

# Organizing for Diversity: Fundamental Issues

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**H**IGHER EDUCATION is faced today with the necessity—and the opportunity—to once again rethink what it does and how it does it. At the core of this effort is the organization's improved capacity to educate in a pluralistic society for a pluralistic world. But to do so requires a shift in our thinking from a focus on the issues surrounding students and "the problems" they create for the institution. In addition to whether students are prepared for learning is a serious question as to whether institutions are prepared for diversity. Such a shift requires a different rationale for thinking about change. If the institution is concerned about the capacity to deal with diversity, then the attention is on the entire community. Diversity among faculty, staff, and students is seen as important not only for the support such individuals provide for specific groups but also for the importance of diverse perspectives to institutional success and quality. The institution recognizes that remediation is an issue for many students and that concern for effective teaching and learning must be a paramount objective throughout the institution. Readiness to deal with diversity requires asking about the attitudes and information of traditional students as well as nontraditional students. Indeed, at a number of institutions, programs have been developed that focus on multicultural awareness for all students through workshops and course credit. Such programs assume that individuals need education about and awareness of pluralism. The message is that educating for diversity is important for everyone to create a suitable environment for diversity, both in the university and in society (Banks, 1981; Barbarin, 1981).

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On many campuses across the country, the challenges of creating an organization that embraces diversity so that it can truly begin to educate all students has begun.

Institutional self-reflection, let alone transformation, is not an easy process. It raises questions about the institution and its assumptions about the academic enterprise. Moreover, the picture of what colleges and universities should look like is not yet clear, though the research on successful institutions suggests some of the issues that institutions must address. Higher education is a highly complex, decentralized system, and within that system is an enormous array of institutions. Thus, the process of change and the specific goals for change will necessarily be specific to the institution. Nevertheless, the existing review of the literature suggests that colleges and universities—large and small, commuter and residential, public and private, urban and rural—will be asked to confront a number of challenges as diversity is addressed.

## **Diversification of Faculty and Staff**

The call for a more diversified faculty and staff in the literature is viewed almost universally as important. The literature is clear about the importance of faculty support in general and the importance of this role in particular for nontraditional students, whether adult learners, disabled students, or minority students. Certainly an important aspect of the success of historically African American colleges and women's colleges rests on the important role of African American faculty and staff and women faculty and staff in running the institution. The emphasis on a diverse faculty and staff is indeed critical but for more reasons than are often articulated.

Five reasons emerge. The first three deal with faculty and staff roles relating to students. The most common reason given for the need to diversify faculty and staff is to provide support for the benefit of students from particular groups. Observers generally acknowledge that students in the minority will seek out a faculty member who, they perceive, understands their experience. Often this selection is based on gender, racial or ethnic commonality, or disability. Given the environment on many campuses, such faculty and staff play a very important role. Indeed, evidence suggests that such faculty and staff,

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because of their relatively small numbers, are often burdened by the advising and counseling that accompany their role as a member of a visible minority.

A second reason for encouraging the diversification of faculty and staff is that diversification is an important symbol to students from these groups about their own futures and about the institution's commitment to them.

Third, diversification of the campus community creates a more comfortable environment for students as well as for faculty and staff. The strains suffered by students also exist for faculty and staff members who represent diverse groups. These individuals assume the burden of being spokespersons, mentors, support persons, and symbols, while also trying to perform to rigorous professional standards. At the same time, they may endure the same kind of loneliness and insensitivities also experienced by students (Blackwell, 1988; Olivas, 1988; Smith, 1980).

The last two reasons for the importance of a diversified faculty and staff relate to benefits to the institution. Diversification of the faculty and staff is likely to contribute to what is taught, how it is taught, and what is important to learn, contributions that are vital to the institution. Faculty trained in traditional pedagogy and in traditional methodologies often find it difficult to fundamentally change courses and curricula. Diversification of the faculty and staff make it easier, because the likelihood is greater for the introduction of different perspectives and approaches and for many more opportunities for professional collaboration. People such as administrators and faculty in decision-making positions who have had their own experiences with aspects of institutional life that create barriers or even alienate students offer the institution an invaluable service by providing their perspectives on potential problem areas. It should be remembered, however, that no single individual can represent any more than his or her own perspective or be sensitive to all the issues, needs, and concerns of each disparate group that has been described. An African American faculty member, for example, cannot reflect all the issues of a disabled or a Latino student. Thus, what is needed is true diversity. Fifth, a diverse faculty and staff reflect one measure of institutional success for an educational institution in a pluralistic society. As long as the leadership of our institutions contains only token representation of persons from diverse backgrounds, institutions will not be able to claim that the goals for society or our educational institutions have been achieved.

