Diversity: the challenge for higher education

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This paper emerged as a reaction to the results of the 1998 campus climate for diversity survey of a major research university in the southern U.S. The paper addresses the issue of diversity in higher education, and argues that the diversification of the faculty and student population can no longer be a peripheral activity, but must be reflective of the institution's commitment to diversity. The paper reviews some of the theoretical explanations for the slow progress in achieving diversity, while at the same time gives an example of good practice.

In the final argument, the paper contends that with the inevitability of a more diverse population and workforce, the institutions of higher education do not only have a responsibility, but must assume leadership position on this crucial issue of preparing citizens for the world they now face.

Background

The progress in higher education successfully diversifying its faculty and student population, and creating the climate of support for such diversification, has been slow. A review of the current literature highlights some examples of good practice (for example, project TEAM, see Bennett, 2000), but also gives indication of a disconnection between institutional policy and faculty commitment, the impact of which is directly related to the successful outcome of policy. There are many explanations offered for this disconnection. Nevertheless, the onus remains with the institutions of higher education to develop strategies and put in place systems that would facilitate them achieving the goal of truly diversified higher education communities.

Over the past several decades, issues of diversity have moved from their peripheral positions to become central concerns of institutions of higher education. Fostering this transition has been a range of policy decisions and program implementations specifically aimed at (a) increasing the numbers of persons that represent diverse populations, and (b) improving the climate that would sustain this diverse population. In an effort to examine the impact of the various initiatives, and encouraged by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), during the last

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decade, many of the major universities canvassed the opinions of their faculty and students with regard to the campus climates.

In trend with that move, in March 1998, the Virginia Tech Center for Survey Research mailed the Faculty Assessment of Campus Climate Survey, accompanied by a letter from the president beseeching support, to 2,648 faculty personnel, which represented all salaried faculty members working at least 50% on and off campus. In the fall of the same year, the Undergraduate Student Assessment of Campus Climate was mailed to 3,000 of the approximately 13,000 eligible undergraduate students enrolled at the university. Because of the brevity of their experience at the university, first-time freshmen were not sampled. All minority groups were over sampled to ensure a meaningful minority student response. The overall response rate was 50% for faculty, 38.7% for undergraduates.

Specifically, the survey canvassed opinions on department and classroom climates, faculty and student relations, perceptions of discrimination, actions relative to diversity, services provided by the university, and the campus climate in general. Of particular interest were the perceptions of minority groups, defined as 'anyone who is not white, male, heterosexual, Christian, and without disability' (Hutchinson & Hyer, 2000, p. v). However, despite this fairly inclusive definition, the main areas of focus were race/ethnicity and gender, with keen attention being afforded the perceptions of African-American faculty and students. Indeed, there is justification for this special interest, for in addition to the historical reasons; this group also comprised the largest minority on the campus.

Similar to findings at other research universities in the USA (for example, universities in the Oregon State System of Higher Education [OSSHE], University of Michigan), the results indicated that the perceptions of White faculty and students, especially the males, were more inclined to be in dis-accordance with those of the minority groups on many of the issues pertaining to their perceptions of the campus climate as these related to race relations and feelings of acceptance. All minority groups and females in general were much more sensitive to issues of diversity, and had themselves experienced, or were aware of others who had had negative experiences on the campus. Again, accordant with the findings of similar institutions, in almost total contrast to the White males, the African-American students held a much more negative perception of the campus climate.

Of greater interest however, were faculty responses to the survey instrument that targeted their perceptions of the climate for diversity on the campus. Whereas there was almost universal agreement that diversity was indeed beneficial and should be actively promoted (94.4%), there were marked differences by ethnicity and gender on specifics for increasing and improving the climate that would facilitate diversity. Female faculty, like the female undergraduate students, assessed almost every aspect of the campus climate less favorably than their male counterparts. As stated in the Executive Summary of the report on the 'Campus climate for diversity: faculty perceptions' (Hyer *et al.*, 1999), 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. An

examination of the responses by ethnicity indicated that African-American faculty, like students, perceived the climate for diversity much less hospitable than their white colleagues, and were 'deeply skeptical of the university's commitment to diversity in general and to the success of faculty members and students of color' (p. v).

