Exemplifying Inclusive Excellence: How Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis Leads by Example in Kinesiology

Mark Urtel,1 NiCole Keith,2 and Rafael E. Bahamonde2

1Department of Kinesiology, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Indianapolis, IN, USA; 2School of Health and Human Sciences, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Indianapolis, IN, USA

This article documents the highlights achieved by the Department of Kinesiology at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis over the span of 25 years that culminated with their being awarded the Inclusive Excellence award as sponsored by the American Kinesiology Association. Furthermore, this journey was presented using the special issue focus on leadership. Presented experiences occurred within the typical faculty understanding of teaching, research, and service. Recognition was given to the university and campus that hosts this department as it related to the overall diversity and inclusion culture developed on the broader scale, as this is important to acknowledge. This journey could inform or inspire other similar units as they strive to enhance diversity and inclusive excellence in their respective institutions.

Keywords: faculty, leadership, department culture, diversity

When one considers the concept of leadership, it is not hard to find information to review. In fact, a quick search on Google yielded over 4.1 billion hits when searching for leadership, by (a) quotes, (b) articles, (c) books, and (d) videos. While this dizzying search result suggests there is a lot of information (and possibly “experts”) on leadership, it also suggests leadership is an ever-evolving and highly contextualized concept. Leadership in Kinesiology is no different. As this special issue indicates, when we reflect on leadership within the three frames of vision, values, and practice, it guides us to be steadfast in our vision for a diversified discipline, committed to surrounding ourselves with colleagues who share our value of how an inclusive culture can benefit us, and motivated to put our words into practice to achieve these outcomes.

Furthermore, the concept of effective leadership through vision, value, and practice should be relatively impervious to the environment around us. By that we mean, effective leadership is essential during the good times and bad. As Smith and Fairbrother (2021) eloquently summated, uncertainty and change are the reliable constants for each of us whom serve as a leader. Therefore, as the recent/current pandemic has illustrated quite convincingly, it has been, and still is, imperative for leaders to maintain their vision, values, and practices as we pivoted to remote instruction and continue to alter our daily operations to withstand these unprecedented challenges. Similarly, when we consider the good times, leadership is equally important. As an example, prior to the pandemic when Kinesiology was realizing unprecedented growth, with some sources indicating a 184% increase in majors between 2000 and 2016 (Cairns, 2020). This would equate to the second fastest growing major within higher education in the United States. As a result, leaders had to adhere to their vision, values, and practices to be able to manage and control growth so that when the growth stabilized (and as some of us are experiencing now, perhaps even decreasing), there was a clear and sustainable path moving forward. In essence, leadership is always challenging, regardless of if you are entering disruptive times or high growth times; and while those climates are much different, leadership is always challenging.

As it relates to diversifying Kinesiology and aspiring to demonstrate inclusive excellence, the aforementioned take-home message still rings true. Leadership matters. Leading by example matters. Leadership is challenging. And leading with vision, values, and practice is vital for success to be achieved. Kinesiology is still evolving from being predominantly White and male to a much more representative and diverse discipline (Bunn, 2021); however, work remains. To affirm that one can look no further than the Kinesiology Review special issue from 2013, as coordinated by guest editor Mary E. Rudisill. Her article “Diversity Enhancement in Kinesiology” started the long overdue conversation on how we can be better. And as we revisit that special issue nearly 10 years later, it turns out there have been positive advances in Kinesiology that have enhanced diversification; nonetheless, opportunities remain. This collection of articles by leading scholars in the field laid out a compelling case for why and how Kinesiology programs should address the lack of diversity in the discipline.

For example, Brooks et al. (2013) offered a highly effective argument for why we should value a diverse discipline. They approached this using a holistic lens and confirming that all
stakeholders associated with Kinesiology in higher education will unequivocally benefit as diversity improves. In addition, as Hodges and Corbett (2013) and Lowrie and Robinson (2013) plainly present, the diversification of our country is not being mirrored within the landscape of higher education generally, and Kinesiology specifically. Their respective foci are centered on how culture and the formal and informal processes of socialization can help address and overcome some barriers or perceived obstacles to improve diversity. Then, Keith and Russell (2013) offer models on how universities, or more particularly, academic units, could create an infrastructure and architecture that supports and grows diversity within a campus. To be sure, since in this special issue there are pockets of successes and affirming stories to tell, in fact, we propose here that we have a positive story to tell.

