

This issue tackles the challenging topic of diversity and higher education. Our guest editors and authors offer vibrant and direct reports of institutional approaches to understanding aspects of diversity as well as recommendations regarding effective recognition and support of all students. In my own column, I want to share some thoughts about the evolution of views of diversity, especially our increasing understanding of its relationship to academic excellence, and of the resulting special opportunities for metropolitan universities. My comments are based in part on recent conferences focused on service, public engagement, and the civic mission of higher education.

The concept of *diversity* elicits a variety of responses from different constituencies. The nature of the response depends on how the term is defined, and there are many different definitions present in the marketplace of higher education. Invariably, institutions attach goals to this term, and the programmatic responses to those goals are themselves quite diverse—and often controversial.

Diversity initiatives are most often thought of as activities focused on providing access, but as campuses gain experience, the initiatives take different forms. Each form is built on a different set of motivations, and may reflect levels or stages of institutional readiness, skill, and capacity.

Access and success. Most institutions first offer some form of programming to open up access to higher education and to promote social justice by ensuring that students of all backgrounds can seek post-secondary education. Often these recruitment and retention efforts are accompanied by special academic and social programs that assist first-generation and at-risk students by providing remedial education or special assistance to promote success. These programs are not without controversy.

Recently, some states have become embroiled in disputes over the costs, success, or constitutionality of access and academic support programs.

Enhancements of climate and culture. At this stage, campuses move beyond seeking to become more diverse racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically. The focus shifts to efforts to provide a different campus culture and intellectual environment through the introduction of cultural programming (e.g., a different sound on campus radio, different use of student fees, new support for special interest groups), and disciplinary and curriculum transformation (e.g., new fields and programs, new race and culture courses, diversity requirements, development of a criterion of multicultural competence as a requirement for graduation). Climate and culture programs have sometimes drawn challenges about perceived political correctness.

Systemic change and engagement. In this third stage, an institution begins to think seriously about its educational mission and its societal responsibilities. Carol Schneider of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) talks about the

importance of the exploration and understanding of “difficult differences” as a critical element of the student learning environment. In this way, concerns for equity and democracy become essential components of academic excellence and integral to the educational purposes of the institution. Although few institutions have reached this stage, the center of gravity becomes the common experiences and competencies of all members of the campus community rather than an emphasis on helping nontraditional participants adapt successfully to a majority culture. At this stage, the campus becomes a working model for a democratic society based on mutuality and civic engagement.

One of our most critical challenges is the need to increase our own multicultural competency. If a revitalization of civic life and the practice of democracy are among our learning goals, we need to discover feasible ways to raise citizens’ competence to live in a complex, interconnected, and reciprocal world as well as in a local environment. We must do our part to develop models of multicultural education and develop—in our schools, on our own campuses and within our communities—a genuine multicultural competency.

To accomplish this, a campus community must place strong emphasis on a set of shared values, on effective and inclusive communication, and on cultural knowledge. Multicultural education calls upon students to challenge traditional assumptions. It encourages a critical examination of the sources of our own knowledge and a respect for alternative perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing. Multicultural education also demands innovation and creativity in seeking better, more active ways of teaching and learning that are compatible with other curricular forms our institutions are adopting. Institutions that do this can enrich the educational experience of their students, promote personal growth and a healthy society, and strengthen communities and the workplace through university-community relationships.

In recent months, several major national educational associations have issued position statements and reports on equity and diversity, and I recommend that you look for these in association web pages and catalogs. AAC&U has a particularly strong set of materials providing insight into curricular change and the definitions of multicultural competency that will prepare our students with the necessary knowledge and abilities to function in a diverse world.

Urban and metropolitan institutions are understood to have a special responsibility and wonderful opportunity to respond to issues of diversity and to implement its companion concept, multicultural education. First, the majority of Americans live in urbanized environments. Their urban and metropolitan educational institutions have a special mission to serve the learning needs of these regions through access, campus climate, and engagement in civic issues. Effective urban and metropolitan institutions are a reflection of the people and issues of their regions. Second, most metropolitan communities have grown increasingly diverse in the past decade and are a true laboratory for understanding the meaning and value of a diverse campus community and its relationship to effective learning, academic quality, and the revival of civic responsibility.

Third, the economy of metropolitan areas is complex and invariably links the region and campus to the global economy, thus offering the opportunity for faculty and students to have hands-on experience with the challenges of a global environment

Fourth, urban and metropolitan institutions have long faced the demands of access, inclusion, and equity and have moved into the second and third stages of understanding the impact and positive potential of diversity and multicultural education. Though few would claim complete success, many of our campuses have useful experiences to share with colleges and universities that are just beginning to struggle with these issues.

Some of these stories are captured in the articles contained in this issue. I thank the guest editors and their authors for candidly sharing their descriptions and analysis of the experiences of their institutions, and trust it will encourage many of us to reflect on our own institutional opportunities and needs.

Call for Contributions

Metropolitan Universities continues to welcome the submission of unsolicited manuscripts on topics pertinent to our eponymous institutions. We seek contributions that analyze and discuss pertinent policy issues, innovative programs or projects, new organizational and procedural approaches, pedagogic developments, and other matters of importance to the mission of metropolitan universities.

Articles of approximately 3,500 words should be intellectually rigorous but need not be cast in the traditional scholarly format nor based on original research. They should be *useful* to their audience, providing better understanding as well as guidance for action. Descriptions of interesting innovations should point out the implications for other institutions and the pitfalls to be avoided. Discussions of broad issues should cite examples and suggest specific steps to be taken. We also welcome manuscripts that, in a reasoned and rigorous fashion, are *provocative*, challenging readers to re-examine traditional definitions, concepts, policies, and procedures.

We would also welcome letters to the editor, as well as opinion pieces for our forum pages. Individuals interested in contributing an article pertaining to the thematic portion of a forthcoming issue, or writing on any of the many other possible subjects, are encouraged to send a brief outline to either the appropriate guest editor (addresses available from the executive editor) or to the executive editor. Letters and opinion pieces should be sent directly to the latter:

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