What does a diverse higher education IT workforce look like, and why is it important? Higher education IT leadership doesn't appear to be particularly diverse. Statistics from the 2015 Center for Higher Education Chief Information Officer Studies (CHECS) survey show that 95 percent of responding CIOs identified themselves as “White.” This represents a 4 percent increase from 2014. The CHECS data also covers IT leaders considered to be one level below the CIO. Of those who responded, 95 percent identified as “White.” The 2015 percentage of these IT leaders who were women and who identified as aspiring to be a CIO reached a new low of 24 percent, with the highest percentage over the past six years at only 31 percent. Similarly, data from the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) shows that in 2014–2015, only 20 percent of CIOs in higher education were women.

These statistics for higher education IT leaders, and the events that have unfurled across the United States and within higher education dealing with race, should indicate a strong need to take action to diversify the overall higher education IT workforce. However, there’s a perhaps even more compelling reason: improving organizational performance. Incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion into the workforce isn’t just “the right thing to do.” These values are imperative for improving decision-making and outcomes. Improved organizational performance has been demonstrated repeatedly in the private sector and applies to higher education as well. Additionally, “IT Workforce Hiring and Retention: Ensuring adequate staffing capacity and staff retention as budgets shrink or remain flat and as external competition grows” was listed as #4 on the EDUCAUSE 2016 Top 10 IT Issues list. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are critical to the recruitment, hiring, retention, and career advancement for IT staff in higher education.

Now is the time for all of us in higher education information technology to examine who we are as an industry and profession, starting with comprehensive data about our current demographics. A partnership between colleagues from EDUCAUSE and CUPA-HR could be critical to answering some key questions: Are we improving? Are we remaining static? Are we heading in the wrong direction? How can we grow and develop our pipeline? How do we address the lack of representation of marginalized groups as staff move up the leadership ladder?

The future of the profession depends on ensuring that at current and, more important, future leaders know and understand the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as develop a culture and strategy that continually fosters improvement. This is a matter of extreme importance and should be valued as much as budgets, strategies, governance, and the technologies we deploy and support.

This year colleagues from EDUCAUSE, CUPA-HR, and search firms that focus on higher education are embarking on a year-long discussion of and strategy development on diversity, equity, and inclusion, to include blogs, articles, webinars, and conference sessions. We are issuing a call to action: What does the community need to do—and do now? Some possibilities:

1. Publish diversity demographics for the higher education IT community through a partnership between EDUCAUSE and CUPA-HR
2. Collect data or additional data to continually assess how we are doing
3. Structure programs to help leaders, managers, and supervisors recognize and reduce unconscious biases
4. Develop target development programs for underrepresented talent
5. Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion within our community through increased educational opportunities such as blogs, articles, research, webinars, and conference sessions
6. Collect, store, and share best practices from member institutions that have positively increased diversity within our community
7. Offer programs that provide the EDUCAUSE membership with usable approaches to increase workforce diversity

What can you, as a member of the community, do to help?

- Educate yourself on the issues. Contribute to upcoming EDUCAUSE activities around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Act!
- Understand the unconscious biases that are prevalent and play a significant role in every workplace situation.

Finally, what other activities do you want to see? What topics do you want to discuss? What sessions do you want to attend and participate in at the 2016 EDUCAUSE Annual Conference? Please let us know in the Comments section!
By MELISSA WOO and KEITH W. McINTOSH

Notes
1. CIO Roles and Responsibility, 2015, CHECS report.
2. According to Jacqueline Bichsel, director of research, CUPA-HR, personal communication based on presentation material, December 21, 2015.
7. For an excellent presentation on this topic, view the video “Unconscious Bias @ Work,” a presentation by Brian Welle (Google Ventures).

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