

What's in a name?

We are both proud and excited to share that effective August 1st, the Office of Graduate Minority Programs will be changing its name to the **Office of Graduate Diversity Initiatives**.

The Office of Graduate Minority Programs was formed in 1984 to create a space at the University of Florida- a predominately white institution- for students of color and underrepresented backgrounds. The goal of our office has always been to foster a space that reflects the demographics of our nation's population, not just one group. Since formed, we have developed programs and administered funding aimed to increase the number of primarily Black and Hispanic graduate students, but also students from other underrepresented backgrounds.

The Office of Graduate Minority Programs is proud of its office's historical roots. The term "minority" was coined at a time when the nation was adopting policies and programs that looked to protect the constitutional rights of what was termed the minority groups, and we are proud of how far we have come. We are committed to continuing our efforts in 2017- and beyond- of being our student's advocates, sharing all of their amazing accomplishments and contributions to UF, and obtaining funding to support their graduate education and encourage them to change the world. In order to do this, we recognize the importance of using empowering language as we advocate for our students and our office; language that includes students of color - not excludes by the various interpretations and perceptions of the word "minority". "Minority" is a word that is becoming more challenged. A quick Google search confirms this. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines minority as "a group of people who are different from the larger group in a country, area, etc., in some way (such as race or religion)".

NPR's own Vice President of Diversity, Keith Woods, wrote in a 2002 column that "minority" is part of a media language " mired in euphemisms and the tortured, convoluted syntax that betray America's pathological avoidance of straight talk about race relations." In parallel debates, some critics argue that an emphasis on minority status is insulting to Blacks, Latinos and Asians and ignores their cultural influence on the mainstream. Others argue that the emphasis encourages victimization, most recently among some whites. Many people use "minority" when they really mean African American or Hispanic. That is not only incorrect, but is also offensive to many in those groups. Additionally, it is projected that by the year 2050, non-whites will become the majority of the U.S. population. Presently, just over a third of the country is Latino, Black, or Asian American (U.S. Census, 2010). There is more available research on why especially in 2017 the word "minority" is oppressive, outdated, and promotes exclusion.

Language is important. Branding is important. How we define and characterize ourselves and our office is important, especially to those who do not look like us.

We are both proud and excited to share the new name of our office: **The Office of Graduate Diversity Initiatives**. With this language shift, we honor and acknowledge our students as individuals and their culture – their heritage, ethnicity, race, and experiences. We are aware that the word "diversity" does not solve all of the perceptions that come with "minority". We are aware that "diversity" comes with its own challenges, however we challenge you to consider that this is the most positive word for underrepresented populations at this time. If you research similar offices at other institutions, you will find comparable names. Most importantly, our mission will remain the same and that is to increase the number of Ph.D. students from underrepresented ethnic or racial groups. Our services will not change nor our funding opportunities.

In sum, our name change allows us to remove the oppressive language, false perceptions, and negative interpretations that the word “minority” can bring. We are evolving from an “us vs. them” mindset to one that includes, engages, and empowers all of our graduate students and what makes them unique. We are diverse. We are unique. We are not less than, like the word “minority” can suggest. We are not different. We are to not be excluded. We are The Office of Graduate Diversity Initiatives.

More readings on the topic of the word minority:

- <http://www.npr.org/sections/ombudsman/2011/08/29/140040441/covering-race-considering-journalists-use-of-minority>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/minority>
- <http://blackyouthproject.com/why-the-term-minority-is-problematic/>
- http://workforcediversitynetwork.com/res_articles_termminority.aspx



The Office of Graduate Diversity Initiatives Team