



Involving the Entire Campus in Diversity Planning

by Dr. Charles Taylor

This article is intended to provide campuses with effective strategies to involve every department on campus in diversity planning.

Introduction

This article should help you to make diversity planning more accessible, to frame diversity planning in a manner that compels the least resistance, and to build accountability for diversity plans once implemented. A systematic approach to lowering resistance to diversity planning will not only lead to more diversity initiatives, but also more support campus wide.

Commitment to Diversity Must Be Campus Wide

Achieving diversity requires the active engagement and participation by all members of the university community. The commitment to diversity should be evident in all of your college's communications, including admissions literature, website, and course catalogues. It is important that leadership be fully committed to the goals and that this commitment be demonstrated in talk and in action. This commitment also includes modeling diversity in the governing board and in senior administrative positions, the celebration of diversity in all aspects of the internal and external community, and the willingness to allocate resources to achieve equity and diversity and to make support of the diversity strategic plan part of annual performance appraisals (North Carolina State University, 2007).

I think you will agree that is a powerful vision statement for diversity. I liked it immediately when I first read it. It's holistic, inclusive and is the type of vision that should be replicated across this country. Whether they achieve the lofty goals included in the statement is up for debate, but at least they have a road map and understand that it takes a campus wide effort to produce the type of cultural shift needed to achieve real change.

An impressive body of work in the past few years documents the educational benefits of diversity not just for students of color but for the student body in general. Milem et al. (2005) have summarized some of these benefits from recent literature. They find that diverse campus communities provide a more rich cultural and learning experience for students that allow them to be better prepared members of a democratic society. A diverse environment allows students to be exposed to other ideas than those held by their own racial or ethnic group.

Furthermore, students in diverse communities also learn to think critically, and exhibit less racial bias towards members of another ethnic or racial group. Promoting values of justice, equality and fairness are as much an education, as more traditional learning practices are.



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However, Milem et al. (2005) also posit, that in order to achieve the benefits associated with diversity, there needs to be an institutional commitment towards promoting diversity. A greater institutional commitment to diversity is considered to be congruent with fewer racial tensions on campus, whereas a campus that has a marginal focus on diversity might be perceived as potentially hostile by ethnic minorities. Another way of putting the same idea according to Milem et al. (2005), is that diversity may not be beneficial just by itself, unless there is a systematic institutional effort to promote diversity on campus. Such an effort needs to be visible to encourage students to engage in inter-racial dialogue and friendships even on an informal and personal level. Where such an effort is invisible, or not systematic, students do not reap the benefits of diversity and are discouraged from interacting with people of other racial and ethnic groups.

Getting Departmental Buy-In for Diversity

Best practices in higher education show us that the most effective campus initiatives are grassroots efforts that emerge from students, faculty and staff and are supported and facilitated by Diversity managers and campus leaders. Ultimately, diversity efforts are best realized when neither faculty, staff, nor students perceive it as an imposition and are equal stakeholders in the process (Mayhew et al., 2006).

Perhaps one of the best ways to get academic departments to embrace diversity is to reassure faculty that neither academic freedom nor faculty governance will be violated and that resources will be provided to assist them as they create and implement their diversity plans. Rather than extracurricular work, diversity planning should be presented within the realm of pre-existing faculty responsibilities. In other words, diversity planning should happen during normal faculty meetings. In addition, the planning and product that emerges out of the diversity plan should be framed as academic work or as professional development. Diversity planning may be presented as a way of building on pre-existing departmental planning and as a benefit to not only students but also faculty.

Mayhew et al. (2006), found that faculty members perception of the institution's diversity climate relates most closely to their perception of their department's emphasis on diversity. These findings point to the importance of including all stake holders in the process of diversity management and of making it a more relational experience as opposed to a directive imposed by the dean's office.

Make it Easy for Departments to Complete Your Diversity Plan

One of the biggest complaints is the time it takes to put together a diversity plan. This complaint can be mitigated by creating Diversity Plan Templates that everyone must use.



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The template may be emailed out to everyone and your diversity officer or committee members can provide training on how to complete the forms during departmental meetings or through a special campus workshop. I've provided an example of a template that has been used successfully at Edgewood College where I currently work. Forty-two of forty-six departments on campus completed a diversity plan using this template during the 2011-12 academic year. That's a phenomenal number under any circumstances but the ease in being able to complete the template makes the high participation rate possible.

Departments are asked to convene special meetings to discuss their plans and reach consensus on which strategic areas to focus on. They are provided with a list of diversity initiatives they can choose from or they're free to come up with their own as long as the initiative fits one of the strategic areas the campus is focusing on for the year. Final plans that are submitted to the Diversity Council are typically 3 to 5 pages. They don't take long to complete, they involve the entire department and they address a strategic area that the college as a whole is focused on.

