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*Because the diversity of metropolitan Orlando is both a major strength and a complex issue, diversity and diversity education are important components of UCF's metropolitan mission and strategic planning process. That process links our strategic priorities with our budgetary process and has resulted in a number of innovative programs for the metropolitan university environment.*

## **Diversity and the Metropolitan University: Coming of Age in the 21st Century**

Demographic changes are challenging individuals and organizations to acquire knowledge and skills that support personal, professional, and organizational success in academic and nonacademic environments. As we approach the new millennium, demographic shifts will dramatically impact metropolitan regions, and community leaders will be confronted with the many new challenges associated with these changed demographic realities. But metropolitan universities, with their emphasis on strong interactive community partnerships, are in an optimal position to assume a major leadership role in addressing many of these complex issues. A successful metropolitan university will be defined by the leadership role it takes in assisting its host community in planning, implementing, managing, and monitoring activities that facilitate regional enhancement.

Thus, as we approach the twenty-first century, it is imperative that our teaching, research, and service focus on economic, social, political, and cultural issues that are important to the quality of life in our host regions. Educational and community leaders must become partners to accomplish regional goals. We must design opportunities for collaboration and, when opportunities present themselves, we must be prepared to act.

We are convinced that metropolitan universities are creating effective models to accomplish this agenda. As a metropolitan university, the University of Central Florida (UCF) has an entrepreneurial spirit, and the cre-

ativity and internal flexibility to think outside the box. These qualities and the diversity of our region have created new ways of working together for the greater good of our community.

Because the diversity of metropolitan Orlando is both a major strength and a complex issue, diversity and diversity education have become very important components of UCF's metropolitan mission and strategic planning process. The process has highlighted the vision, goals, and selected initiatives related to partnerships and future directions that will carry the university into the next century.

### **Background**

UCF was established in 1963 as Florida Technological University and began classes in October 1968 with an enrollment of 1,948 students. The name was changed to the University of Central Florida in December 1978. During its 35-year existence, UCF's enrollment has grown to nearly 30,000 and there are now more than 3,000 faculty and staff. By 2010, our enrollment should exceed 40,000.

Located in Orlando, one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the nation, UCF defines its mission and ethos in terms of the educational needs of the region. The population of the metropolitan area is approaching a million and a half. Unemployment is low here, where, in addition to tourism, the target growth industries are international business, film and television, the arts, sports, health care, and high technology.

The characteristics that define metropolitan universities are the very characteristics that define UCF: the majority of our students come from our metropolitan region and are diverse in age, ethnicity, racial identity, religion, and socioeconomic background. Many are women returning to complete their education, and many are students who transfer to UCF from community colleges or from other baccalaureate institutions. We also have a very active population of senior citizens who enroll in classes and participate in projects designed to meet their special needs.

One of the most exciting aspects of our metropolitan character is our involvement in creative partnerships with public and private enterprises, elementary and secondary schools, and community colleges and universities in our area. And, in keeping with our metropolitan mission, the issues that are important to Central Florida help determine our research and service priorities.

### **Diversity and the Metropolitan Mission**

In the modern academy, we must think of diversity very broadly and define it in ways that include all, rather than exclude some. From this inclusive perspective, diversity takes many forms: race, ethnicity, gender, social class, caste, religion, age, sexual orientation, ability, and other differences.

But the mere existence of differing human qualities and characteristics renders little meaning to our understanding of diversity. Instead, in order to fulfill the goals of the academic enterprise, we must manage our diversity by building on the strengths that our differences and our similarities provide.

Thus, establishing positive relationships that support individuals and foster productive communities is an important dimension of our definition of diversity. This management component of diversity must be understood as a developmental process

that works best when all members of the organization assume an active role in the creation of an inclusive society. Such a process requires innovative thinking, strategic planning, and creative practices that foster individual development and organizational excellence. By using a process-oriented definition, diversity becomes a more utilitarian concept by which individual and organizational goals can be met.