In general, White faculty and students, regardless of gender, held a much more positive perception of the campus climate than faculty and students of color. However, disconcerting about these findings is the fact that White males, and more importantly, the White male faculty were largely unaware of the extent of the racism perceived in the university climate by African-Americans. Similar to the perceptions of the White male students, the White male faculty found the campus climate to be very satisfactory, and indicated that programs initiated were adequate to encourage and facilitate a more diverse university community.

Perception of campus climates

There is no uniform perception of campus climate. Individuals' perceptions are moderated by group membership and the societal experiences that result from such membership, a consequence of which is the contrasting definitions and perceptions of the goals of diversity. In an initial report on the 1997 Michigan study, John Matlock, Assistant Vice Provost and Director of Multicultural Initiatives, observed that students of color, particularly African-American students 'more often feel that they are not respected by faculty members,' and that the 'university is not truly committed to diversity' (p. 1). Also, the study noted that 'students of color evaluate diversity goals in terms of institutional commitments and actions. White students, on the other hand, perceive diversity in terms of social contacts with students of color' (p. 2).

In a study that examined the work life of faculty at a large research institution, Cress and Hart, (2002), similarly observed the disparity between the perceptions of faculty of color and white faculty with regard to institutional commitment to diversity. As they noted, many faculty of color felt that 'in spite of the talk about diversity, it doesn't permeate. It's not a category or a criterion that is at all respected or implemented or articulated at any level' (p. 24). These are interesting findings, and like the Michigan study, starkly highlight the contrasting perceptions between the dominant white population and the population of color.

It is this finding more than any that galvanized my interest and led me into looking deeper into the issue of diversity. The fact that almost everyone stated that diversity was good for the institution and should be promoted suggests that there may be genuine and general support for the institution's commitment to a more diverse community. However, the contrasting views on the specifics of policy implementation forces the consideration of alternative explanations. Thus, there is the possibility that persons, while being in agreement with the principles of diversity, in practice are content to leave things as they are, or alternatively, that the endorsement of diversity as being beneficial to the institution is simply a reflection of the political correctness of the times.

Whichever it may be, of concern is the apparent lack of awareness of the Euro-Americans, especially the males, that allows them to have a perception of an environment that embraces all groups when in reality, such an environment might not be in existence for those for whom it matters most. These contradictory perceptions symbolize a dichotomy that is very difficult to bridge, but which institutions of higher education, for their very credibility, if not survival, are compelled to bridge.

Obstacles to achieving diversity

It is a fact that most universities and colleges have embraced the goal of having a more diverse university community. As stated in the executive summary of the Virginia Tech Faculty Climate Report, 'Diversity must become a more compelling part of our vision of an excellent university' (Hutchinson & Hyer, 2000, p. ix). This statement encapsulates not only that particular institution's commitment to a more diverse community, but symbolizes the new visioning of excellence that incorporates the importance of diversity, exemplified in statements by both the American Council on Education, and The Association of American Colleges and Universities.

In attempts at actualizing this vision, universities have initiated various diversity related programs and other multicultural studies. However, the challenge of overcoming a history of exclusion is formidable. Thus, according to Lowe (1999), a crucial element in moving diversity beyond the rhetoric to the promise that it holds is the commitment of the college and university presidents without whose support the issue of diversity remains a circular and cyclical intellectual debate.

While there is no denying the essentiality of the support of the campus leadership, just as important is the recognition that the roots of most of the large prestigious institutions of higher learning are firmed in a long history and culture of exclusion. It is an exclusion based principally on race, and in some cases on gender, and disability as well. In other words, exclusion based on difference; interpreted as being not European-American, male, and 'normal'.

But history never goes away. It impacts the present. Consequently, it is not unexpected— as mentioned in the 'Campus climate report: student perceptions'— that the perception of some Black students is that their recruitment had nothing to do with a genuine interest in them and their education. The recruitment was for the purpose of having a representative number of students from minority groups (Hutchinson & Hyer, 2000). This view is not novel; it corroborates Dilg's (2000) argument that students of color at predominantly white institutions are caught between the effects of 'broadening the population base in institutions, and the realities of day-to-day experiences in those institutions' (p. 2). Thus, according to Hurtado (1992), there is often a feeling of alienation, a lack of a sense of belonging perceived by minority students on many predominantly white campuses.