The Diversity Council at Edgewood reviews all plans and returns those that are incomplete or that don't focus on the appropriate strategic area. Outstanding plans are acknowledged and all plans are posted on a shared drive for anyone at the college to preview. This great campus participation rate (over 90%) allows the Diversity Council to collect valuable data about the plans and the types of initiatives departments are engaged in. The Council can encourage partnerships, share best practices and leverage limited resources in ways that give these plans even greater impact on campus. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the buy-in and ownership of these plans by the various departments.

Diversity Plan Template

Diversity Plan Template Cover Page

2011-2012 Academic Year Diversity Plan

FROM _____

Unit, Department, or School

Submitted by _____

Name of Director, Dean or Vice-President

Date Submitted _____



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Timelines

Annual Diversity Plans from Departments, Units, or Schools submitted to Diversity Council: 4/15/11

Internal Status Review of Diversity Plan by Department, Unit, or School: 12/1/11

Annual Progress Report from Departments, Units, or Schools submitted to Diversity Council: 3/15/12

Diversity Council submits annual recommendations to President's Leadership Team: 4/15/12

Diversity Plan Template

Strategic Area #1 [Every department and school on campus is required to address two strategic areas similar to the ones listed below]

A systematic approach to recruiting, developing, and retaining faculty, staff, and administrators who are of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and/or demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes that foster an inclusive campus climate.

A. Departmental Project: Describe your project here. See list of projects attached or create your own.

B. Desired Outcome: How will you know if your project is successful

C. Assistance Needed: Describe the resources you need to complete your project

D. Project Completion date: List the date within the 2011-12 academic year that you intend to complete the project. If the project extends beyond the academic year please explain why.

Please feel free to use this table to further define the steps you'll take to carry out your projects

Action Steps	Lead responsibility or Point Person/Coordinator	Timeline





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Diversity Plan Template

Strategic Area #2

A systematic approach to recruiting, developing, retaining, and graduating students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

E. Departmental Project: Describe your project here. See list of projects attached or create your own.

F. Desired Outcome: How will you know if your project is successful

G. Assistance Needed: Describe the resources you need to complete your project

H. Project Completion date: List the date within the 2011-12 academic year that you intend to complete the project. If the project extends beyond the academic year please explain why.

Please feel free to use this table to further define the steps you'll take to carry out your projects

Action Steps	Lead responsibility or Point Person/Coordinator	Timeline

Diversity Plan Template

OPTIONAL

You may select a third strategic area in diversity to work on that appeals to your unit's interest such as a disability, LGBT, gender, or other issue. This optional Project is in addition to the two above that every unit must complete, but the process is the same.

A. Departmental Project: Describe your project here.

B. Desired Outcome: How will you know if your project is successful

C. Assistance Needed: Describe the resources you need to complete your project



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D. Project Completion date: List the date within the 2011-12 academic year that you intend to complete the project. If the project extends beyond the academic year please explain why.

How to Build in Accountability and Recognition for Diversity Progress

Accountability is the process for determining and monitoring responsibility for meeting campus diversity goals and needs. Recognition for diversity progress refers to recognizing and rewarding individuals and organizations when progress has been made towards meeting campus diversity goals and needs. The ultimate goal should be to institutionalize diversity. You can start the process by determining and monitoring who is responsible for meeting diversity goals and needs. Every diversity plan should have a section that lists who is accountable for it and the timeline in which that activity is to be completed.

In the University of Oregon's Diversity Plan (2007), the Vice President required Student Affairs directors to document activities and programs that have supported the University's diversity plan. A requirement such as this not only encourages a sense of accountability but it also allows educational institutions an outlet for improvement. Documentation of activities and programs that support diversity allow for a space for reflection on and recognition of what worked and what didn't (University of Oregon, 2007).

Conclusion

For any systemic diversity initiative to be successful, it requires a transformation of the institutional culture. The change that is needed cannot come from one department or school on campus. Unless diversity is an institutional goal, it will have a limited impact on changing the campus culture.

An example would be the case of the Black culture center on campus which would be ineffective if professors continue to reinforce racial stereotypes in the classroom (Harper and Hurtado, 2007). Similarly if students were exposed to racially sensitive curriculum, but there were no student organizations or centers on campus where students could express their cultural identity, then minorities might feel alienated and perceive the institutional climate as antithetical to the teachings promoted at the departmental level.

Perhaps another way of understanding the contemporary college campus is to compare it to the human body. The typical college has many centers and departments, while the body has numerous organs that work together to make it function. The lack of diversity on campus is like a chronic immune deficiency that affects the entire body, and that cannot be fixed by a localized treatment. Rather it involves a careful diagnosis, and holistic treatment of the



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entire campus body. All these examples point to the need for a pervasive change in the institutional setting, and not merely superficial steps.

References

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