## **Framework for Change**

### ***Vision and Goals***

UCF is a multicampus university where diverse people express and exchange ideas in an atmosphere that supports and encourages scholarship, creativity, and the development of shared values based on respect, worth of the individual, integrity, and justice. Values deemed essential include the pursuit of excellence, accent on the individual, and a commitment to enhance the quality of life.

Because of our unique location, UCF seeks international prominence both in selected disciplines that flourish on campus and in the community: the arts, entertainment, and hospitality; biotechnology and forensic science; computing and information technology; laser technology; simulation and modeling; social and public policy; health and education; space exploration; and transportation and environment, among others.

Our five goals serve as a foundation for our teaching, research, and service agendas and structure our strategic planning process. We seek to:

- offer the best undergraduate education available in Florida
- achieve international prominence in key programs of graduate study and research
- provide international focus to our curricula and research programs
- become more inclusive and diverse
- be America's leading partnership university

And, born of a collaborative roundtable process that involves diverse faculty and staff communicating across departments and disciplines, the following four strategic directions move us closer to fully addressing our metropolitan university goals:

- promote interdisciplinarity in our programs
- foster learning communities
- achieve operational excellence
- make innovative use of technology

## **Strategic Initiatives**

One of the most important features of UCF's strategic planning process is the link between budgeting and strategic priorities. Each year, faculty and staff are encouraged to submit grant proposals related to one or more of the university's goals or strategic directions. After a thorough review process, we fund several projects in each of these areas, thereby ensuring that the university remains focused on established priorities.

### ***Diversity Dialogue Consultants***

One of the funded activities that supports the goal of diversity is the Diversity Dialogue Consultants (DDC), a student leadership development project. The DDC

consists of a team of six UCF students selected through an application and interview process to facilitate diversity workshops. From May through August 1998, members of the DDC participated in an extensive training process that emphasized the core dimensions of diversity.

The students received additional training in affirmative action, “-isms,” religion, socioeconomic status, power, privilege, and conflict resolution. And, prior to learning facilitation techniques, the team engaged in self-assessment activities that challenged them to explore their attitudes and confront their own biases about specific elements of human diversity.

From September through November, the DDC provided diversity dialogue and awareness sessions for university classes and student organizations. During these three months, more than 1,000 individuals, mainly students, were involved in the DDC’s formal and informal activities. For example, the consultants assisted the orientation team in facilitating new student orientation sessions during the fall semester. Also, by invitation, they designed and conducted the diversity awareness component of new student orientation for Florida Southern College, a private, church-affiliated college in Lakeland, Florida.

Ninety percent of all session participants rated the activities and presentations as excellent or very good. As further testimony to the DDC’s exemplary diversity work, the group was asked to make a special presentation to the full Strategic Planning Council of the university, and was so successful that it was funded again for the 1998-99 academic year. The DDC is essentially an activity by students.

### ***Faculty Development Summer Institute***

One of the most successful and the most promising faculty activities chosen for funding by the Strategic Planning Council was the 1998 Faculty Development Summer Institute. This week-long institute was sponsored by a creative internal partnership among the Office of Diversity Initiatives, the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center, the Office of Quality Initiatives, Human Resources, and the Office of International Studies.

The institute encouraged substantive curricular change through the infusion of domestic and international diversity, learning communities, and new learning environments into the academic experience. Each faculty participant completed a course transformation project for implementation during the following academic year.

Guest faculty included Vincent Tinto, who spoke about learning communities; Harold Hodgkinson, who presented information on demographic realities; Margie Kitano, who conducted a workshop on strategies to appropriately infuse diversity into the curriculum; and Troy Duster, who presented a framework to address diversity in the college classroom. Due to the enthusiastic faculty response, a December seminar was held at the conclusion of the fall semester and another week-long summer institute is planned.