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Thus, the issue of diversity in faculty and staff assumes direct as well as indirect importance for campus efforts. While these efforts are important for students from those groups, they are also important for the institution. Concern is great, however, that being able to achieve this goal in the near future is highly unlikely (Blackwell, 1988; Sudarkasa, 1987; Valverde, 1988; Wilson, 1987a). The lack of growth in higher education over this past decade and the increased use of part-time faculty have combined to produce fewer opportunities for faculty and staff advancement. Now, projections for openings in the next decade are more optimistic, but it is almost universally recognized that the lack of retention and the lack of attractiveness in pursuing advanced degrees for today's and yesterday's undergraduates threaten institutional goals for increasing the hiring of more women and minorities (Blackwell, 1988). If the presence of a truly diversified faculty and staff is critical, this situation jeopardizes institutional efforts.

It is important to note that the barrier to diversification is not simply an issue of numbers. Availability of individuals to assume these positions is clearly a problem. Evidence suggests, however, that institutions are also having difficulty retaining faculty and staff of different backgrounds for the same reasons they have had problems retaining students. The current revolving-door pattern is an extravagant waste of human resources and a major obstacle to change. Efforts to retain and develop staff and graduate students already within the institution are therefore as important as increasing the pool of applicants to the institution.

## **Mission and Values**

As indicated earlier, some of the values rooted in the academic tradition are now coming into question. Issues of values are not easily identified, discussed, or dealt with. Given the literature on organizational effectiveness, however, it is probably very important to identify those values that are central to the institution's mission and those that are not. It is also critical that this discussion be held in such a way that traditional assumptions may be open to question. Two sets of values are frequently cited as important: competition/cooperation and individualism/concern for community. The increasing evidence on the effectiveness of cooperative learning, for example, suggests that traditional

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structures that encourage competitiveness may be counterproductive to the institution and to all students (Astin, 1987; Palmer, 1987). Rather than being viewed as a threat to institutional quality, such changes may well turn out to improve institutional effectiveness. Discussions about individualism and community touch not only on matters of importance to a number of ethnic and racial groups but also on the increasing concern about narcissism and unethical behavior in society (Harris, Silverstein, and Andrews, 1989; McIntosh, 1989; Minnich, 1989). Have we gone too far in encouraging competitive and highly individualistic practices at the expense of concern for the community and at the expense of good learning?

Questions about values emerge at all levels of the institution. Perhaps one of the most challenging has to do with the ways in which students perceive that the values and perspectives they bring with them to the academic community are not appreciated and may even put them into conflict with institutional norms and behaviors. At its worst, students may perceive that they must abandon the values of their own cultures or background to succeed (Ogbu, 1978). The resulting phenomenon of alienation is contradictory to the central role being given to the importance of involvement in one's education and with the institution.

The question of values also extends to how the campus functions and to the norms and expectations for performance. As has been suggested in this monograph, grading practices, decision making, approaches to learning, residence hall lifestyles, dress, and interpersonal manners are very much affected by values and by background. Creating a campus environment in which one is free to discuss these issues and in which one can create alternative practices can be difficult. The overall pattern of teaching practices in higher education, for example, has never adequately reflected what we know about learning. Large lecture classes, lack of immediate feedback, multiple choice tests, and so on do not reflect the necessary variety in pedagogy for adequate learning (Smith, 1983). One might conjecture that as long as students could succeed despite this kind of teaching and as long as one did not care about those who did not succeed, we did not need to connect teaching with learning. Now those conditions must change. Fewer and fewer students succeed. To connect teaching with learning requires knowing about students, knowing about the

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subject matter, and knowing about conducive environments for learning. Perhaps because of their marginal status, more of these issues are being raised today as they relate to nontraditional students. Just one example of alternative forms of pedagogy is described in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky and Associates, 1986). Despite methodological issues about the study's ability to generalize about gender, the report does vividly describe a group of women's preference for "connected" learning. The authors describe connected learning as an interactive experience in which involvement facilitates learning. In this form of learning, empathy, care, and understanding are viewed as important parts of the process of making judgments. Class participation, collaborative projects, and students' contributing to one another's views would be seen as critical. In contrast, the values implicit in many traditional forms of pedagogy are isolation, cynicism, and competition.