Brubacher (1977) got to the heart of the matter when, in reviewing the history of higher education in America, he stated that the original intentions of higher education was for the upper classes. In this assertion he captures clearly a historical perspective that, to some extent, still informs the present social perception of who

deserves a higher education. He cited the 1948 New York Times reporting of the concerns of a Fordham University president to the idea of enlarged enrollments at universities. As stated by the president '… paying vast numbers of mediocre students into the currency of higher education could only lead to its debasement, thus invoking a kind of academic Gresham's Law' (p. 55).

The application of the Gresham Law analogy from the field of economics provides a conceptualization of education in terms of economic process and product. Therefore, if the perception is that some students represent inferior inputs, it is not surprising that an expansion of the pool of prospective applicants to higher education could be seen as allowing for the creation and marketing of an inferior product, which ultimately, would be detrimental to the reputation of the institution.

Evidently, this is a perception fortified by a psychological accommodation of exclusion. Excluding the 'other' perceived as not deserving of credentials, or being able to make effective use of the credentials. Thus, based on this economic rationalization, for groups positioned at the lower end of the socially constructed ladder, it is not unexpected that very little currency, if any, is apportioned by some to their presence and contributions in the hallowed halls of higher education. As Hilliard III (1999, 2002) argued, as long as there is the belief, supposedly supported by scientific inquiry, that race/ethnicity is a primary explanatory factor of intellectual capacity (see Gottfredson, 1996), the argument that supports exclusion assumes legitimacy.

The above discussion encapsulates the attitudinal obstacles faced by the institutions of higher education in forging ahead with an agenda of diversity. In addition to the natural resistance to change, the institutions have to deal with the objections of the 'old white boys' club' (Platt, 1993), who to a large extent constitute the entrenched faculty, and more importantly, may perceive diversity as a direct threat to their positions of influence. Thus the answer to Chalmers' (1997) question 'Why with such virulence, do those who claim an interest in building a diverse school community move so strategically to ensure that the influence of people of color is minimized?' (p. 67) can be gleaned from McIntyre's (1997) assertion that many Whites believe that to 'make things equitable for people of color' means that they would have 'to lose something' (p. 57). This notion, grounded in group conflict theory—discussed later—creates a level of intellectual dissonance that is manifested in contradictory beliefs. Therefore, as evidenced in the literature, to everyone, theoretically diversity is desirable and should be promoted. The dissension emerges in creating the conditions to promote and support a diverse campus community.

Herein lies the challenge to diversity. As Hutchinson and Hyer (2000) contend, a commitment to diversity is much more than simply the achievement of an adequate representation among staff and the student body. Platt (1993) adopts a similar view and rejects the belief that availing faculty of a reading list, and making a few cosmetic changes to the curriculum by including a multicultural module is representative of a commitment to diversity. Thus, these authors challenge what in some institutions passes as a commitment to diversity. They argue for a more encompassing conceptualization of diversity, and consequently the need for meaningful actions; actions that move beyond surface solutions that do not disturb the

underlying assumptions and perceptions that rigidify the institution against ideas that are perceived to be contentious to the status quo.

These arguments do not diminish the essentiality of achieving structural diversity, i.e., the diversification of the racial and ethnic composition of the campus (Gurin, 2002a). 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, 2002a). However, as Platt (1993) further explains, to capture the 'dynamic and relational aspects of ethnicity,' and to understand 'diversity, as well as unity, within a cultural experience' (p. 78), demand conceptual changes through a reformulation of the mental models one uses to construct his or her context, a context that too often resists a reorganization to reflect the changing reality of a racially diverse society.

Theoretical explanations

There is ample evidence in the current literature that attests to the benefits of having a diverse campus community (Antonio, 1999; Humphreys, 1999; Hurtado, 1999; Report of the AERA panel on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities, 1999; Gurin, 2002a). However, the research also indicates that many students 'still find the campus climates unresponsive to their needs, past experiences, and educational expectations. Students often feel marginalized in existing institutional cultures' (Humphreys, 1999, p. 1).

