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Competing Interests: Strategies for Working with Diverse Minority Groups

Dorscine Spigner Littles Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Human Relations, University of Oklahoma

Amelia M. Adams M.A.

Assistant Dean, Graduate College, University of Oklahoma

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Competing Interests: Strategies for Working with Diverse Minority Groups

Abstract

Intentionally or non-intentionally, budgetary constraints have caused ethnic groups on many predominantly white campuses to compete among themselves for a share of limited power and resources. The purpose of this workshop is to discuss strategies that will provide equitable access to resources, information, finances and opportunities to have a representative community that reflects the diverse populations on campuses.

Dorscine Spigner Littles, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Department of Human Relations, University of Oklahoma

Amelia M. Adams, M.A.

Assistant Dean, Graduate College, University of Oklahoma

Beginning with the arrival of significant numbers of students of color on predominantly white campuses, ethnic students have established organizations and studies based upon particular national identities (including Native Americans, African American, Asian Americans, Latinos and the many subgroups within those communities). Ethnic studies and student support services have been developed to affirm the validity of each group's ethnic heritage and identity for the purpose of providing academic, social and cultural support for minority students and to respond to students who wanted to bring a richer representation of their ethnic experience to campuses. Minority-based organizations have in fact added profound value to campuses, sustained the identity of the various ethnic communities and contributed to the quality of campus life. However, despite decades of existence on campuses, many of the ethnic studies departments and student support service organizations are insufficiently funded and lack adequate numbers of faculty and staff.

Clearly, each racial, cultural or ethnic group on predominantly white campuses face challenges that are unique to that group and every attempt must be made to continue to address those challenges. However, beneath the visible attempts to provide cultural and academic support to ethnic students lies an often unacknowledged problem. Remarkably, many of the ethnic groups have uncertain relationships with each other and have not united around common aspects of their advent on campuses. Despite having many commonalities based on historical inequities, the ethnic organizations also have interests that are not always consistent with one another. The variance in interests and concerns have resulted on some campuses in different racial, cultural and ethnic organizations operating as separate units. Concomitantly, the organizations and members have focused on insuring the survival and well-being of their own units and endeavored to influence the allocation of resources towards their own particular group. Intentionally or non-intentionally, budgetary constraints have caused the various groups to compete among themselves for a share of limited power and resources.

The division among minority groups have created barriers which prevent different people of color working coherently as a community to build alliances. The challenge for these

groups is to develop a collective self-consciousness and to find common ground for understanding and working toward the resolution of problems and to gaining access to a more equitable share of campus resources.

Therefore, the question facing the entire ethnic community is how to create a campus climate in which diverse cultural and ethnic groups can flourish. The purpose of this workshop is to discuss strategies which will provide equitable access to resources, information, finances and opportunities to have a representative community that reflects the diverse populations on campuses. The analysis and conclusions that will be presented will come out of a process designed to insure that diverse communities speak for themselves as they define the issues and reach a common understanding of specific goals, analyze current approaches and suggest new strategies. Major topics covered will include recognizing differences, promoting interpersonal communication, resolving conflicts with others, developing teamwork strategies, fostering cross-cultural relations and diversity, helping others grow and develop, developing positive political skills and developing strategies to achieve equitable access to resources.

Presenters

Dorscine Spigner Littles is Associate Professor in the Department of Human Relations at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of a textbook and several articles on multicultural education and the pedagogy of cultural diversity. She has served as Assistant Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences where she directed a minority graduate student recruitment program and developed several programs for recruitment and retention of students of color. Dr. Spigner Littles has also received several grants for working with populations at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and developed grants to design alternative educational curricula for atrisk school populations.

Amelia Adams received her Master's degree in Anthropology. For the past three years, she has served the University of Oklahoma as the Assistant Dean of the Graduate College.