

Ten Core Ingredients for Fostering Campus Diversity Success

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For nearly 20 years, the University of Michigan has been at the forefront nationally regarding the advancement of campus diversity. The original blueprint of these efforts was "The Michigan Mandate: A Strategic Linking of Academic Excellence and Social Diversity."¹ This document reflected a deliberate and progressive articulation of how building and sustaining a community that values, respects and draws its strength from the diversity of people, was an essential element in making the institution highly competitive for the future.

While the emergence of this approach at the University of Michigan and other institutions has ushered in a new era of institutional change thanks to resultant diversity initiatives, diversity is not without its detractors. In fact, with this increased commitment to diversity and inclusion comes an increasing backlash through legal challenges and public referenda, with UM taking center stage in both instances. First, the 2003 Supreme Court decision supported UM's admissions program, and most recently Proposition 2 passed in November 2006 which, among other things, prohibits the consideration of race and gender in college admissions and financial aid in the State of Michigan.



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As a critical component and outgrowth of the Michigan Mandate, we have been involved in a comprehensive, longitudinal campus research and assessment project that

examines the impact of diversity on students.² We have given numerous national presentations and consulted to a wide array of higher education institutions. During this time we have learned much about what it takes to make campus diversity work.

Given the pressing negative reaction against concepts of affirmative action, diversity and inclusion, it is important that colleges and universities appreciate and understand how to strategize, plan and implement campus diversity efforts. In this spirit, listed below are ten observations and recommendations that may help campus leadership gain a fuller understanding of the dynamics of campus diversity. These points illustrate critical lessons learned along the way, including the avoidance of pitfalls that institution's can encounter along the way.

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Generally, while UM's focus on diversity tends to be very broad, inclusive of not only race and ethnicity, but of gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, etc., the study from which many

of these lessons are drawn was primarily centered on racial and ethnic diversity. Further, the contentious nature of the national diversity / affirmative action debate is rooted in the politics of race. So, while we feel these suggestions are broadly applicable to a wide spectrum of difference, they are principally centered on racial and ethnic diversity.

#1 — Campus Leadership Must be Visible and Heard

Without visible and sustained commitment from campus leadership (including academic leaders), it is unlikely that institutional approaches to campus diversity will be successful. There are pockets of diversity activities throughout any given campus that many key administrators know very little about. In fact, these activities are often achieved despite a lack of campus leadership involvement.

In general, the campus community needs to know that diversity is a priority of the president or chancellor, the executive officers and the governing board. These leaders must strongly advocate for diversity and deliver consistent, clear messages regardless of the audience. It is also important to have faculty and staff of color in leadership positions.

We often hear that campuses focus on increasing the number of students of color but pay little attention to hiring and promoting faculty and staff of color. Emphasis must be placed on hiring more faculty and staff of color into leadership positions — and retaining them. Faculty and staff of color, or offices of minority/multicultural affairs, should not be the sole bearers of campus diversity efforts. Campuses with well-articulated visions of diversity — and campus leaders who put these visions into practice — will experience a more vibrant commitment to diversity achievements.

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#2 — Institutional Diversity is Everyone's Business — No Exceptions

The ways college and university campuses approach diversity have changed dramatically in the last ten to 15 years. Long gone are the days of solitary offices, or in some cases, single individuals charged with and held accountable for pushing the diversity agenda for the entire campus. When diversity becomes an institutional priority, such practices cease.

Institutions must be sensitive to the fact that campus diversity is everyone's business. In order to have sustained success, strategic diversity planning and implementation must touch the entire campus. Institutions must demonstrate a commitment to reform the "untouchables," that is, those academic units that often convey the message that diversity doesn't apply to them. Furthermore, academic units have to be major players in institutionalizing campus diversity initiatives that impact students. The lack of involvement of key academic units can leave the impression that campus diversity initiatives pertain only to students and student staffing.

However, there is cause for hope. Nationally, many institutions have come to grips with the sobering reality that achieving campus diversity success requires a well-crafted, well-articulated and integrated strategic plan that engages each level of the institution and reflects a commitment to action. This shifting paradigm is embedded in the belief that the breadth of responsibility for creating and advancing campus diversity initiatives should span across all levels of the institution. It should also include a regimen of planning, implementation and assessment that addresses broad and specific diversity-related goals.