There are many theories that attempt to explain why, despite all effort and the documented benefits in having a diverse campus community, some groups still experience a less than satisfactory campus climate. Giddens, 1984, in looking at the reciprocal relationship between social structure and social practices, proposed structuration theory. In this theory he suggested that the practices in which individuals engage maintained the social structure, which in turn limited the type of practices in which individuals can be engaged. Therefore, with regard to institutional norms, there is the possibility that despite the articulation in support of diversity, the institutional culture becomes a restrictive factor on the extent to which traditional practices are allowed to change.

It is true that diversity encompasses more than just ethnic/racial differences. However, given the pervasiveness of the racism in American culture, the challenges to actions to promote diversity cannot be divorced from the racial attitudes that permeate the society. The Report of the AERA panel on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities (1999) examines four social psychological theories that seek to explain the basis of the racial attitudinal dispositions that lead to hostile racial relationships and consequent impediments to the diversity process. These theories are: realistic group conflict, social identity, optimal distinctiveness, and social dominance.

As discussed in the report, realistic group conflict theory posits that group conflict, ethnocentric attitudes and behaviors are a consequence of 'competition over scarce resources and perceived threat to group position' (p. 5). Thus the dominant group interprets egalitarian policies, such as increasing the diversity of the

campus membership, as providing opportunities for others to take, or erode what has been rightfully theirs. They see these policies as negatively impacting the social position of its members, and as a result, assume positions that legitimize what Jonathan Kozol refers to as 'savage inequalities.'

Taking another perspective, the social identity theory proposes that individuals exhibit preference for their own group, and as a consequence favor its members in the distribution of resources. In situations of power differentials, this favoritism can be detrimental to the non-dominant group. Any review of the history of institutional racism would highlight examples of differences in treatment, and distribution of resources based on the power differential attached to ethnicity.

Similar to the social identity theory is optimal identity theory, which states that, especially for minority groups, there is a need for in-group social identification and simultaneously, a recognition of group difference. As noted by Hurtado *et al.* (1994), the resulting intra-group socialization can be a powerful support mechanism for minority students on predominantly white campuses. However, identification based on group difference can result in a negative reaction from the dominant group for whom racial group identification assumes much less importance, and who may view with some animosity such intra-group socialization or racial/ethnic clustering.

The fourth theoretical explanation, social dominance theory, explains group differential treatment in terms of a social hierarchy based on race, within a system of white superiority in which Euro-American standards inform beliefs and outcomes. This mindset can be conscious as in essentialist racism, or unconscious as in power evasiveness. (See The European Collaboration Challenging Whiteness, 2002.) However, the outcomes are the same. The contributions of groups whose racial status is designated socially inferior are seen as not important and so, not worthy of consideration. Common to the four theories is the power differential that allows the dominant group to determine who, what, why, and how with regard to access to, and distribution of resources.

There may be other theories that attempt to explain why, after so many decades, there remains the apparent resistance by some to the achievement of genuinely diverse campus communities. Additionally, there are certainly many reasons why universities may find it difficult to increase the number of students from underrepresented minorities students. However despite theoretical explanations, and challenges to diversifying the campus population, the reality of an increasingly diverse society, and an economic reality that seeks a diverse workforce, demand that colleges and universities adopt a more proactive position in increasing the diversity of their faculty and student populations.

Culture not race

The global market has increasingly—and continues to—internationalized the workforce and the clientele of many organizations. Consequently, an essential component of the education and training of workers has been geared towards a transformation of thinking that transcends ethnocentricity. The purpose of this action is multifaceted. In addition to the enriched and enhanced learning environment created by

a diverse population that allows for an increased understanding, acceptance and/or tolerance of cultures different from one's own (Cabrera *et al.*, 1999; Gurin, 2002a), there is the wider political, social and economic agenda that demands an individual who, even if not accepting, must be at least tolerant of diverse cultures.

This point was well articulated by Higgs (1996), Liff (1997) and Bowen *et al.* (1999). The fact is that the majority of the world's population is some color other than white. Also, as suggested by Hansman *et al.* (1999), quoting from the US Census Bureau (1992), by the year 2050, approximately 47 % of the American population will comprise Hispanic, African, Native, and Asian Americans. Implied therefore, is the inevitability of the interaction between and among people of different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, thus placing the question of race, ethnicity and multiculturalism center stage in the diversity debate.