In addition to these Kinesiology-specific perspectives, there exist other institution-wide perspectives on leadership approaches to inclusive excellence. Once such example is the National Institutes of Health. Here, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is implemented that ranges from how to produce a welcoming environment through to elements of mentoring and approach is implemented that ranges from how to produce a welcoming environment through to elements of mentoring and then finishes with the steps to help diversify the talent pool (Valantine, 2020). Again, when looking back at our efforts and equating them to this current scholarship, many parallels exist, and one could argue we were ahead of our time in the pursuit of inclusive excellence. Yet, it would be highly unfortunate for us to believe that we have arrived as a discipline in achieving the goals of inclusive excellence. Work remains as we reacknowledgements in support of faculty initiatives that contribute to inclusive excellence. It then becomes necessary to ask: What type of leadership was utilized in our academic program that contributes to the diversification of the discipline in an effective and sustained manner? In this case study, we will share how leadership emerged from the Department of Kinesiology in the School of Health and Human Sciences at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) that exemplified vision, values, and practice that culminated in our department earning the prestigious, as emphasized by Bunn (2021), American Kinesiology Association Inclusive Excellence Award. What is intriguing and unique to our department is that much of this leadership occurred decades before the current literature was published on the strategies to enhance and diversify the discipline. Knowing this, we will retrospectively apply some current literature and scholarship and view our narrative using that lens in better describing how we have arrived at this point in our journey.

**The IUPUI Context**

We must acknowledge that the institution our department resides in IUPUI has been a national leader in inclusive excellence since its inception in 1969. While aspects of IUPUI can be established as far back as 1891, with Indiana University having offered classes in Indianapolis then, it was not until 1969 that Indiana University and Purdue University merged programs and schools and IUPUI was formed. Notably, the focus of the early programs was on health-and teaching-related fields. Coupled with the location being in the capitol city of Indiana, the natural focus of IUPUI was engaging with the people of this metropolitan area in impactful and service-oriented ways. Hence, its mission and aim centered on serving the community in which it originated.

Remarkably, IUPUI is a six-time Insight into Diversity Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award winner. Additionally, IUPUI is committed to recognizing both staff and faculty in their pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion by hosting an array of awards to identify and celebrate these efforts. Moreover, the campus commitment to diversity is also expressed by the purpose of this urban-serving institution. For instance, taken directly from the IUPUI’s mission statement: “We are all-in to promote an inclusive and accessible campus that is community oriented, internationally conscious, and an advocate for the rights of our students. We do this by asking tough, student-centered questions and then consistently working to improve, through anti-racism initiatives, honoring the heritage of Native peoples taking action locally, and globally, and so much more.” IUPUI also prioritizes their path to “evolve our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion agenda” and highlights 10 actions items that address the allocation of dedicated personnel, resources, and time in achieving these goals. A keystone element of this agenda is that each school was asked to develop a diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan to ensure it remains a priority along with appropriate acknowledgements in support of faculty initiatives that contribute to inclusive excellence. Along with these, the campus mission statement has been consistent in valuing a focus on community and civic engagement within the teaching, research, and service roles of faculty. Recently, this had been reemphasized as our campus is a national leader in support of promotion and tenure cases on diversity, equity, and inclusion (Flaherty, 2021). To that end, we have had the privilege of working and collaborating in an environment that has been an exemplar in demonstrating leading by example toward inclusive excellence.

**The Department of Kinesiology**

The Department of Kinesiology is the largest department of seven in the School of Health and Human Sciences at IUPUI. The department hosts 23 full-time-equivalent faculty, ~34 adjunct faculty (each semester), and approximately 13 graduate assistants. The department offers degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels. At the undergraduate level, there are three plans of study within a degree in Kinesiology; they are as follows: (a) Exercise Science, (b) Fitness Management and Personal Training, and (c) Physical Education Teacher Education. At the graduate level, we offer a master’s degree in Kinesiology (MSK) and a PhD in Exercise Science. We also offer a range of certificates and minors. Additionally, our department offers programming in Food and Nutrition, Physical Activity elective programming, and campus-wide General Education programming. Suffice it to say, the Department of Kinesiology at IUPUI has a prominent presence within the campus landscape and has significantly contributed to the campus’ achievement of its academic mission.

