

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY EFFORTS: A TYPOLOGY

LINDA KUK

JAMES BANNING

Colorado State University

American higher education has become focused on increasing access and success for traditionally underrepresented populations. Despite the myriad of institutional efforts, attention has not been given to the role of student organizations in supporting these efforts. This article looks at the role campus student organizations can play within campus diversity efforts and presents a typology for understanding campus organizations' diversity activities. This typology will aid in organizational self-understanding and in promoting student organizations to become more inclusive of campus diversity efforts.

Campus Climate, Diversity and Student Organizations

Research has indicated that the campus climate fostered through both the curriculum and co-curricular life of the campus play a key role in supporting student success and student college persistence (Astin, 1984, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Yet many traditional college campuses and their surrounding communities continue to be perceived as unwelcoming, or at best, neutral to the presence of diverse students (Brown, 1991; Mallory, 1997; Person & Christensen, 1996; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Levine and Cureton (1998) suggest that multiculturalism remains the most unresolved issue on today's college campuses. Many would argue that the context of the college experience, the campus climate, has much to do with both the quality of the experience and persistence to graduation.

In recent years, campuses have devoted significant resources to addressing campus climate efforts to enhance diversity. They have created special recruiting initiatives, fostered the development of

multicultural services and retention programs, developed curriculum integration efforts, and structured multicultural competency training for faculty, staff and student leaders. Often overlooked in these efforts, however, has been the role of campus student organizations. This is surprising in that student organizations have the potential to serve as significant agents to advance the multicultural and diversity goals of college campuses. Campus student organizations serve as significant social networks for students on college campuses and serve as important links for students to campus life and to the institution. They have also been found to be important components of student involvement and contribute to student learning, student development and student success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For diverse students these groups are often the life line to college persistence and connection (Cheng & Zhao, 2006; Mallory, 1997; McRee & Cooper, 1998; Rooney, 1985; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). Despite the documented importance of student organizations,

the relationship between these organizations and institutional diversity efforts remains unexplored. The following is a typology for guiding student organizations through an assessment of their current involvement with diversity related goals and strategies within their campus environments.

The Student

Organization Diversity Typology

The goals and behavior of campus student organizations can promote or hinder the institution's efforts toward increasing the admission of diverse students on campus as well as their feelings of belonging and persistence once on campus. This typology presents a way to view and understand the relationship between student organizations and their organizational behavior toward campus diversity goals and issues. The diversity typology outlines the possible relationships between a student organization and the campus's institutional diversity efforts. Understanding this relationship has two purposes: (a) by naming the relationship between the two entities a clearer understanding about the nature of the relationship is possible, in other words, the relationship can be conceptualized and discussed, and (b) the typology is presented in a hierarchical format from most negative to most positive – this provides both the student organizations and those who work with these organizations a road map to relationships that can increase their support of and involvement in institutional diversity goals. The typology builds on the work of Banks, 2002; Banning, 1997; Banning, Middle-

ton, & Deniston, 2008. The typology moves from a negative relationship with two sub-categories to a null relationship, to a contribution relationship, to an additive relationship, to a transformational relationship, and finally to a relationship that is viewed from a social action perspective.

Negative Relationship

The negative relationship between the institution and the student organization includes goals and behaviors of a student organization that hinders the institutions efforts both in recruiting and retaining diverse students. Building on concepts presented by Hammersley & Comm (2000) the negative relationship category has two sub-categories: Willful Negative and Negligent Negative.

Willful negative. A willful negative relationship between a student organization and the institution occurs when the student organization is consciously motivated through organizational values, a policy or a behavioral act to bring harm to the institution's diversity goals. For example, a student organization may carry on a covert policy that does not allow for the recruitment of ethnic minorities into their organization. This denies full participation to all students. Many campuses can also point to incidents in their history where a student organization has willfully made statements in the press, or communicated through organizational activities such as homecoming floats or organizational displays that certain groups are not welcomed on campus. For a relationship to be classified as willful negative, it must include

behavior that is conscious and motivated.

