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Promoting Diversity in Higher Education

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Abstract

Many institutions are working on ways in which they can promote diversity. Within a diverse society, there are so many different cultures. Faculty, staff, and administrators have been working hard to implement strategies that will assist in diversifying their institution of higher education. As we continue to advance through the millennium, institutions of higher education are making changes in their programs of study in order to have a more diversified learning environment. This paper discusses diversity in higher education and how the university community can work together to make the institution a more welcoming environment for everyone.

Diversity within higher education

Promoting diversity within the world of higher education has been a goal of many institutions of higher education. Within higher education, programs that promote diversity were aimed at: "increasing the numbers of persons that represent diverse populations, and improving the climate that would sustain this diverse population" (Brown, 2004, p21). In order to diversify the climates within higher education, many universities have sought the opinions and views of diversification from faculty and students. Various studies have been done at universities through centers for survey research, whereby each student and faculty member was asked to complete a survey that would entail information regarding diversity within the university.

The findings of studies conducted at research universities in the USA (for example, universities in the Oregon State System of Higher Education [OSSHE], University of Michigan) reveal that the white faculty members and male students had a different perception on diversity as compared to women and ethnic minorities. The white faculty members had a different perception in that they were less sensitive to the issues of diversity (Brown, 2004, p22). Information from the Executive Summary of the report on the Campus climate for diversity: faculty perceptions states that "female faculty were more aware of problems related to race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and other aspects of diversity, were more critical of the university's efforts and commitment to diversity, added to which, they were more knowledgeable and willing to participate in diversity-related programming (Brown, 2004, p22).

The overall results of the studies conducted reveal that people feel that there is a need for diversity. People felt that diversity was needed for the good of the university as a whole. As stated by Brown (2004) there is a need to embrace diversity so that each individual group will be more comfortable and be represented within the institution of higher education.

Achieving Diversity

In order to achieve diversity, institutions of higher education have developed and initiated various diversity related programs, and other multicultural studies programs (Brown, 2004, p24). As discussed by Brown (2004), a crucial element in promoting diversity and the university being committed to all of the things associated with the diversification of the college campus, is the support of the college and university president.

Obstacles that many face are associated with the resistance to change. As stated by McIntyre (1997) whites believe that to make things equitable for people of color means that they would have to lose something. The belief that has been stated by many is grounded in, group conflict. Structural diversity can be achieved by diversifying the racial and ethnic composition of the campus. Structural diversity creates opportunities, "for both classroom diversity and informal interactional diversity that facilitate knowledge about, and greater understanding of others from different cultures and backgrounds," (Gurin, 2002).

Diversity in higher education

Institutions of higher education have been looking over admission's policies for over twenty-five years in order to accommodate for equal opportunity and race issues.

The Bakke decision of 1978 was one of the major decisions that influenced diversity in higher education. "The Bakke decision allowed for the lawful consideration of race and ethnic origin in university admissions but left the frameworks for achieving this unclear" (Searle, 2003, p850). University offices have been left with the power to determine how they will determine the degree of emphasis that they place on race.

In respect to admissions in higher education, researchers such as Sylvia Hurtado of the University of Michigan and Daryl Smith of Claremont Graduate University have found that there is a correlation to the diversification of the student body and diversity within administration and faculty members. Researchers have found that "as we look at possible strategies to diversify the professoriate and retain faculty of color, let us remember that the faculty and student worlds are not separate—each one influences the other" (Antonio, 2003, p14).

By creating a diverse student body one will be able to broaden the various ethnic groups that make up the entire climate of the institution of higher education. "Diversity in the student body helps to broaden the range of what is taught and how, and to develop opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of new ideas and pedagogies" (Antonio, 2003, p17). Admitting more students of various ethnic backgrounds, will in turn cause administrators and faculty members to come together to change the curriculum. According to Antonio (2003) the diversification of an institution causes changes in the general education programs.

Working together

As students leave higher education and advance into the real world, they must be able to relate to people of other races. Creating a diverse environment within an

institution of higher education, will better prepare students for what lies ahead as far as the workforce and the real world. Administrators, faculty and staff are working together to improve diversity at their respective campuses.

One way identified as increasing diversity in the admissions process is by having information sessions both near and far. Brenda White, an Associate Dean for Enrollment Services, suggests that institutions hold information sessions within their area and to go to another country such as Europe and try to recruit international students (Payne, 2005, p1). These informational sessions are beneficial in improving diversity within the institution.

Another important task that must be completed to promote diversity within an institution is to provide a wider range of classes that will attract the views of students from all types of racial and social groups. It is important to provide a wider range of courses. As Payne (2005) states providing courses on gay and lesbian politics will be one course that will be put into place at an institution during the upcoming year. It is also imperative that the students and faculty come together in order to discuss issues that should be discussed, topics of interest to them. "As administrators and students discuss ways to increase diversity, the dialogue prompts students to reflect on how much they learn from people of different backgrounds" (Payne, 2005, p2). Talking together will increase the flow of thoughts on diversity and assist with developing courses that will be of interest to everyone within the student body.

Having student discussions and open forums will afford students with the opportunity to speak their mind on issues associated with diversity in higher education. Institutions that hold monthly discussions on the interests of students and faculty, or

discussions prior to the new semester, will find that they will be able to offer a much more diverse curriculum.

Administrators can also share with the promotion of diversity within staffing, by hiring individuals from different ethnic backgrounds. A diverse faculty brings with it more ideas and backgrounds about their respective cultures. Faculty members from diverse backgrounds are usually willing to share information about their cultures, and can serve as mentors to students that are from their particular background.

Promoting diversity within an institution of higher education, allows faculty, staff, and students to gain a better understanding of other backgrounds. "Diversity helps people to see things from different perspectives and to realize that there are many standards and perceptions. It helps to get rid of stereotypes and false beliefs" (Payne, 2005, p2). A more diversified institution of higher education, will give everyone on campus the opportunity to work together and to learn about each others' backgrounds. By promoting diversity there will be less friction and prejudices against other ethnic groups. In order to promote diversity it will take the efforts of the administration, faculty, staff, and students. Working together to promote diversity will bring about astounding results.

Conclusion

Promoting diversity on campus is beneficial. By diversifying an institution of higher education, one is able to create a climate that will be much like that of the real world. Faculty and students will become more familiar with other cultures. By incorporating different courses into the curriculum, the administrators and faculty will be able to draw a greater interest of students from other ethnic backgrounds. Creating a

diverse background ties in with developing a mentoring process, in that faculty that are hired from other ethnic backgrounds can serve as mentors to students and faculty that share their same background.

Within institutions of higher education, it is imperative that administrators work together to determine ways in which they can diversify their institutions. It will take the work of faculty, staff, and administrators to come together to determine ways in which they can diversify the overall curriculum and the learning environment. As institutions of higher education move forward with promoting diversity in higher education, there is hope that they will be able to recruit more women and ethnic minorities as faculty members and as students within the world of higher education.

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