

Response to Reviewer 1 + Handling editor

Reviewer Comment

Comment: The manuscript requires deeper contextualization of Affirmative Action and DEI programs, particularly regarding their historical foundations.

Author Response

Response: The introduction and historical context sections were expanded with new data from Rose (2019) and Urofsky (2020). These sources situate AA and DEI in the broader struggle against systemic discrimination.

Reviewer Comment

Comment: Please incorporate more case studies or examples to support arguments.

Author Response

Response: Additional case studies were integrated, including the University of Michigan enrollment outcomes, corporate DEI initiatives at Google and Johnson & Johnson, and healthcare programs at the Cleveland Clinic.

Reviewer Comment

Comment: Clarify the benefits and limitations of DEI programs.

Author Response

Response: We expanded the 'Challenges and Critiques' section to analyze quota-driven shortcomings, highlight the *Watson v. Fort Worth Bank & Trust* case, and stress the need for targeted measures. April (2021) was also integrated to support the argument that innovative DEI frameworks and inclusive leadership are essential to overcome resistance to meaningful engagement.

Reviewer Comment

Comment: References require proper formatting.

Author Response

Response: All references were reformatted according to APA 7th edition. Instances of 'as cited in' were corrected, and consistency in citations ensured.