Negligent negative. Negative behavior that is unconscious and/or unmotivated contributes to a negligent negative relationship. The outcome of this behavior is still negative in terms of the relationship to the institution's multicultural goals, but the negative behavior is not conscious or motivated – it occurs out of negligence. Many examples are available where the student organization engaged in behaviors that they did not think through or they should have known better but did not or there was insufficient supervisory involvement with the leaders of the organization. For example, a campus organization sent out a flyer that depicted African American students involved in track and basketball and Anglo students involved in gymnastics and tennis. These are stereotypic depictions of race and athletics, but this error was not motivated in a willful way – the group was just not thinking. The results of negligent negative behaviors can be equally disruptive to the institution as willful negative behaviors, but the appropriate intervention and/or corrective action may differ from that which would be appropriate for willful negative behavior.

Null relationship

The next level in the typology of student organization/institutional relationship is called the null relationship. The null concept was introduced by Freeman (1979) and elaborated by Betz (1989). The basic definition of the null relationship is when the student organization does nothing to support the multicultural goals of the institution. Often times the student orga-

nization believes that it is meeting its responsibilities because it has done nothing negative. But the null relationship suggests that being neutral and non-negative is not positive, but null. The campuses' dominant culture will unlikely change unless there are motivated positive efforts. Betz (1989) brings attention to this dynamic when examining career counseling for women. She notes that when an environment "simply ignores" (Betz, p.137) women it is discriminatory. The null relationship includes the concept of ignoring. When student organizations go about their own business and remain isolated, and in some cases, segregated from the larger organizational network the campus climate remains unchanged.

Stevens (2004) applies the null relationship to sexual orientation. Pointing to the work of Fassinger (1991), Stevens notes that "The societal stigma attached to sexual orientation could be so strong that an environment that did not actively promote and support positive actions, services, and programs, suggested that status quo is acceptable" (p. 186). For a student organization to move beyond the null relationship with the institution's diversity goals, it must be proactive in relationship to those goals, not just non-negative. For example, if sororities and fraternities are silent in their rush materials regarding desirability and the openness to a diversity of members, few diverse students will be attracted to these organizations and the status quo remains.

Contributions relationship

Moving toward a more positive relationship in the typology of student organizations and institutional diversity goals is the contributions relationship (Banks, 2002). James Banks' work focused on how to bring about multicultural curriculum reform, but his categories are instructive to this typology model. In Banks' (2002) curriculum reform model the focus of the contributions approach is "on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements" (p. 30). Many student organizations choose to support this relationship; for example, Cinco de Mayo and the many other multicultural events that are taking place on campus. Many student organizations participate at the contributions level by inviting special speakers during Women's History Month and other events devoted to multicultural celebrations.

Additive Relationship

The contributions approach focuses attention on cultural events that are typically acceptable by the dominant campus culture. The additive approach is also positive, but goes beyond the recognition of major cultural celebrations to include organizational efforts to address diversity activities more associated with the organization's goals. Banks (2002) describes the additive approach as making additive changes, but without making substantial changes to the existing framework. In the curriculum arena, this is often accomplished by adding "cultural content, concepts, and themes... without changing ... basic structures" (Banks, p. 31). Again,

the additive relationship can be found within student organizations. For example, the Forestry Club might as one of its programmatic elements invite a native speaker to talk about tribal practices in forest management. The Social Work Student Association's invitation to a lesbian couple to discuss child adoption would serve as another example or the Interior Design Student Organization's invitation to the Director of Student Disability Services to discuss the history and status of universal design would be yet another example.

While both the contributions and the additive relationships move student organizations closer to the multicultural goals of the institution, they both reflect supplemental efforts that do not make major changes in the student organization or in campuses' student organization network. Banks (2002) suggests the strategies of transformation and social action do make fundamental changes.

Transformational Relationship

Included in the transformational approach suggested by Banks (2002) are strategies that "change(s) the canon, paradigms, and basic assumptions ..." (p. 31). This transformational relationship can occur between student organizations and the institution's multicultural goals. A group such as a fraternity could come to recognize that its covert single race policy is unwarranted and as a result, take positive steps to transform their old policy into a policy more supportive of the institution's multicultural goals. In concert with Bank's notion of transformation, all student organizations under institutional