Cohen (1998) posited that culture and not race explained human diversity. This statement implies that the issue at hand is not race, but the culture that creates a distinction and reflects the racial, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds of the individual. It is accepted that race is a political and social construct. It is not a scientific category but, as stated by Hall (2000), 'the organizing discursive category at the center of a system of practices of socio-economic power, exclusion and exploitation'[1]. Hilliard III (1999) strengthens these assertions, and contends that before the recent use of race as an ethnic marker, ethnic identity was based on 'cultural traditions, linguistic traditions, and historical traditions' (p. 22).

In reality, it is not possible to disengage race from culture. 'Biological racism has never been separated from cultural inferiorisation' (Hall, 2000). William J. Wilson, in an interview with Jenkins (2000), gives an example of the development of culture as a result of social practices based on biological racism. As he explains, one of the outcomes of racial segregation for the black population was the restriction on patterns of social interactions. This restriction, he continues, led to the development of 'habits, norms, orientations, world-views, that in some respects differ from those of other groups' (Jenkins, 2000, p. 2), in other words, the development of a distinct culture. But, keeping in mind Hall's (2000) assertion, a culture that emerges from a group that is considered inferior would itself be seen as inferior. Therefore, whether discrimination is initiated because of physical difference, what Hall, with reference to Frantz Fanon, calls 'epidermilisation', that is, 'the writing of difference on the skin of the other,' or because of the cultural expressions of the other, the underlying rationale is the same; an association between race and culture that perceives one or the other inferior.

Institutions of higher education are in a unique position for addressing issues of race and culture. To some extent, these institutions serve a captive population, and at an age and time when this population is motivated to learn and eager to garner new experiences. It is therefore imperative that colleges and universities provide diverse cultural experiences that facilitate cultural learning and understanding. As is evidenced in the literature, there is no better way of achieving the above than by becoming culturally diverse, and in so doing, create the environment that allows for positive interactions among all persons.

However, multiculturalism cannot be left to providence. It does not just happen.

It has to be actively pursued, put in place and constantly analyzed, nurtured, and supported during and after implementation (Hall, 2000). It is not a one-time thing, putting it in and it is there. It is a process that begins with the initial inclusion of persons from different groups. A process that demands the systematic putting in place of structures that support and therefore, facilitate the retention of these persons by giving them a sense of belonging to the institution.

As mentioned previously in the discussion on the effects of history on the present, implementation of the process is not an easy undertaking. The final result is often an adulterated version of the intended outcome, for the process is often eroded by the history. It is a history that postulates that 'black people and intellectual activity do not go together' (Painter, 2000, p. B7), and fosters a reluctance to accept that 'blackness and intelligence are not mutually exclusive' (p. B7). This challenge is formidable, and not easily circumvented. The reluctance to accept that ethnicity is not a predictor of intelligence is grounded in the social dominance theory, and supported by research of questionable validity (Hilliard III, 1999). Therefore, strategies to overcome this resistance, or change institutional practices cannot be, or perceived to be peripheral. As stated by Cress and Hart (2000), faculty must see 'multicultural issues as fundamental aspects of their daily work lives' (p. 24), and not just another initiative to be added to an already packed schedule. An example of the peripheral importance attached to the issue of diversity is the statement attributed to a White female faculty; 'We are so entrenched in just trying to get our day-to-day work done that looking to other kinds of things like diversity is difficult' (Cress & Hart, 2000, p. 24). Such statements suggest that diversity is someone else's responsibility. Thus, while there is agreement with the principle of diversity, and the importance of multiculturalism, the actualization remains the responsibility of another.

Although not referring to institutions of higher education, Denton (1997) in an article titled 'Down with diversity (at least some of it): a case for cultural identity,' argues that cultural diversity may not be such a good thing after all, because of the potential to weaken the organization. According to his theory, there are advantages and disadvantages to diversity, in that, whereas diversity may facilitate new ideas and promote innovation, it also has the potential to dilute the cultural identity of the organization. This possibility, he argues, can be detrimental to the organization, for crucial to the organization's strength and success is its cultural identity.