We have observed that in reaching this ideal place of full institutional entrenchment with

regard to diversity, institutions are increasingly willing to engage in a number of essential steps. These steps include:

- Examining programs, policies, practices and procedures to determine how they impact the campus and benefit the various populations they are intended to serve, and then making necessary changes to be more effective and inclusive.
- Taking a hard and systematic look at institutional traditions and customs that often pose significant barriers to achieving campus diversity success and committing to institutional reframing, as needed.
- Committing to extend the diversity focus from being primarily focused on student "feel good" programming to incorporating enriching diversity experiences for the faculty and staff. This includes enhancing diversity content within the curriculum, tackling access and equity issues, addressing climate issues and ensuring that diversity is reflected in the faculty, staff and leadership serving the student body.
- Exploring opportunities to incorporate student organizational programming into the academic experience involving faculty and curricula. This is an ideal opportunity to more tightly couple students' curricular and co-curricular experiences with diversity. By encouraging the application of diversity knowledge from course content to interactions with diverse others outside of the classroom.

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We can learn a great deal from students' diversity initiatives. Students often devote enormous amounts of energy to planning and implementing diversity activities with little involvement and support from faculty and academic units. Some administrators and faculty perceive such efforts as not germane to the academic mission — thus, passing up potentially valuable curricular/co-curricular learning opportunities. For example, student groups often work collaboratively to bring speakers and other diversity activities to campus, but they are not connected to the broader academic enterprise. Related classes can benefit from sending their students to hear, say, a prominent Latino historian, and then have classroom discussions afterward.

#3 — Stop Reinventing the Campus Diversity Wheel

While much energy is committed to designing diversity plans with lofty goals, most campuses fall short on the strategic implementation of these plans. They don't tackle the tough issues, such as funding, implementation strategies (including periodic assessments) and institutional leadership. Campuses often update or develop new plans without fully assessing the successes and challenges of the previous plan. "What was wrong with the previous plan and what happened to it?" is a frequent comment heard by stakeholders. Many become weary and wary of another initiative to develop another plan.

For some institutions, developing a plan every five years or so seems to be the norm. However, it's essential that plans not only contain strategic implementation, but also action steps that are monitored by leadership and reported to the campus community. A good place to start is by analyzing the efficacy of previous plans. Campuses have to do more than just give the appearance of valuing diversity by merely trotting out a diversity plan at the beginning of each year or during accreditation reviews. Such maneuvers, whether performed sincerely or not, produce considerable cynicism across campus. Supporters of diversity will say that nothing is being done while opponents will argue that the lack of progress demonstrates that diversity efforts don't work.

#4 — Integrate Campus Diversity Priorities with the Institutional Mission

Institutional diversity priorities must be aligned with the institutional mission. A good diversity plan links the goals of diversity with other components of the institutional mission, such as instruction, research and service, and weaves these objectives into the fabric of campus priorities. For example, most institutions claim in their mission statements that if students attend their institution, they will be better prepared as citizens of the world. Yet, many of these institutions have failed to consider, let alone clearly articulate, how institutional diversity fits into this equation.

For example, when the University of Michigan developed its initial diversity plan in 1988, it gave considerable emphasis to "strategically linking social diversity to academic excellence." This signaled to the campus community that diversity was so important that it was going to be interwoven into the instruction, research and service mission of the institution. This linking, as a broader outcome, was critical in the Supreme Court decision and UM efforts to demonstrate that diversity was critical to the mission of the institution.

Further, the over 500 amicus briefs submitted in support of UM's case (by corporations, educational associations and the military) created a powerful package and captured the attention of the justices who concluded that diversity provided educational benefits to all students, and prepared them for civil engagement, work and leadership in a global community.

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It is important that campus diversity efforts be viewed as essential to the fulfillment of an institution's overall mission. This is unlikely to happen when poorly conceived diversity plans are isolated and operate separately from campus priorities. Isolated plans give the appearance that diversity has low priority on campus and is not related to important institutional goals. Diversity efforts can then become marginalized and prime targets for budget cuts.

#5 — Campus Diversity is More Than a Numbers Game

Measuring the success of an institution's racial and ethnic diversity has to move beyond issues of access and increasing numbers. Too many campuses obsess over how many students of color enrolled this year over the previous year. The marker of success or failure then becomes the numbers — did they rise, stay the same or decline?