From a curriculum standpoint, the department utilizes high-impact practices early and often. By nature, our students and faculty are actively engaged in many ways, particularly within the diverse community to which IUPUI is located. Additionally, our department has a culture statement that affirms our commitment to being an inclusive department.

As we begin to address the journey to how the Department of Kinesiology at IUPUI was awarded the American Kinesiology
course includes teaching, research, and service. Another perspective on inclusive excellence was published, in 2015. At the same time, the faculty leaders expressed vision, values, and practice for sustained inclusive excellence. Again, well before the notable, and the faculty leaders articulated their vision, values, and practice.

This faculty leadership, within their individual and collective work, demonstrated a vision of how their work could contribute to an inclusive excellence environment. Then, they either aligned with or ensured new colleagues shared their values on the path toward inclusive excellence. Finally, they dedicated themselves to practicing these beliefs and articulating and demonstrating them consistently in their teaching, research, and service.

The genesis of this work started in 1996, and since then, the vision, values, and practices are now embedded within the department culture and embraced by the collective faculty and departmental leadership; this transformation is important to note. In the next section, we will focus on the key elements of our application for Inclusive Excellence and then summarize a few prominent outcomes.

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion Using Research

The Department of Kinesiology selected five initiatives to highlight in its application for the American Kinesiology Association Inclusive Excellence Award; they are as follows: (a) Minority Scholars Program (now known as the Diversity Research Scholar Program [DSRP]), (b) National Science Foundation (NSF) Lois Stokes Midwest Center for Excellence (LSMCE), (c) Post-Baccalaureate Research Education Program (IPREP), (d) Health Careers Opportunities Program (IU-HCOP), and (e) The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Mentoring Women to Fellowship Program. These initiatives exemplify faculty leadership and demonstrate the vision, values, and practice that ultimately fostered an inclusive environment in the academic unit.

First, in 1996, faculty member Dr. Rafael Bahamonde (of the then School of Physical Education) was one of the founding DSRP mentors at IUPUI and 7 years later was appointed the director of the DSRP. The IUPUI DSRP is a performance-based scholarship directed toward academically talented first-time or incoming transfer students. Scholars from racial and ethnic populations who have been historically underrepresented in institutions of higher education and whose presence will enhance the learning environment through increased diversity at IUPUI are encouraged to apply. The 4-year graduation rates of DSRP scholars were more than double the average graduation rates for underrepresented minority (URM) students with comparable grade point averages (GPAs) at admission and many of the students continue their education into professional and graduate programs (Galli & Bahamonde, 2018). As a result, by introducing students into the profession that otherwise may not have avenues of support, this faculty leadership initiative successfully demonstrated a vision for inclusive leadership and excellence. Echoing Hodges and Corbett (2013), the efforts here provide the necessary socialization and modeling supports to foster a discipline more reflective of society. Moreover, by producing higher graduation rates it leads into the practice of increased admissions into graduate and professional programs, which is vital and necessary for a more representative and diverse faculty.

Second, Dr. Bahamonde became part of the leadership team as the Director of Outreach of the LSMCE. LSMCE is a partnership with IUPUI, Chicago State University and the Argonne Laboratory, serving as a national hub of information for scholars to access data, models, and funding opportunities in broadening participation of underrepresented minority (URM) students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Additionally, the Center assists 28 Midwestern non–Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP) schools with developing strategies to improve their URM students’ performance, persistence, and success in STEM degree programs and provide opportunities for their faculty and students to participate in STEM activities including workshops/conferences, webinars, and research internships. In 2019, The Louis Stokes Midwest Regional Center of Excellence (LSMRC) for Broadening Participation in STEM is a partnership of Chicago State University (CSU) and IUPUI was funded by NSF. The LSMRC will obtain significant new knowledge on factors that sustain institutional collaborations that advance URM student achievement in STEM majors at Midwest non-LSAMP campuses (Jones et al., 2016). Similar to the DSRP program noted above, by offering the LSMRC we are able to enroll underrepresented students in our disciplinary programs which clearly values a diverse discipline and can then serve as an additional conduit for students to become leaders in the field and diversify the discipline. This socialization was a significant premise in the work of Lowrie and Robinson (2013) and is also illustrative of the NIH’s aspirations of diversifying the talent pool of underrepresented students (Valantine, 2020).

