

Incorporating **design thinking principles** into all new ITS systems and system upgrades at Empire State University will significantly enhance **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)** by fostering an empathetic, collaborative, and innovative approach to problem-solving. This approach will bring about the following changes.

1. Empathy as a Foundation

Design thinking begins with empathy – understanding the diverse experiences, needs, and challenges faced by different groups within the university community, including students, faculty, and staff from underrepresented backgrounds. By emphasizing empathy, ITS can:

- Identify barriers to inclusion, such as financial, cultural, or systemic challenges that minority students face.
- Listen deeply to underrepresented voices, ensuring their experiences inform new policies or initiatives.
- Foster a human-centered approach to decision-making, which places the needs of marginalized groups at the forefront.

For example, workshops or “empathy interviews” with students from different backgrounds can highlight issues around accessibility, discrimination, or social isolation. This input can then guide more inclusive campus policies.

2. Inclusive Ideation and Collaboration

The collaborative nature of design thinking encourages brainstorming sessions that include diverse voices, allowing more equitable participation in decision-making processes. By involving people from different racial, gender, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds, ITS can:

- Ensure that diverse perspectives lead to innovative solutions that address systemic inequities.
- Promote cross-functional collaboration, where teams from various divisions and departments (e.g., student services, faculty, and administration) work together on ITS initiatives with a DEI frame of reference.
- Encourage co-creation of solutions with stakeholders, such as designing more inclusive systems to support student services, rethinking recruitment and retention strategies, or addressing disparities in academic achievement.

This principle ensures that solutions are not developed in isolation but are shaped by those the systems and services directly impact.

3. Iterative Improvement and Adaptability

With design thinking's focus on iteration rather than "once and done," continuous feedback and adaptation are emphasized. This allows the ITS to:

- Refine programs that address diversity gaps, such as adjusting DEI training or resource allocation based on real-time feedback.
- Adapt policies to changing student needs, particularly as new issues around equity emerge.
- Promote a culture of learning and growth, ensuring that ITS's approach to DEI strategies evolves based on ongoing feedback from all community segments.

For example, after rolling out a new student support service, ITS could gather student feedback and make iterative adjustments to ensure its effectiveness.

4. Problem Reframing and Long-Term Inclusion Goals

Design thinking encourages reframing problems, which helps ITS look beyond surface-level issues and address the root causes of inequity. By rethinking the ways they approach DEI challenges, ITS can:

- Challenge existing assumptions about diversity and explore deeper structural biases in policies and practices.
- Focus on systemic change, such as rethinking how technology supports socioeconomic diversity or using technical systems to minimize implicit biases in hiring and promotions.
- Reframe student support services by focusing on equitable outcomes rather than providing equal opportunities.

For example, ITS could develop holistic support systems that integrate information across advising services, financial aid, and mental health resources, ensuring students have the tools to succeed throughout their academic journey.

Conclusion

By applying Design Thinking principles to new systems and services and systems upgrades, ITS can create a culture of empathy, collaboration, and innovation, ultimately fostering a more inclusive environment. This iterative, human-centered approach ensures that systems and services are adaptable and responsive to the real needs of the Empire State University population, promoting long-term, sustainable change.