Areas of new inquiry, however, are not always well received, particularly if they are not in the accepted tradition of one's colleagues or institution (Pearson, Shavlik, and Touchton, 1989). Many have viewed feminist scholarship and ethnic studies, for example, as peripheral to the curriculum and as subjects of nonserious inquiry. Moreover, some view such scholarship as contributing to the weakening of the curriculum (Bloom, 1987). The issues involved go to the heart of such questions as what constitutes a good education, what we mean by quality and how we evaluate it, and the appropriate methodologies in the search for truth. For faculty members interested in asking new questions in new areas, the risk can be great unless those areas are already seen as legitimate or unless they themselves have the status to alter approaches in their fields. And it can be very difficult for those who represent minorities in the decision-making process.

Institutions face a challenge in differentiating between those values and goals that facilitate learning and serve the institution's mission and those values that leave some groups on the margin. At the same time, it is important to be open to new ways of accomplishing goals. Evidence on the benefits of cooperative learning for all students, for example, suggests that traditional structures that build in competition may be counterproductive. Such environments may be detrimental to most students. Values and the clarification of assumptions about values are at the heart of the issue of diversity.

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## Dealing with Conflict

Even the most superficial analysis of what is happening on many college campuses suggests that conflict is either openly present or just under the surface. Some degree of conflict would be expected when individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds try to come together in an institutional setting (Jones, 1987). While increased numbers may be more comfortable to a member of a minority group, they may be more threatening to a member of the majority. Thus, conflict may be intensified on many campuses as they become more diverse or more explicit in their efforts to diversify. A look at the literature on intergroup relations suggests moreover that the conditions are present for conflict, given the competitive environment, unequal status of individuals and groups, frustration caused by hostile environments, and perceptions of unresponsiveness by some and favoritism by others and given that little exists to bring groups together in meaningful contact (Amir, 1969; Gamson, Peterson, and Blackburn, 1980). Building on the literature of cultural pluralism, we can expect conflict when desirable values are incompatible. Campuses, for example, are struggling with having to choose between setting desirable standards for speech and behavior and supporting rights of free speech given in the First Amendment (*Stanford Observer*, 1989). Yet the existence of conflict may be a good sign that the institution is grappling with many of these issues and is in the process of fundamental change. Indeed, a very significant study of the patterns of adaptation that occur in institutions dealing with issues of diversity suggests that conflict may be part of the process that will assist institutions to identify essential changes (Skinner and Richardson, 1988). Conflict can therefore be a pathway to learning (Green, 1989).

Though higher education is rooted in a tradition of debate and the free exchange of ideas, it is not clear that dealing with conflict, particularly the kind of conflict apt to become emotional, is one that institutions can deal with very effectively. The conflicts that can emerge from trying to create truly pluralistic environments are uncomfortable and may need to be so. The challenge is to create vehicles for dealing with conflict in an environment that is open to differences. Indeed, a characteristic of many successful campuses has been the creation of strong policies, procedures, and even special programs of

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mediation and arbitration to recognize the existence of conflict and to use it as a vehicle for learning by the institution (Green, 1989).

## **The Quality of Interaction on Campus**

The body of research cited that reflects the importance of students' involvement with the institution requires an institutional assessment about involvement, how students can become involved, the level of interaction among students and between students and faculty, and the general climate of the campus for involvement. The literature on intergroup relations that suggests the need for students and faculty to participate together in meaningful and important work also supports the involvement. While residential campuses and smaller institutions have more natural potential to develop involvement, the challenge is present for all institutions. Many campuses use mentor programs, programmatic efforts at the college and departmental levels within the university, residence halls, and athletic programs to build communities of involved students and faculty. For large public institutions, the challenging question is whether meaningful learning communities can be developed that benefit from diversity.