Third, The IUPUI Post-Baccalaureate Research Enhancement Program NIH (IPREP) grant was funded for over $1.6 million and helps prepare undergraduate students from underrepresented minority populations, including students with disabilities, for admission to graduate programs in the biomedical and behavioral sciences. Dr. Bahamonde served as the co-PI on the grant and currently serves as the Director. In this role, he developed an online mentor training for the IPREP program and provided additional mentoring resources for the faculty mentors. IPREP is currently in its ninth year and has placed 88% the fellows in PhD programs, including MD/PhD programs (Hansen et al., 2019; Hardy et al., 2021). For example, a 2016 IPREP fellow who is currently a PhD candidate in Exercise Science stated: “IPREP helps you find what route is best for you” (IUPUI IPREP, 2018, 0:03). And they continue “the mentee-mentor relationship. Having a strong relationship with your mentor is what makes the program a success” (IUPUI IPREP, 2018, 2:13).

This program further supports our continued commitment to the vision, values, and practices of inclusive excellence by providing the necessary pathway for underrepresented students to enter the discipline as faculty, which ultimately leads to a more inclusive environment than ever before. In addition, this program is illustrative of the architecture that Keith and Russell (2013) so poignantly noted is critical for success and it can be put in place, at the department level, in a very efficacious manner.

Fourth, the IU-HCOP programs are offered in a geographic area with significant health disparities and underrepresentation in
the health care workforce. The goal of IU-HCOP is to train qualified, culturally competent health care professionals who are primed to address underrepresentation and work toward health equity. The IU Health Careers Opportunities Program was established in 2015, led by faculty member, Dr. NiCole Keith, and has realized the following accomplishments: IU Health Careers Opportunities Program staff enrolled 180 HCOP-eligible students from 14 high schools in the Indianapolis metropolitan area. Students came to IUPUI for a 20-week Saturday Student Academy or a 6-week (Monday through Friday) Junior Summer Camp. This exposure for college-ready, yet underrepresented, high school students also demonstrates our unwavering commitment and modeling of inclusive excellence leadership. Additionally, it provides another touchpoint for students to see themselves in the profession in a way they had not experienced prior. Brooks et al. (2013) and Valantine (2020) would deem this as an exemplar of how the value of diversity can not only demonstrate a welcoming environment but also benefit all stakeholders of an organization.

Fifth, the ACSM established the Strategic Health Initiative for Women, Sport, and Physical Activity with a goal of addressing current issues facing women’s health and fitness through clinical practice, research, public information, leadership, and advocacy. In 2015, Dr. Keith joined this group and developed the Mentoring Women to Fellowship program to address the significantly low number of women who were ACSM Fellows when compared with men. What came to fruition for this is not only a more intentional pathway for women, underrepresented women in particular, to see themselves as leaders in this professional organization. But, most importantly, Dr. NiCole Keith become the first person of color to hold the position of President of the American College of Sports Medicine. As such, underrepresented professionals can now see themselves in this more inclusive space. Valantine (2020) highlights this form of mentoring as a key tenet of the NIH’s approach to inclusive excellence.

**Promoting Diversity and Inclusion Using Service**

As it relates to service, the Department of Kinesiology selected two programs to highlight in our application for the American Kinesiology Association Inclusive Excellence Award; they are as follows: (a) The Adapted Movement Programs and (b) Discovering Kinesiology Camps.