sponsorship could be invited to engage in serious discussion on how their organizations help or hinder the institution's goals. Banks notes: "Important aims of the transformational approach are to teach students to think critically and to develop the skills to formulate, document, and justify their conclusions and generalizations" (p. 31). The campus might create opportunities and incentives for student organizations to partner with other student organizations in their educational and cultural awareness activities. For example, the African American student group along with the Jewish student group could make an ongoing commitment to developing and implementing a campus based holocaust awareness program, or the Greek Council could be invited to help organize, along with the GLBT organization, an institutional activity during the April Gay awareness month activities. The transformation focuses on change, not just additions. For example, rather than just inviting a speaker, the Forestry Club could change its organizational goals to include the exploration of indigenous peoples' contributions to the conservation of natural resources. If such transformational activities exist within and between student organizations, then one would expect the willful and negligent negative relationships to decline and student organizations would go beyond the contributions and additive strategies and become transformed into new ways of thinking and acting. The highest stage of this typology is what Banks calls the Social action approach.

Social Action Relationship

The social action relationship, using Bank's (2002) approach, would be realized when student organizations take deliberate actions to recognize and solve campus multicultural issues that promote and enhance the institution's diversity goals. Student organizations within this relationship could actively participate in ongoing institutional programs of recruitment and retention of diversity. Campus student organizations could become a part of extending the campus diversity efforts into local high schools and the greater community. Student organizations could become a part of campus "hosting" activities and become admission ambassadors.

The organizations could reach across the student organizational network and most importantly take significant actions within their organization to align themselves in a social action relationship with other student organizations and within the institution. For example, student organizations could assume leadership roles in organizing efforts across various student organizations to volunteer in the community to help low income areas of the community in restoration activities or to tutor disabled and immigrant children so that they might have a better chance of realizing a college education. They could work across student organizational boundaries to address student-community relation issues and/or proactively address alcohol and drug abuse in their community. Under the social action framework, The Forestry Club would not only explore the contributions of native peoples to conservation, but would organize summer

work programs in conjunction with tribal communities.

Implications and Discussion of the Campus Student

Organization Diversity Typology

The diversity typology can be useful to student organizations and campus student organization advisors. It can serve as a road map for the development of student organizations in relationship to diversity goals. Since student organizations serve as an important source of student connection with the institution, this typology can aid in promoting a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment for all students.

Utilizing the typology can help student organization members understand the relationship between their collective organizational diversity values and behaviors, and their impact on the overall campus environment. Being able to visualize and label their values and behaviors in relation to the spectrum of possible sets of values and behaviors makes it easier for organization members to understand themselves in the context of the entire campus. Student organization members can begin to understand the multitude of choices they have with regard to their actions and begin to think through how they want to act and be viewed within the larger community to support the institutional goals of diversity.

The typology not only can be helpful to organizations and their advisors in assessing current relationships within the institution's diversity efforts, but can assist the organizations in designing new

approaches that move their relationships toward the more positive social action relationship. As groups come to understand the impact that behavioral choices have on their individual and collective actions, they can begin to more fully understand the consequences of these actions in relationship to larger goals and the larger campus environment. They can begin to design strategies that will place them in the position of where they as an organization want to be in relation to the institution and campus diversity goals.

This typology could provide advisors with a tool that can help student organization leaders confront and discuss these sensitive issues in a more open and less threatening manner. The typology could also assist organizations in being proactive in their plans to foster less organizational isolation, resulting in stronger connections within the greater campus student organization network. This typology would also enable various student organizations to fashion their outreach and organization development strategies collaboratively with other student organizations so their collective efforts would support the larger institution's diversity related goals.

Summary

Research has indicated that the campus climate fostered through both the curriculum and co-curricular life of the campus play a key role in fostering student success and student college persistence (Tinto, 1993) Yet many traditional college campuses and their surrounding communities continue to be perceived as unwelcoming,

or at best, neutral to the presence of diverse students.

Student organizations have the potential to serve as significant agents to advance the multicultural and diversity goals of college campuses. Campus student organizations serve as significant social networks for students on college campuses and these groups serve as important links for students to campus life

In conclusion, a diversity typology has been presented for guiding student organizations through an assessment of their current involvement in diversity related goals and strategies within their campus environments. Utilizing this typology would help campus practitioners and organization leaders create development strategies for student organizations that would both educate students and help student organizations identify goals and strategies related to diversity.

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