## **Educating for Diversity**

As institutions begin to evaluate the quality of climate for diversity, one inevitable discussion centers around the role of the educational process and in particular the role of the curriculum (Slaughter, 1988). Many more institutions are beginning to articulate a commitment to educate students for living in a pluralistic world and to create environments that embrace diversity. The content of the curriculum insofar as it serves these goals, the styles of teaching, and the modes of assessment are all being evaluated. Schools like Stanford and the University of California-Berkeley have now moved to require that all students develop some familiarity with the diversity of American cultures and with issues of race, class, and gender. Curricular transformation involves the same kind of developmental process as institutional transformation in moving from courses that address the voids in the curriculum to efforts to ask new questions that more naturally embrace the pluralism of perspectives in the field (McIntosh, 1989).

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The role of pedagogy is very important to this aspect of education. Recognizing that groups and individuals may learn in different ways requires rethinking the ways in which teaching occurs. The increasing community of students with learning disabilities has focused attention on this issue, but the discussion touches on the literature concerning the adult learner, racial and ethnic groups, and women as well. In other words, it touches on more than a majority of all students.

The issue of assessment is another component of this educational challenge. Not only are the goals for assessment ambiguous in terms of the kinds of learning being evaluated; significant questions also exist about many of the forms of assessment now in place. For example, for those with learning disabilities, multiple choice, time-limited tests may be invalid indicators of learning. The controversy concerning the role of standardized tests for women and minorities reflects similar concerns about the validity of present testing approaches. Without valid indicators of learning, underestimating the performance of many populations of students is a significant risk. This controversy is being highlighted by court challenges to the means of awarding New York State scholarships to women and by criticisms of the national movement to require examinations for teachers (Duran, 1986; National Center, 1989).

## **The Perceived Conflict Between Access and Quality**

The continuing message that a fundamental conflict exists between issues of access to the institution and quality is perhaps the most disturbing indication that present institutional approaches to diversity are inadequate (Adolphus, 1984; Birnbaum, 1988; Mingle, 1987; Rendon and Nora, 1987; Skinner and Richardson, 1988; Stewart, 1988). Given the number of national studies concerned about the effectiveness and quality of higher education and the call for increasing standards, the higher education community needs to carefully and thoughtfully address this apparent conflict.

Much of the discussion about improving institutional quality focuses on perceptions about the quality of the students being admitted and concern about lowering standards, although these perceptions can also be found in discussions about hiring and retaining faculty and staff (Gamson, 1978;

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Mingle, 1987; Peterson and Associates, 1978; Willie and McCord, 1972). There is reason to believe that the questions being asked and the assumptions being made result in an inappropriate conflict between these two central values. Several important points must be made:

*The concern about the preparation of students, while affecting many minority students, is not a minority problem.* While the impact of poor preparation on those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds is more devastating, declining preparation of students is a national issue affecting virtually all schools and all students. Indeed, most poorly prepared students are white (SHEEO, 1987).

The concern that the admission of many minority groups represents a lowering of test scores ignores the fact that the goals of higher education with regard to admissions have always reflected different levels of preparation among its students. Even the most highly selective institutions have sought diversity in geography, artistic and athletic talent, and leadership among its students rather than populations of perfect GPAs and SATs. With these types of diversity, quality was discussed hardly at all because the educational community and the public understood that quality presumably embraced the contributions of those with different strengths. Moreover, it was widely recognized that grades and test scores could not define all that was needed for success in academics and the community. The value of diversity when it comes to students that differ markedly from the majority seems to be recognized far less, however.

*Much of the evidence concerning the tension between quality and diversity rests on lower standardized scores.* As indicated elsewhere, serious questions exist about the predictive validity and the power of these instruments for women, for many minorities, and for those with learning disabilities (Duran, 1986; Grubb, 1986; Morris, 1979; National Center, 1989; Sedlacek, 1986; Thomas, 1981; Wilson, 1980). The same could be said for learning assessment programs that rely on these kinds of measures. Changing measures of assessment does not mean lowering standards for learning. Indeed, one characteristic of institutions described earlier as successful is that they set high standards and expectations. We are challenged to develop adequate assessment programs

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and to avoid relying on inadequate programs that, because of expediency, have the effect of diminishing the evidence of performance for particular groups. Though assessment takes a different form for faculty and staff, concern exists that many institutions do not know how to evaluate the quality of scholarship or performance of those from different faculty groups as well.

