Leadership for Diversity: Effectively Managing for a Transformation

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Leadership for Diversity: Effectively Managing for a Transformation

by Adrian K. Haugabrook

Diversity has become a contentious theme woven throughout many different aspects of higher education. Multiculturalism, ethnic studies, women's studies, curriculum reform, strategies for increasing access and opportunity to the under-represented and under-served and improving campus climate have all been vehicles to promote and further diversity initiatives. Diversity stands to challenge much of what has been the traditional views of higher education. The efforts to promote multiculturalism and diversity have caused the academy and the enterprise of higher learning to introspectively examine and reexamine its values, beliefs and relationships to a much larger society. American higher education now sees itself in the midst of a changing world that is redefining both societal and economic needs. These changing needs have raised some unexplored and profound questions with regards to diversity. Why should higher education be concerned with issues of diversity? Who should be educated? What role should higher education take in educating a pluralistic citizenry? Must the aims and purposes of higher education be redefined entirely? In what ways does diversity significantly expand the body of knowledge in the academe? What are the implications for this expansion? What are the pedagogical and policy implications of diversity? And what of the even more idealistic question that higher education may be grappling with: can we change the world? These questions, as well as others, will continually be placed on the table for discourse by scholars, legislators, governing boards, students and citizens.

From the 1940s through the Civil Rights era and until the early 1980s, discourse surrounding diversity consisted of issues of access and preparation. But now, diversity issues have expanded to include inquiries alluding to pedagogy, the curriculum, campus and institutional climate, persistence and graduation rates of students, institutional structure, faculty composition and assessment, institutional leadership, funding and principle questions regarding institutional mission. It is not just an issue of student access and participation that is leading the discourse of diversity. All members of the campus community are now part of the discussion.[1] Diversity in higher education has become a very complex issue that has, in many regards, transformed the enterprise of American higher education. As Yolanda Moses points out,

Campus leaders at all levels, including faculty, staff, and students, must work together to articulate a clear vision of what their institution would look like if cultural diversity were successful in enhancing diversity among students, faculty, staff, and governing body.[2]

American colleges and universities have always reflected the ideas, trends and concerns of greater American society and even more recently the global society. One of the most significant trends relate to population growth within the country. The original definition and use of the phrase "minority group" is losing its significance and applicability.[3] In 1991, Native Americans, African-Americans and Latinos collectively represented about 25% (61 million) of the total United States population—and the number is increasing. Within the next 20 years, Latinos will number approximately 47 million and African-Americans will rise to 44 million. The Latinos population will actually double in the next thirty years. With such staggering figures, higher education can expect to see an increase in students of color coming to college. But higher education must still answer the question of who should receive a higher education and by what means.

There are a number of negatives attached to being in a "minority group." The term minority often times connotes poverty, unemployment, crime and low educational attainment. But higher education has been embraced by many "minority groups" as a means to increase economic and social opportunities. This ideal is not new. What is higher education's role in such a dynamic nation? Higher education must continue to promote access and equal opportunity for all who seek its value. Higher education should be a right not just a privilege. Individuals should have the opportunity to make the choice as to whether they will attend college—or not. Regardless of who chooses, access should be provided.

Many institutions in America still sustain vestiges of discrimination. Affirmative action has been too short-lived and it is therefore impossible to assess what "good" it has accomplished. Thirty years of affirmative action compared to nearly 400 years of institutionalized racism and discrimination is not a fair comparison. Colleges and universities must examine what they do and how they do it and transform themselves into welcoming environments for all of its users. If higher education wants to be seen as an industry, it must connect with its current and potential customers. Higher education has the potential to be the only industry that can profoundly impact the entire livelihood of this country. It would provide a more educated and economically stable and prosperous citizenry. It can be accomplished by developing, implementing, redefining and evaluating access strategies.

Colleges and universities must also better define themselves as social institutions and clearly articulate their institutional mission. They must rethink who they are serving and how they are serving them. They need to ask themselves the question of who are they not serving and why. These are not simple questions and should not be treated as such. The focus of diversity has at times been

redirected to discourse about "those people" or "those ideas." Diversity is broader than that. Diversity has been a value of American life but it has not always been valued in American life. Higher education does and should continue to play a significant role in advancing the ideas, the people and the pedagogy. It is not merely reform in higher education that diversity warrants, it is a transformation. Higher education should be about truth, increasing the base of knowledge in all subjects and disciplines, providing a new brand of leadership, and educating new minds to exist and compete in a diverse and global community. Higher education as an enterprise must realize its assets, its short- and long-term investments, its options, its customers and its costs. If higher education fails as an enterprise, it will bankrupt the truth.

Colleges and universities should use the following strategies as tools to redefine and restructure—utilizing diversity as a theme. Many of these assertions have implications for institutional leadership, for leadership that proposes to be transformational and transactional. Leadership is transformational in the sense that leading for diversity stands to change the culture and traditions, values, symbols, language, and systems of how an institution lives. Leadership that is transactional addresses the internal needs of an organic and dynamic organization.

Define (redefine) institutional commitment to diversity. Diversity as a definition is quite organic. It is an evolving term that reflects the social, economic and political demography of this country as well as the world. Diversity is not solely about issues of race and ethnicity. Today, it is about an assortment of various experiences including gender, sexuality, religion, socioeconomic status, ability, learning styles and age. Because of the dynamic nature of diversity, institutions need to clearly articulate what influence diversity has on the institution and in what ways diversity should be reflected through the institution. There needs to be an institutional commitment once these answers have been determined.