### ***Additional Diversity Projects***

A few of the other diversity projects funded by the Strategic Planning Council include the Diversity Education Faculty Development Project (1997-1998), the Faculty and Staff Development Train-The-Trainer Program (1998-1999), and the Social

Systems Diversity Web Course (1998-1999). The University of Central Florida is clearly putting its money where its priorities are by funding these projects through the Strategic Planning Council and by establishing other ongoing offices and programs to address issues of strategic importance to the university community.

### **The Office of Diversity Initiatives**

The Office of Diversity Initiatives was established in August of 1994 on the recommendation of a diversity task force established by the president. The primary function of the unit is to foster a university culture that values and respects human diversity. Working with administrative and leadership teams, the Office of Diversity Initiatives focuses on managing human similarities and differences in ways that enhance organizational excellence and individual success.

This unit is defined by its six goals:

- establish structures and procedures to support the university's goal of becoming more inclusive and diverse
- create a pedagogically sound curriculum that reflects the pluralism of our society
- design a comprehensive faculty and staff recruitment and retention process
- develop a better understanding of and support for student diversity, inclusiveness, and retention
- engage in diversity research programs and creative projects that advance knowledge and enhance opportunities for shared experiences
- develop diversity partnerships with external organizations

These broad goals accommodate diverse programming activities that range from coordinating the celebration of Diversity Week, through coordinating the President's Commissions and the Minority Council and serving on the General Education Program Diversity Oversight Committee, to facilitating diversity workshops.

#### ***Bias-Free Communication Workshops***

Because education and training are important components of our diversity process, an ongoing training activity at UCF is the Bias-Free Communication Workshop that is offered through Human Resources. This workshop features words, phrases, and examples of appropriate behaviors for decreasing bias in our communication patterns, and a UCF-produced *Guide to Bias-Free Communication* is distributed at each session. This two-hour workshop is one of the methods we use to transform the environment into an inclusive community that is respectful of diversity in all of its dimensions.

#### ***Leadership Enhancement Program***

The Leadership Enhancement Program (LEP) is a consortium project sponsored by UCF, Daytona Beach Community College, and Brevard Community College, with funding from the Florida State Department of Education. Administered through the Office of Diversity Initiatives, the program is designed for women and ethnic minority men who are currently employed by an institution in the consortium. Its intent is to

provide opportunities for participants to gain skills and experiences that will enhance their career progression. The program offers a common core of seminars, combined with focused experiences in various administrative functions. The common core serves as the foundation upon which participants tailor a program to meet their individual needs by working with mentors and engaging in such activities as shadowing, research, and developing special projects. They also attend local, regional, and national conferences. The overall goal of the LEP is to develop a cadre of higher education professionals who can be tapped for leadership positions when opportunities become available.

### ***Sisters Mentoring Sisters***

A new program that is a direct outgrowth of the LEP is Sisters Mentoring Sisters. This program provides African-American career service personnel with skill-building sessions and community-building experiences from an Africentric perspective. Administrators, faculty, and community women facilitate sessions using the principles of Kwanza as the foundation.

### ***Higher Education Diversity Coalition***

UCF is a member of the Central and South Florida Higher Education Diversity Coalition. This Ford Foundation-Association of American College and Universities Coalition first convened at Barry University in October 1996, and was formed to test the premise that higher education institutions can most effectively address diversity-related problems when they work together on issues that are important to the region. This consortium focuses on programs in adult literacy and citizenship and uses service learning as the vehicle to deliver these programs. UCF and the other coalition institutions include diversity training as an important element of this project. UCF's participation in this coalition is also managed from the Office of Diversity Initiatives.

### ***Other Diversity Projects***

American higher education has benefited enormously from efforts to increase diversity on our campuses. Our students need, and most want, increased opportunities to live and learn with and from people of many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. As we look thoughtfully to America's future, we must embrace our country's diversity as a strength to be celebrated and nurtured on our campuses and in our communities. For these reasons, initiatives to increase UCF's ethnic minority representation occur at all levels of the university and are not solely the province of the Office of Diversity Initiatives.

