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Backlash

Sherryl N. Weston

Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Affairs, Naropa University

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Backlash

Abstract

In order to be successful at creating a welcoming and pluralistic climate, there must be proper attention paid to backlash. Understanding the underlying causes is the root of creating effective coping strategies. This workshop will suggest ways of understanding and dealing with this phenomenon.

Sherryl N. Weston, M.A., M.S.W.

Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Affairs, Naropa University.

Here, the term "backlash" is used to refer to the negative responses to diversity efforts. These take several forms that often become the impetus for the institution backing off of particular initiatives. It is imperative that there is a deep understanding of the forms that backlash takes. It is crucial that leadership develops the ability to identify which issues are real issues to be addressed and which are a feature of resistance to change.

It is not to suggest that resistance is to be dismissed, but identifying the difference between resistance and issues that are anchored in "whole reality" will reduce the possibility that needed changes are circumvented by fear of conflict.

The depth and controversy in this topic make it unwise to attempt a "complete" explanation of the issues. There are many terms in this field that are understood in a variety of ways. It would be very easy to misunderstand. As a result, it is my intent to outline the general ideas and invite the committee to ask for more clarification if that is necessary.

There are two basic reasons for backlash:

- . Poorly planned and/ or executed programs which cause misunderstanding
- . Insistence on maintaining the status quo on the part of privileged parties (i.e. Whites, heterosexuals and the like) as well as on the part of people of color or others of the targeted or marginalized groups.

There are three concepts that need to be understood as reasons for this:

- . White (or male, or straight, or class) privilege in society and how it manifests itself in the work setting
- . Political orientation of the leadership vs. the work place and community
- . Internalized oppression on the part of targeted or marginalized groups and how it manifests itself.

In a conversational and participatory style, I will teach about these concepts and help attendees identify the methods that may be necessary to address these issues on their campuses.

Presenter

Sherryl N. Weston, M.A., M.S.W. holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Special Education from the University of Northern Colorado and a Master's in Social Work from the University of Denver. Her primary interest in her first career was emotional and behavioral disordered adolescents. Afterwards, she spent a dozen years in clinically-oriented social work where she developed an interest in cultural competence issues. Her specific areas of expertise are internalized oppression and multicultural identity.

Ms. Weston now is Special Assistant to the President for Diversity Affairs at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado where her professional focus is "macro" or "indirect" social work, the community organizing and social change elements of the profession. Naropa is a Buddhist-inspired, private liberal arts college that has a contemplative educational focus. The largest of their programs prepare psychologists and therapists.