Promote access, quality, and diversity as a package. Institutions seemed to have separated these three terms into mutually exclusive (distinct) and unrelated items. If these terms continue to be articulated as distinct then the interpretation and perception by others will support this notion. Higher education as an enterprise needs to create language that promotes the positive aspects of access, quality and diversity. In other words, one quality does not exist to the detriment of the other two. All three qualities should be viewed as interrelated and not mutually exclusive.

Evaluate institutional and departmental missions with regard to diversity. Institutions should set new standards and expectations through institutional mission, policies and procedures and organizational culture. A true measure of institutional and departmental effectiveness is based on the relationship a particular program or service has to its institutional mission. If there is an institutional commitment to diversity and it is clearly articulated within the framework of the mission, then all outputs should be assessed and evaluated based on one or more

diversity criteria. This process assumes that active leadership, properly designed assessment and evaluation strategies and well-defined and communicated institutional goals are available. Policies and procedures should be developed and continuously reviewed to ensure expectations are being met at all levels. The unfaltering review of protocol sets precedence and gives assurances that diversity is and will continue to be a measure of excellence for the institution. The culture of an institution will subsequently change as a result of the redefinition of its mission and development of expectations that reflect institutional commitment to diversity. It becomes a culture that will continue to grapple with the complex issues of diversity while continuing to truly embrace diversity.

Institutionally, speak a common language; define diversity through consensus. An institution must be able to understand that all of its constituencies affect and are affected by diversity. A comprehensive institutional plan should be drafted to provide guidance and leadership for attainment of a truly diverse community. Leaders must realize that even though there may be a common set of goals, there may be a plethora of voices espousing ideas and methods that may be different. Leaders should qualify these varying views as a strength not as a weakness.

Understand the historical and philosophical context of access and diversity. It is important that all constituents understand the historical aspects of diversity, particularly from the perspective of access. Understanding in the historical context helps proponents to better articulate the direction an institution should take as it seeks to achieve diversity. Diversity is complex in nature and historical and legal perspectives provide a firm foundation in which to build understanding and hopefully consensus. As institutional leadership becomes educated about diversity and promotes education of the history of diversity, care must be taken not to alienate those who may already feel marginalized by the issue. Those on the margins are not just people of color but are also people who do not feel they have any association with the past or affiliation with the current discourse on diversity. They may be intimidated by the language and complexity of diversity and therefore, may be unwilling to engage in the attainment of a diverse institution.

Realize that diversity is inclusive not exclusive. An institution must refuse to "ghettoize" diversity by proclaiming that it only serves the interests of people of color. The benefits of diversity and diversity initiatives should serve the entire institutional community. The discourse on diversity has broadened and so should its interpretations on each campus. Campus leadership should not deny the fact that diversity exists on their campus no matter how monocultural the campus may appear to be. If for no other reason, diversity should be seen for its educational value and its ability to assemble divergent ideas, beliefs and perspectives in a common venue—the campus. Identify advocates and dissenters. Too many advocates may inspire "group think." The true practice of diversity will ensure that there is even diversity amongst the advocates. Sharing the table with dissenters is not only

respectful but crucial. Dissenters not only introduce different perspectives but may eventually become supporters. Dissent makes a strong argument even stronger.

Realize that divergent views contribute significantly to a growing body of knowledge. The very essence of education in general and higher education specifically is the ability to inspire critical analysis. How critical can analysis be when there is only one perspective promoted? How does one gain a comprehensive view of American literature if writers of color are not included? How can researchers make attempts at explaining current social issues if disparate views are not included in the discussion? As diversity is realized, knowledge as we know it is increased. Difference is not necessarily disagreement; instead, it should be seen as an attempt at explaining what is perceived as reality from another person's situation.

Continually provide information and resources for the community. The institutional community expands when diversity is fixed as an active part of the institutional mission. Not only does diversity serve the institution but, it serves the local, state, national and perhaps, the international community. Diversity affixes a "face" to complex issues that people in these communities would otherwise feel have no relevance to their livelihood. Promoting institutional diversity is congruent with a campus' mission to serve the community in which it resides. Financial, human and physical resources could and should be tapped by the different levels of community in attempts to research, educate, and problem-solve. To paraphrase Indira Karamcheti and Charles Lemert, "The conflict and opposition between quality and diversity is a false one. In order for institutions to be high quality, they must use diversity as a part of their definition of excellence."[4] Diversity is a true measure of quality and excellence and until our language, organizational structure, leadership practices, and institutional constituencies reflect these new measures, higher education will struggle behind a society that continues to grow exceedingly diverse—in all the ways diversity is defined.

Notes

[1] See Daryl G. Smith, Lisa E. Wolf, and Thomas Levitan, eds., *Studying Diversity in Higher Education: New Directions for Institutional Research # 81* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

[2] Yolanda Moses, "Quality, Excellence, and Diversity," in Daryl G. Smith, Lisa E. Wolf, and Thomas Levitan, eds. *Studying Diversity in Higher Education: New Directions for Institutional Research # 81* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

[3] Manuel Justiz, Reginald Wilson, and Lars G. Bjork, eds. *Minorities in Higher Education* (The Oryx Press: Phoenix, 1994).

[4] Indira Karamcheti and Charles Lemert, "From Silence to Silence: Political Correctness and Multiculturalism" *Liberal Education*, vol. 77 no. 4, September-October 1991, 14-18.

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