First, 25 years ago, in 1997, Kinesiology faculty member, Dr. Katie Stanton, founded the Adapted Movement Programs. Adapted Movement Programs help people with disabilities improve their overall physical, cognitive, and social function via three clinicals (Ability Fitness Clinic, Motor Activity Clinic, Live* Laugh*Dance). Moreover, these clinical settings provided service-learning opportunities for students in the Department of Kinesiology (and other majors), who get real-world experience by working directly with clients. A community board of advisors promotes the clinics, raises funds, and guides program services. While Dr. Stanton founded the Ability Fitness and Motor Activity Clinics, respectively, Kinesiology faculty member Dr. Rachel Swinford founded Live*Laugh*Dance. Taken together, their vision, values, and practices of including individuals of all ability levels in physical activity and motor development programs further solidify our faculty leadership using inclusive excellence as our point of calibration. Furthermore, this typifies Hodges and Corbett (2013) suggestions that the discipline of Kinesiology should expand their reach to all persons to better reflect the society we all exist in.

Next, faculty member Dr. Mark Urtel collaborated with the Indiana Area Health Education Centers to establish the Discovering Kinesiology summer camp for Indiana college-ready high school students. Area Health Education Centers has as one of its core functions to “increase representation of individuals from under-represented minority and disadvantaged (URMD) rural, and medically underserved backgrounds in health professions, particularly primary care”; this program developed into a residential, on-campus experience that allows students to learn more about the discipline of Kinesiology. What followed from this initiative is that students who not only were typically overlooked for college pathways upon graduation from high school were exposed to campus and academic life. Additionally, they were also introduced to a discipline that many times is overlooked or not fully understood. In fact, we realized actual enrollments from program completers that ended up majoring in Kinesiology at IUPUI. This effort also aligns closely with the work from Hodges and Corbett (2013) and Lowrie and Robinson (2013) in fostering socializing opportunities to enable the discipline of Kinesiology to better reflect the communities it serves.

**Promoting Diversity and Inclusion Using Teaching**

As it relates to teaching, the Department of Kinesiology highlights a seminar course we piloted titled “If You Can See It, You Can Be It: Changing the Face of Healthcare (Healthcare Role Exploration).” Realizing a high percentage of our KINE undergraduates strive for admission into professional programs that are healthcare based (Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, etc.), this course focused underrepresented individuals toward the health professions. This course will educate students on important issues within the world of healthcare, require real-world shadowing experiences in healthcare settings, and explore students’ emerging identities as healthcare professionals. In addition, students will have the opportunity to shadow healthcare professionals in the community and, for 6 weeks, will work with a group of theater professionals (local director, playwright, and actor) to produce a play about being a minority healthcare professional in Indianapolis. It is notable that we partnered with school colleague Dr. Sally Wasmuth, from the Department of Occupational Therapy in offering this novel course. This course exceeded enrollment expectations when originally piloted and further showcased our collective vision, values, and practices of introducing an academic discipline to underrepresented students in a way that made sense to, and empowered them.

Taken together, these comprehensive programs have yielded some significant outcomes that support and extend inclusive excellence in the discipline of Kinesiology. For example, the DSRP has fostered a graduation rate of 65%, which not only exceeds that of the general population of IUPUI but also is double the graduation rate for URM students with comparable GPAs at admission (Galli & Bahamonde, 2018). The ACSM mentoring project has fostered 63 mentor dyads and 13 of the mentees have been awarded fellowship status. We have tracked students who attended the Discovering Kinesiology camps, and it was found students in fact ended up enrolling in the department with plans on majoring Kinesiology. The Health Care Exploration course attracted 13 URM students in its inaugural offering, with course evaluations indicating high satisfaction and appreciation for the course. More importantly, the department has had presence in the space of diversity and inclusion, in a leading manner for over 25 years. Plus, we have continued to add to and refine our programming offered and have exemplifies a vision of inclusive
excellence, with high fidelity values, and most importantly have translated those to our high-impact practices.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Our goal here was simple. To share our story and reiterate what many, such as Philips (2017) have proven, and that is that striving to sustain a culture that values diversity and inclusive excellence makes us better. It makes us smarter. It allows us to meet the needs of our constituents more effectively. Our department continually endeavors to facilitate, build, and create interactions, understandings, and dialogue among our diverse cultures. Our goal is to create an intentionally inclusive and accessible program and campus. Our collective goals are to instill diversity into our institution’s consciousness, reinforce it with equity, and ultimately demonstrate a culture of inclusive excellence. We lead by example. In effect, we have the vision for it, we value it, and we practice it.

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