Campus leaders often fail to appreciate the interrelationship between access, success and retention/graduation. A better measure of diversity success is how many underrepresented students return after the first year and how many graduate. There are often vast differences in the graduation rates of various racial and ethnic groups on campus, yet institutions rarely incorporate systematic efforts designed to close these gaps. Graduation parity has to be one of the key goals and measures of campus diversity success.

A well-conceived diversity plan should include strategies that address 1) access, persistence and retention, 2) disparities in graduation rates, and 3) overall satisfaction with the campus experience. Student satisfaction over the four-year experience can strongly reflect perceptions of the overall institutional climate. An institution may have a fine overall graduation rate yet discover that many students of color express considerable unhappiness with the campus climate. A potential reaction from a student in this predicament might be, "I graduated, but I would never return to this campus. A lot of negative things happened to me strictly because of my race."

#6 — Campus Diversity Among Students is Complex and Multifaceted

Colleges and universities must recognize the complexity of campus diversity from the student's perspective — especially the interrelationship of equity/social justice issues and institutional efforts to demonstrate that diversity represents a benefit to all students. To have successful campus diversity, an institution must address both issues.

Campus leaders must realize that students come to campuses loaded with misperceptions and stereotypes about others — even when they are open to learning about others. Students in general still come from highly segregated high schools and communities. Thus, the student's curricular and co-curricular experiences must move beyond soft "feel good" diversity programs that really don't contribute to systemic institutional changes. These may only reinforce or validate stereotypes that students already harbor about different groups. There must be a commitment to tackling campus myths about diversity — especially racial and ethnic diversity — and to creating "safe spaces" for students to explore their own identities as well as those of others.

Leaders must also acknowledge the remarkable diversity within various racial and ethnic groups (e.g., the various sub-groups that exist within the broad Asian American, Latino/a or Black categories). Emphasis must be placed on supporting students' inter- and intra-group identities — through programming, services and policies. Failure to recognize and appreciate within-group experiences can easily convey the view that all groups are monolithic in their values, expectations and experiences.

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Furthermore, it is imperative that campuses be prompt, and proactive when possible, in addressing racial incidents involving students, faculty and staff. Students expect campus administration to resolve racial incidents in a timely manner and to cultivate a climate that encourages the success of all students. Students of color hold university leadership accountable for addressing overall campus climate issues at all levels. If leaders fail to effectively address racially-charged incidents, they are likely to face major and sustained conflicts that can quickly derail any recent climate improvements.

In what appears to be a contradiction, all student groups expect campus leadership to address campus climate problems, yet at the same time, students resist measures they perceive to be mandated by leadership. Thus, institutions must strike a delicate balance by addressing concerns while ensuring that student perspectives are reflected in any proposed actions. Above all, institutions must take the stance that students have the right to live, learn and work in environments that validate their myriad identities and cultivate their social, emotional, intellectual and professional development. This message must be clear and consistent.

#7 — Maintain a Commitment to Racial / Ethnic Diversity as the Institution's Diversity Focus Broadens

Over the past 25 years or so, the diversity agenda has broadened from a focus on African Americans to other racial groups to greater concerns relative to gender, sexual orientation and international issues. However, there is a danger that as the diversity agenda broadens, some campuses are shifting away from a civil-rights focus on social justice/equity issues related to diversity (such as increasing and retaining adequate numbers of underrepresented students, faculty and staff). Perhaps this is related to continued attacks on campus diversity efforts, which tend to make campuses more cautious about aggressively pursuing diversity goals.

At many campuses, there is the perception that campus leaders often pit diverse social groups

against each other, forcing them to compete for resources and attention. Such practices make it difficult for the various diversity groups to work through their differences, because their interests have been made oppositional rather than mutual. A good diversity plan recognizes the importance of all components of diversity that enrich the campus, while consistently addressing the paramount diversity issues involving equity. Affirmative Action initiatives are rooted in the civil rights/social justice activities of the 1960s, and the racial aspects of this dilemma still remain unresolved and contentious, despite the continuing expansion of the diversity definition.

#8 — Assess the Impact of Campus Diversity on All Students

It is essential that campuses assess their diversity efforts with both longitudinal quantitative and qualitative data. Increasingly, institutions are being asked by the legal system and the public to demonstrate that campus diversity really has an educational benefit for all students. However, few institutions can produce data beyond anecdotal stories. In fact, most fail to provide the much-needed concrete and long-term evidence of the value, importance and effectiveness of diversity efforts.