### ***Provost's Diversity Enhancement Program***

Particular emphasis has gone into increasing the ranks of minority faculty, especially faculty of color, through the Provost's Diversity Enhancement Program. The program provides funding to the six UCF colleges to help them increase diversity and correct underrepresentation. Disciplines with documented underrepresentation of protected classes are identified as meriting special attention for assistance. Based on individual circumstances, other disciplines may also be recognized as eligible for a diversity enhancement faculty line.

Each college normally receives one diversity enhancement faculty line a year, except for the large College of Arts and Sciences, which is normally allocated two lines

per year. After the provost has funded a filled position for three years, the college assumes the financial responsibility for funding it.

Since the program's inception in 1994, twenty-seven of the twenty-eight faculty members hired through this successful enhancement program remain employed at UCF.

### ***Minority Programs in Education***

Minority Programs in Education (MPIE) was established in 1990, funded for six years by a grant from the Ford Foundation, and continued by UCF. Its purpose is to respond to the critical shortage of minority teachers in local elementary and secondary school systems. Initially, MPIE (formerly known as Teacher Education for America's Minorities—TEAM) was part of a consortium of seven state universities. UCF is so far the only member of the consortium to formally integrate the programs into its College of Education.

As a course of action, MPIE identifies, recruits, and supports minority students as they pursue a teaching career. The support is manifested in small group sessions, tuition assistance, volunteer opportunities, and an overall sense of warmth and commitment to students of color. Value-added components include service learning opportunities, financial aid, mentoring, support groups, and career exploration programs.

We have made great strides in setting and reaching recruitment and retention goals. The 10-year goal to graduate 100 students has been met and exceeded in less time than projected. Now the challenges facing MPIE are to keep pace with the ever-increasing numbers of minority students admitted to the college and to secure additional funding to support those enrolled in graduate programs.

### ***Soldiers to Scholars***

Soldiers to Scholars is a UCF partnership in which discharged military personnel earn bachelor's degrees in a program aimed at increasing representation of African-American males on public school faculties in the area. Participants live in Orlando's ethnic minority community, where they provide after-school tutoring and mentoring programs for students of color who live in the inner city. This program is supported by Enterprise Florida's Jobs and Education Partnership, the Florida Housing and Finance Agency, the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, the Florida Department of Education, the Orange County School System, and UCF.

The program assists former military service members who want to further their education by providing tuition assistance and housing at a reduced cost. Many of the program staff members have prior military experience and understand the situations and concerns of those in transition. The office staff has been successful in streamlining the admissions process and obtaining personalized attention that helps ease participants into their education experience.

## **Conclusion**

In the execution of our metropolitan role, we take advantage of experience-rich, community-based learning opportunities for our students. We recognize that the community includes and is enriched by the presence of men and women of diverse backgrounds, especially by those who are members of groups subject to stereotyping, discrimination, or disadvantage. We encourage the study of diversity to respond to the needs of individuals, the university, and society.

Through strategic planning and funding, through community partnerships and creative projects, we advance our metropolitan mission and address university and community issues and enhance the well-being of the populations we serve. This important link between people and social, cultural, economic, and political systems is one of the hallmarks of the metropolitan mission, as well as an important element of a comprehensive definition of diversity.

If we as faculty, staff, and administrators of metropolitan universities remain mindful of our mission and how it differs from the mission of other institutions; if we continue to capitalize upon our program and research strengths; if we continue to develop creative partnerships with our local communities; and if we provide enhancement opportunities for the diverse members of our regions, we can be significant contributors to the future of our communities and the good of our nation as we address the issues facing the twenty-first century.

### ***Suggested Readings***

- Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds., *Teaching For Diversity and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- Banks, James A., and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds., *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 1993).
- Blum, Lawrence, "Can We Talk?," *Change* (November/December 1998).
- Elliott, Peggy G., *The Urban Campus* (Phoenix: The Oryx Press, 1994).
- Morey, Ann I., and Margie K. Kitano, eds., *Multicultural Course Transformation In Higher Education* (Needham Heights: Allyn and Bacon, 1997).
- Morrison, Ann M., *The New Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1992).