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The View of One University from Three Lenses

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The View of One University from Three Lenses"

Abstract

The presenters use their PWI University's Diversity Plan as the focus to present their individual perspectives on today and their (hopefully) shared vision for the future. An African American female junior faculty member, an African American female Ph.D. student, and a European American male tenured professor compare perspectives and visions.

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From a very unlikely source, *Extraordinary Goj*; by Fred Shoemaker with Pete Shoemaker, comes a short section, "Shades of Meaning:" "When you wear sunglasses the world looks darker. Have you ever had days when you've worn sunglasses so long that you forgot you had them on and started to think that the world was darker than it is? Every culture is like a pair of glasses that colors the way you see the world. If you're not aware of the limitations of your culture -if you don't realize that you have glasses on-then you can see things only in a certain way. Only when you realize how the glasses shape your current point of view is it possible for you to develop a new point of view."

Using a point-counterpoint-counterpoint approach, the presenters, an African American female, Ph.D., untenured faculty member; an African American female, Ph.D. student and Diversity Manager for the University; and a European American male, tenured professor, compare their perspectives about their faith-based PWI's progress in developing a diverse campus.

One member describes the current progress by saying, "My PWI has recognized the value of diversity and accepted the responsibility of creating a blueprint for the campus community to attain. It is our number one Operational Goal." Another states, "Although we have an active diversity program, it is too often not at the table where critical decisions about the University are made. There are no consequences for people who do not attend the program's activities. There have been few references to diversity from the senior administrators." The other says, "The University's Diversity Plan has a number of goals and objectives, based upon measurable criteria. A problem with measurable criteria is with what they measure; we can quantify things like an 'Increase in percent of culturally diverse students from 5% to 10% of FTE enrollment, , but should numbers alone be the measure? Increased numbers don't guarantee increased acceptance. One of the Plan's action steps, 'Encourage faculty to have diverse students share their cultures in all classes,' might actually foster an environment supportive of stereotyping, suggesting that the perspective of one individual is representative of an entire group."

The discussion will examine how "success" is defined by three points of view. With respect to moving toward the future, one says, "I find the pace at which the institution is moving toward accepting and promoting diversity to be excruciatingly slow. I find there are few non-diverse faculty and staff on campus who have an investment in this change or who are themselves the change agent. I find the campus

climate of white privilege is suffocating all else. I find excuses in place of determined efforts of making change occur." Another states, "An organization must be prepared to reexamine itself, plan meaningful structural change (which includes appropriate power sharing), recognize and enforce expectations, and be open to different life paradigms in order to embrace the multilevel gift of diversity. These activities must be continuous and contiguous with the University's own development. In other words, diversity cannot be ancillary but essential to the University's existence." The third person suggests, "I like to fantasize a time when the University doesn't need a diversity plan; I hope I'm still here when/if that happens. We need to respect and accept each other because it's the right thing to do, not because it's an objective in a plan or the 'politically correct' thing to do. Actions speak louder than words, or measurable criteria."

Given their individual backgrounds and positions within the University, it is not surprising the presenters might have different interpretive lenses about the University's Diversity Plan and its promise for the future. From their differences and commonalities, the presenters will explore how they may represent the microcosm of the University with regard to diversity. Each will present her or his individual perspectives, first on where their PWI is today and then where they hope to see it in the future. Through these presentations, they hope to identify the manifest and latent struggles with regard to diversity and its implications for organizational change.

Presenters

Beverly A. Davis, Ph.D., LCSW is Assistant Professor of social work at Marywood University. She received her doctorate from Bryn Mawr College School of Social Work. Dr. Davis has spent over thirty years as a social work practitioner, administrator and educator. Regardless of her position, she has always been interested in America's interface with its black citizenry. As a social worker, issues of equitable resources, privilege and power have always been significant prisms for informing her work. Child and family welfare and social work practice are her major research interests.

Lia Richards-Palmiter, LCSW is Diversity Manager, adjunct faculty member in the School of Social Work and the Department of Education, and a Ph.D. student in Human Development, specializing in Social Work, at Marywood University. She received her MSW degree from University of Denver. Previously, she served in a variety of capacities in agencies in Pennsylvania, Indiana, South Dakota, New York, Washington, DC, Minnesota, and Maryland.

Lloyd L. Lyter, Ph.D., LSW is Professor and Director, School of Social Work, Marywood University. He teaches in the MSW and Ph.D. programs. He received his doctorate in Social Work from Rutgers University. Dr. Lyter has over twenty-five years clinical, administrative, and consultation experience in social work, mental health, and chemical dependence programs, primarily in urban settings. He regularly presents at state, regional, national, and international conferences. His specific areas of interest and expertise are chemical dependence, ethics, psychopathology, and *HN/AIDS*.