Denton puts forward an interesting argument; one that certainly, or so it may seem, contrasts with current thinking on the subject, for example, Bowen *et al.* (1999) and Hansman (1999). I agree with his contention that the strength of any organization lies in forging a culture that defines it. However, where I digress is in my interpretation and conceptualization of diversity. I perceive diversity not in terms of a separation or a demarcation of cultures, but as creating a culture of acceptance that fosters a sense of belonging among all persons by recognizing and respecting difference, and in so doing, promoting a sense of loyalty to the organization. The purpose of diversity is not to promote divisiveness, but a sense of oneness. It is a case of accepting difference and seeing it as an opportunity to extract and build on the advantages that are present in a diverse community (Higgs, 1996).

The role of higher education

The role of the institutions of higher education is crucial in addressing the issue of diversity. There is no rolling back the increasing diversity of the population nationally (Hurtado *et al.*, 1999), the increasing diversity of the workforce, and the increasing diversity of the predominantly white universities. The challenge then is twofold. It first requires the predominantly white, middle-class and male faculty and staff to adapt to an increasingly diverse working environment (Block *et al.*, 1995). Secondly it requires the preparation of the said faculty and staff to work with this diverse population, and accept ownership of the responsibility for teaching in such a way that demonstrates a commitment to the principle of respect for all.

Accepting this challenge was David Hutchins of the College of Human Resources and Education at Virginia Tech. In response to the video 'Listening to Our Students' that illustrated observations made by minority students on the campus, he developed what he referred to as 'Personal Thoughts on Improving Instruction and Considering Diversity.' In his April 2000 letter to selected faculty, he shared ideas as he stated, 'with the intent of thinking about what we *are doing* and *could be doing* in the process of teaching in a multicultural world,' (author's emphasis). His stimulus question asked what could he do if he were teaching any course and wanted to 'demonstrate sensitivity to increasing diversity and multicultural perspectives.' From this stimulus question he generated a number of considerations that focused on course content and prepared course outlines, his personal behavior as a teacher, and his behaviors that reflected a commitment to diversity. The following are examples of some of the these questions:

How could *I illustrate* content in ways that let minority students know that the content is relevant to them? To what extent do I use *outdated conceptions and biases* (as a result of my own background and experiences) that no longer reflect the larger worldview? Do I deliberately let minority students know that *I value them* and their input in my classes? How do I do this? How could I do this? (Hutchins, 2000).

Further, as part of this self-reflection, he developed a short questionnaire to solicit feedback from the students. The recap of Hutchins' efforts is not to suggest that all faculty adopt his approach, or that the approach is the most effective. However, it does provide a model that could be followed, and more importantly, is an example of taking ownership of the responsibility for creating a climate that facilitates the flourishing of cultural diversity.

The research on campus climate and student adjustment, Cabrera *et al.* (1999) has also found that prejudice and discrimination are rooted in misconceptions rather than in personality traits, and these misconceptions impacted negatively on all students. They theorized that the most promising method of intervention was education, for it had the power to dispel misconceptions, and as a consequence improve intergroup understanding and relationship.

This finding by Cabrera *et al.* (1999) speaks directly to the institutions of higher education and specifically to the faculty. Misconceptions are dealt with through the dissemination of information that attempts to correct the misconception. Thus the faculty has a responsibility to impart such knowledge through their interaction with

the student body, both through the content of their teaching, and by their actions and attitude toward all students. This is a challenging task, for usually that which is considered normal is dictated by the dominant culture which is often comfortable with, and accepting of the status quo (Fine *et al.*, 1997). Therefore effectively interacting with a diverse student population and its corollary, diverse cultures, demands a shift in thinking that can only be realized through faculty training on cultural diversity, the incorporation of multicultural components in the curriculum, and overall institutional policies and hiring practices that are sensitive to the needs of a diverse population (Pascarella *et al.*, 1996).

The corporate view of diversity

Bowen *et al.* (1999), emphasize the long and disproportionate role played by American institutions of higher education in 'supplying leadership talent to the world of business and professional organizations' (p. 72). This is as it should be, for a major role of colleges and universities is to develop the leadership potential, not of the selected few as intimated by the concerns of the Fordham president, but of the people, and in so doing, supply leadership to the society (Brubacher, 1977). Thus in a society that increasingly is becoming more diverse, it is only logical, that the pool from which the leadership is developed should as far as is possible reflect the diversity in the society.

