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Creating a Diversity Movement in the University

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Creating a Diversity Movement in the University

Abstract

What kind of actions can a university take to create a diversity movement within its confines? Taking recent work at North Carolina State University as the prototype, this session will be used to outline and discuss the characteristics of administrative action that can lead to a comprehensive and programmatic diversity movement within any college or university.

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A diversity movement is a set of administrative actions that lead to a comprehensive and programmatic approach to diversity. Creation of a diversity movement within a college or university requires administrative action that is bold. The beginning of those administrative actions must be to place diversity into the highest level of the administrative power structure; such as a Vice Chancellor or Vice Provost position. Examples used in this presentation will focus on a Vice Provost position because that is the set up at North Carolina State University, the prototype for this model. Once established at this high level of power and visibility, administrative actions that come out of the position or office must likewise be boldly philosophical, definitional, action oriented and have high visibility.

Philosophy of Responsibility

To provide the leadership for diversity, one must develop a coherent philosophy to guide the diversity movement. The philosophy must emphasize as a guiding principle that work by the office is to drive advocacy, change and infusion of diversity throughout the University so that all units take responsibility for diversity. Indeed, the philosophy should make it clear that the office is not to do diversity for the college or university. The point of the office must be to motivate an increase in all academic units' participation in and commitment to doing their own substantive diversity work.

Definitional Issues

Part of leading the diversity movement for the college or university is ensuring that all constituencies are likely to "buy into" the diversity mission. At the same time, the diversity mission must be an authentic one and not just window dressing. With those issues in mind, it is important to have a definition of diversity that is tied directly to the nature of the university. At North Carolina State University, diversity is said to exist when the mix of people from a wide variety of niches of society is such that the occurrence of a conflict of ideas is inescapable. So defined and conceptualized, diversity then is the heart of the university's academic mission.

Action

Philosophy and definition must occur at one level, while action must occur at another level. Part of engaging the diversity movement for the campus is having resources and using those resources to push the diversity movement. For example, at NCSU I set an

agenda that engaged the diversity movement by "planning through action." That "with all deliberate speed" action orientation led to interventions at all levels of the university's academic mission:

- College level: A college level diversity proposal competition from which colleges had a potential to receive \$30,000.00.
- Department level: A curriculum diversity pilot effort through a partnership with the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning designed to motivate and help departments to evaluate the need to and consider revising their curriculum to be more inclusive and actively engage the use of diversity related teaching materials and pedagogy.
- Student level: A program was created to train undergraduate students to be "diversity facilitators" for the campus. Likewise a student advisory council on diversity issues, the Lair of Diversity, is being formed.

Visibility

It is critical that the work being done by the high level advocacy office for diversity have visibility. For example, cultivating a working relationship with the student newspaper would be beneficial. Indeed, any publication organ should be used as part of creating visibility for the diversity movement (e.g. a college or university bulletin; an alumni magazine).

Goal

The point of creating a diversity movement must be to address the specific issues faced by the college or university. In the case of NCSU, not long after I was appointed Vice Provost, a first year, white student said to me that she was "shocked" by the absence of university-wide opportunities to talk about issues of diversity. She was shocked, she said, because she came to NCSU believing that a university would be the one place in our society where dialogue on diversity should be pushed and made safe. She expected that she would find those opportunities here at NCSU. She was shocked by their absence, she said. Her response was emblematic of NCSU student concern. I took this to be the issue that would drive my office for the next two years; moving the University from silence to dialogue. In two years we will evaluate where we are because the diversity movement must have a focus that is adaptable to success.

References

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Presenter

As of September 1,2000, **Dr. Rupert W. Nacoste** was appointed North Carolina State University's first Vice Provost for Diversity and African American Affairs. A native of Louisiana, Dr. Nacoste received his B.A. from the University of Florida and his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina State at Chapel Hill. Now Professor of Psychology, he has been on the faculty at North Carolina State University (NCSU) since 1988. For his work in the classroom he has been named to NCSU's Academy of Outstanding Teachers (1994) and alumni distinguished undergraduate professor (1999). Because of his research on the social psychology of affirmative action, Dr. Nacoste has

been asked by various groups to bring his expertise to bear on issues related to the management of diversity. Those calls have required him to be part of a Congressional Briefing on Affirmative Action and to deliver technical analyses at conferences such as the World Conference on Remedies to Racial and Ethnic Economic Inequality and the Department of Defense World Wide Equal Opportunity Conference. For the past three summers, he has been a visiting scholar at the (Department of) Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, where he has conducted research on and made research based recommendations about equal opportunity in the armed forces. Dr. Nacoste has likewise been called on to deliver general commentaries on the state of intergroup relations in the nation, for example as keynote speaker at the Annual Conference of Blacks in Government and at the 14th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast at the U.S. Pentagon.