairly prioritize or exclude certain students based on factors such as their race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. It is critical for admissions recruiters to be aware of their explicit biases and aim to limit them to ensure fairness toward all candidates.

Stereotyping involves categorizing individuals into oversimplified groups based on their race, gender, age, or other factors (Steele 2010). For admissions recruiters, stereotyping can either positively or negatively impact their decision-making processes unintentionally (Nadal, *et al.* 2021). For example, an admissions recruiter who stereotypes all Asian American students as high achieving and academically gifted may be more likely to overlook other aspects of a student’s application, such as their extracurricular involvement or leadership potential. Alternatively, an admissions recruiter who stereotypes all minoritized students as being disadvantaged

may miss the strengths and talents that these students bring with them.

Training Strategies

■ **Creating a Courageous and Respectful Learning Environment.** Before diving into specific training strategies, creating a courageous and respectful learning environment is crucial. A supportive atmosphere encourages recruiters to engage in open discussions and embrace different perspectives. Trainers should establish ground rules, such as respectful language, active listening, and non-judgmental attitudes. This initial step sets the foundation for effective positionality awareness training.

■ **Integrating Intersectionality into the Training.** One effective strategy is to integrate intersectionality into the training. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals possess multiple, intersecting social identities that shape their experiences (Crenshaw 2019). All humans are internally pluralistic and hold many identities at once. In addition, some identities are fluid and others are static. By incorporating intersectional perspectives into training, recruiters learn to analyze social issues from various standpoints, including race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality. This approach cultivates a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives, promoting inclusivity and empathy amongst recruiters.

■ **Inviting Guest Speakers and Community Engagement.** Bringing in guest speakers from diverse backgrounds is an effective strategy to expose recruiters to different experiences and perspectives. Inviting individuals from marginalized communities, activists, or experts in the field facilitates conversations about social justice, privilege, and power dynamics. Personal accounts shared by guest speakers provoke critical thinking and challenge recruiters' initial assumptions, broadening their positionality awareness.

Furthermore, engaging with local communities through service-learning projects or internships enables recruiters to step out of their comfort zones and witness firsthand the realities faced by different communities. Being immersed in unfamiliar envi-

ronments fosters empathy and understanding, encouraging recruiters to question their positionality and how it influences their perceptions.

■ **Promoting Dialogue and Reflection.** Engaging recruiters in dialogue and reflection is pivotal in training for positionality awareness. One approach is to utilize small group discussions or debates that encourage recruiters to express their ideas and listen to others. This strategy not only fosters critical thinking and communication skills but also helps recruiters confront and challenge their preconceived notions.

Additionally, reflective exercises, such as journaling or personal narratives, enable participants to introspect on their background, biases, and assumptions (Andrews 2022; Shuck, *et al.* 2023). By encouraging self-reflection, individuals become more self-aware of their positionality and its impact on their perspectives and interactions with prospective students.

■ **Incorporating Experiential Learning and Simulations.** Experiential learning activities and simulations offer a hands-on approach to positionality awareness training. These activities allow recruiters to acknowledge and experience different perspectives. For example, a poverty simulation exercise may require participants to navigate the challenges of poverty and make tough decisions. Such simulations provide valuable insights into the experiences of marginalized groups and orient learners to the systemic barriers faced by different communities.

■ **Emphasizing Media Literacy and Critical Analysis.** A significant training strategy for positionality awareness is to incorporate media literacy and critical analysis into positionality awareness training. Media plays a significant role in shaping individuals' perceptions and biases, making it essential for students to critically evaluate the messages conveyed through various media platforms (Bapat, *et al.* 2021). By analyzing media content from diverse perspectives and identities, students develop a critical lens to identify biases, stereotypes, and oppressive narratives. This empowers them to engage with media more thoughtfully and challenges them to consider alternative viewpoints.

Summary

This contribution was not intended to put the sole responsibility on recruiters. Recruitment is one component of the strategic enrollment management process, as it will be highly beneficial for everyone committed to student retainment to increase their positionality awareness. As the world becomes more diverse and interconnected, it is essential for recruiters to develop positionality awareness. Given the increasing legislation being introduced to oppose them, it is crucial to recognize and strive for diversity and inclusion. Educational institutions reflect American society as a whole, which underscores the significance of comprehending the position of recruiters.

College admissions recruiters play a crucial role in the process of a college's diversity. To recruit a diverse pool of students, recruiters must acknowledge the central element of positionality, including race, ethnicity,

gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, and being the first person in their family to attend college. It is crucial that recruiters receive proper training on these issues to effectively recruit a diverse pool of students.

Positionality awareness is a critical aspect of the work carried out by college admissions recruiters. College recruiters must recognize the ways in which their identities, experiences, and biases shape their perspectives and interactions with prospective students. In addition, they should actively work to address the systemic inequalities and barriers that prevent marginalized students from accessing higher education. By doing so, they can help to ensure that institutions are inclusive, equitable, and supportive of all students, regardless of their background or identity. Higher education prides itself on being a space for growth and representation; college admissions recruiters must be the pillars to uphold that.

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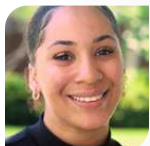


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