There are fundamental reasons for adopting this position. It is an accepted fact that education involves more than just the transfer of facts. It involves the subtle learning that comes through the educational experience. Therefore as Bowen *et al.* (1999) further suggested, 'if you have classmates who are all very much like you, you will not learn nearly as much as you will if you have classmates who are very different from you' (p. 140). This statement under girds much of the thinking in the corporate world. The corporate community continues to place an increasingly high value on cognitive and social skills, and has charged the universities with the responsibility to produce such persons (Gurin, 2002b).

Evidently, and as stated by Hilliard III (2002), the business people have 'learned about the reality of cultural diversity,' and the essentiality of developing appropriate responses to this cultural variety. They have recognized the 'need to be prepared through careful research and training to observe and respond to cultural realities' (p. 13). The problem is, whereas the business community has forged ahead, it appears that too many in the business of education, while acknowledging the importance of diversity, are yet to take that fundamental leap that would orient the institutions to achieving that goal.

That this leap has to be taken is inevitable. The demand of the business community is unambiguous. Additionally, members of corporate America are major players in the financial stability of very many institutions of higher learning, and are a major driving force behind the demand that higher education reflect a diverse population, or more precisely, prepare its students for working in this diverse environment. 'The days of insularity and parochialism are gone' (p. 141) insist Bowen *et al.* (1999). Moreover, for any business to be productive and successful in

the very competitive global economy requires that the personnel have the ability and be comfortable working 'across lines of race, class, religion and background' (Bowen *et al.*, p. 141). An aim of higher education should be to create such an environment so that its students would garner the necessary experience that they can then transfer to the work place. Business leaders demand no less. They strive for a congenial and collaborative atmosphere in the workplace. In the modern world, it is an essential prerequisite for effectiveness.

Whose responsibility?

In looking at diversity, the discussion has focused on race and ethnicity, and the cultural differences that are associated with the racial/ethnic grouping. While this focus presents a limited conceptualization of diversity, it must be noted that race/ethnicity inspires the most emotional debates, and has been, and remains at the core of overt and covert prejudicial responses. Despite this fact however, it is incumbent upon the college level teaching professionals to deconstruct the concept of difference as it also relates to gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class. This list is not inclusive. It is an attempt to illustrate the range of differences that co-exists in the society. Some differences are easily identified through biological signifiers whilst others only become visible through observed differences in behavior. Despite the mode through which difference is observed, the reality is that the society as a whole is becoming increasingly diverse and everyone, especially the members of the dominant culture, has to be educated to living and working in diverse communities.

As already stated, the task is by no means simple. It demands a commitment to change that is continuous, for the complexities are buttressed by an institutional environment informed by its historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion. This environment further creates the psychological climate that fosters suspicion and distrust and stifles the development of a social environment conducive to the empowerment of all students (Hurtado *et al.*, 1999). It is essential that institutions of higher education take the leadership role in dispelling that distrust. Because of the nature of their responsibility, more than any other institution, they have the wherewithal to achieve the goal of creating the kind of atmosphere that could bring to reality the potential advantages of a diverse community.

Conclusion

There is no denying that institutions of higher education are placed in the unenviable position of preparing the intelligentsia and future leaders of the society. Higher-level training in almost every discipline takes place in such institutions. Therefore, their products permeate every discipline from teaching, to government, to private enterprise, and influence every stratum of society. Consequently, the role of faculty is critical to creating the atmosphere within their classes that allows for a discourse on issues of diversity, and as a result, allows for the transfer of the understanding gained to the wider society. Thus, the influence of faculty is seldom ever limited to the context of the class, and additionally, does not end at the

graduation of the student. As a matter of fact, graduation can be perceived as a rite of passage, a new beginning. It is a sending out of persons into the society who through their knowledge and attitudes would influence others.

This article puts forth a call for higher education to do more, or at least be more aggressive in the thrust toward diversifying its faculty and student population, and creating the climate of support for such diversification. The article also examines some of the theoretical explanations for the slow progress. However, these explanations do not imply that the resistance cannot be overcome. The inevitability of institutions becoming more diversified should provide the impetus for the administration to aggressively pursue programs that would facilitate the process for a shift in thinking and attitudes of both faculty and administrators. It is hoped that this article would lend to that process.

Note

1. This document was accessed with a Web browser. Page numbers were not provided.

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