*The problem about quality also involves how we define success in school and a student's capacity to learn.* If we assume that only one way to learn is correct and at the same time place individuals in environments that are only marginally dedicated to their success, we are setting up whole groups of students for failure. Early evidence focused attention on academic preparation as the most significant factor in achievement, leading many researchers to conclude that academic success is a function of preparation, not race (Richardson and Bender, 1987). As this monograph has suggested, however, to the degree that issues of racism, sexism, homophobia, and the general presence of an alienating environment also affect performance, then lack of performance cannot be focused entirely on the student. All too often we have assumed the institution's perfection and students' incompetence.

Care must be exercised in how we teach, about the environment in which teaching takes place, and about how we assess learning.

Numerous references in the literature suggest that the fundamental predisposition of higher education has been to maintain homogeneity and to adapt only when necessary (Morris, 1979; Verdugo, 1986). A critical example of it may be occurring now in the discussions about whether some institutions have set limits on access for Asian American students because they are "overrepresented" in the student body. The credibility of higher education's commitment to quality and diversity is weakened when access of Asian Americans is limited in the name of diversity and access of African American and Latino students is limited in the name of quality. The net result of both is to perpetuate homogeneity.

If these two concepts—diversity and quality—remain in conflict, the challenge of diversity will not be met. The questions once again are whether the conflict is real and whether we are asking the right questions. When quality is measured in one way only, conflict between quality and diversity is created

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(Madrid, 1988). The implications are that we can broaden our understanding about quality without diluting expectations for learning or for the curriculum. The institution will need to carefully evaluate its standards, its performance criteria, and the climate in which learning occurs, however.

## The Changing Climate

At the same time that institutions that genuinely wish to change face significant challenges, other forces facilitate a recognition of the need for change. As troubling as some of the incidents of racial harassment and sexual harassment have been, they have served to bring to the forefront the nature and depth of some of the problems within the community of higher education. Some institutions have begun to study themselves, listening to the experiences of their staff, students, and faculty while acknowledging the need for change. Many institutions, including some of the more prestigious ones, are now leading the way in their efforts to address some of these issues. At the same time, awareness is growing at the national level that major public policy and social implications are involved. Some of the recent national commissions on the achievements of minorities have been both urgent and eloquent in their calls for change and action.

Changing student demographics and the increased voice that students and staff can find in influencing institutional policy have facilitated the awareness of a need for change. It has combined with continuing institutional concern for enrollments to put students in a more influential position than they have been in during other times. This is now a time of increasing student activism. Over the next decade as large numbers of faculty retire and larger numbers of students enter the collegiate generation, we can anticipate a shift in institutional priorities from a concern for enrollment to a concern about hiring faculty, and it may well shift the focus away from the quality of students' experience to the quality of the faculty's experience (Bowen and Schuster, 1986; Smith, 1988). The improved environment for faculty, their salaries, and their hiring may assist in attracting more minorities and women to faculty positions. Some evidence suggests, for example, that it may already be occurring. While the overall numbers of minority Ph.D.s has declined in recent years, the number has actually increased for minority women (Coyle and Bae, 1987).

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An organizational approach to diversity has significance for virtually all institutions regardless of the diversity within their student bodies, for it acknowledges the importance of diversity for society and for its future. The reality of demographic shifts is such that Hawaii's "minority" student enrollment is 66.4 percent and Maine's is 3.8 percent. The approach to educating for all forms of diversity—minorities, women, disabled, adult learners, and part-time learners—and the importance of educating all students to live in a pluralistic world are as relevant to Maine as they are for Hawaii, however.

By creating an organization that can deal with diversity and by taking a comprehensive approach to diversity, institutions will find themselves less fragmented in dealing with the numbers of groups with special needs. It will then be more likely that the special needs and perspectives of any number of groups will be more easily accommodated. Moreover, an institution that organizes for diversity will derive many benefits from this approach, not the least of which is the increased capacity to respond to change (Weick, 1979). Other opportunities are present as well:

- Revitalizing the curriculum;
- Developing new approaches to policy and organization;
- Modeling the development and growth of "global villages";
- Increasing dialogue and thus success concerning the characteristics of the environment that foster good teaching and learning;
- Creating an environment that appreciates the ways in which difference contributes to education;
- Clarifying the values that are essential to the academic mission and to the creation of community;
- Benefiting from the diversity of teaching approaches;
- For students, particularly but not only in residential institutions, experiencing the excitement and opportunities to learn from diversity.

In other words, opportunity is greater for much enhanced institutional success and quality.

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