Comprehensive institutional examinations can have a significant impact on an institution's ability to develop and evaluate strategic planning and implementation related to campus diversity. Institutional "report cards" help meet the outcry for proof that diversity "works" from both the courts and an even more skeptical public. These progress reports also justify the benefits of diversity success when an institution's campus diversity practices are challenged.

Institutions that plan to conduct quality institutional research relative to diversity may wish to consider the following suggestions:

- Track the short- and long-term impact of campus diversity initiatives on students in their social, academic and professional experiences across all four years in college and post-graduation.
- Study instrumentation should include items specific to race-related attitudes and behaviors, but also attitudes and behaviors centered on assessing the students' general college experiences, permitting a broader and more balanced analysis.
- The study planning and implementation team should reflect a **true** collaboration between academic and non-academic units, ensuring that all perspectives are represented in the study design and deployment.
- A broad-based qualitative component should supplement a large-scale quantitative survey effort. This allows researchers to probe more deeply into how students' views on life relate to their experiences with diversity at their institution.

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#9 — Communicate Institutional Diversity Priorities and Successes

Once a formidable diversity agenda has been set, and work has begun, sharing the agenda with the campus community fosters support and momentum for the diversity goals. Communicate campus diversity successes and address stereotypes and myths that can derail the efforts, e.g., that all financial aid funds are allocated to students of color or that students of color don't interact with other groups.

The lofty statements of most institutions proclaim their support for campus diversity. However, if they lack clear communication plans or send mixed messages to the campus community, they will convey the message that diversity is merely tolerated, thus thwarting the hard and

dedicated work of many administrators, faculty, student and alumni. Campus leaders need to ask themselves some questions in order to design an effective communication program:

- What activities/events/communications/media introduce the importance of campus diversity to new students and faculty?
- What institutional reports/data publicize the many benefits that have been realized relative to diversity?
- How are diversity successes and achievements celebrated and communicated to the campus and external populations?

Campuses have to be proactive and aggressive in communicating diversity success to counter some of the media and campus constituents that view diversity only in negative terms.

#10 — Garner External Support for Campus Diversity

External support from alumni, donors and the corporate community is essential to the long-term success of campus diversity initiatives. These external groups are often overlooked as potential supporters of and contributors to these efforts. They can be powerful allies in fostering support for overall campus diversity initiatives. Campus leaders can also serve a pivotal role in informing these populations about the importance of campus diversity and how such efforts benefit society in general. This is, unfortunately, an opportunity that is often overlooked.

A notable example that speaks to the necessity of fostering external relationships was the extensive filing of amicus briefs by corporations, unions and the military in support of the University of Michigan in its defense of its admissions policies. These briefs were of critical importance to the success of the cases and highlighted to the broader community the importance of diversity in preparing educated and competitive citizens for today's increasingly global democracy. These supportive actions further illustrated that diversity is not only key to a quality education, but also critical to the current and future economic vitality and security of our nation.

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It is surprising that many institutions do not reflect their commitment to diversity in their capital campaigns and fundraising efforts. What is often said is that donors are not interested in contributing to causes that advance diversity — especially to those relating to race and ethnicity. But such assertions contradict the commitment to diversity proclaimed and practiced by the leading corporate and foundation communities.

Conclusion

To a large extent, colleges and universities are still grappling with how to make diversity work on campuses in such a way that the entire community reaps the full educational benefit. While campuses are still experimenting with how to make this all work in a diverse democracy, one thing is certain: diversity is here to stay on campuses and elsewhere as demographics suggest that the U.S. will become increasingly diverse over the next 40 years. In the not so distant future, there will be no majority racial group, a trend that has already occurred in California. Further, women will outpace men in college attendance rates; again, a trend already occurring on many of our campuses.

The health of our country, as a whole, depends greatly on how well we sort through the complex challenges of diversity. Failure to succeed in this matter could put the nation at risk

over the next few decades. Given the awesome responsibility the 2003 Supreme Court decision bestowed on higher education — to prepare our students for the future — campuses will play a major role in fulfilling this aspect of our national priorities.

Endnotes

1. This document was authored by former UM President James Duderstadt in 1988.
2. This project began in 1990. The latter portion of the project (2000 - 2004) was funded, in part, by the Ford Foundation.



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