Maximizing Impact: Purposefully Incorporating Diversity Efforts Within

Postsecondary System-wide and Institutional Strategic Plans

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DEDICATION

We are oftentimes fortunate to have people that come into our lives whom we consider to be heroes. While I never had the privilege of meeting one of this nation's premiere Civil Rights pioneers, Dr. Maxine Smith, I am humbled to have the opportunity to be a part of her namesake program that is devoted to the professional development and personal enrichment of young men and women who aspire to continue her legacy by excelling as exemplary leaders and educators in the field of higher education. Thank you to the University of Memphis' administration for the opportunity to represent the institution in such a distinct manner by participating in this program. A special acknowledgment goes to my predecessors at the UofM who held the fellowship before me and provided invaluable insight and guidance. They are all tremendous role models. I am grateful to the entire TBR system administration for their unyielding support of the program and willingness to share their knowledge. Lastly, I am most thankful to have Dr. Wendy Thompson to serve as my mentor. She has been an inspiration for me and has helped renewed my enthusiasm for diversity work in higher education. THANK YOU ALL!

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Abstract

Postsecondary institutions are increasingly becoming more diverse. To ensure that the campus culture is appreciative of such diversity, many institutions are including language in policies and implementing programs that demonstrate the institutions commitment to diversity (Williams & Clowney, 2007). One such means for communicating institutional commitment to diversity is through the strategic plan. Serving as the basis for what the institutional priorities are and what initiatives get funded, the strategic plan can reflect the institution's true commitment to diversity by purposefully incorporating plans for diversity throughout the document. This project sought to understand what was already being done in regards to diversity and strategic planning at both the systems and individual institution level so that information can be relayed about what works and has a greater impact, and therefore should be considered when developing a strategic plan that gives attention and appreciation to diversity. Findings suggest that although institutions are including diversity initiatives in their strategic plans, there needs to be more advanced attention to diversity within the strategic plan.

Introduction

Many postsecondary institutions are increasingly becoming more diverse as demographic trends within the United States shows an increase in minority populations (Smith, 2006). It is projected that by the year 2050, minority group members will constitute approximately 47% of the total U.S. population (Passel & Cohn, 2008). This is in sharp contrast to the 24% representation minority groups had in 1990 (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Much of the demographic shift can be attributed to new immigration patterns. For example, 80% of the immigrating populations into the U.S. are from Latin America and Asian countries (Szelényi & Chang, 2002). A changing population demographic means greater diversity within the college study body. To ensure that the campus culture is appreciative of such diversity, many institutions are including language in policies and implementing programs that demonstrate the institutions commitment to diversity (Williams & Clowney, 2007).

One such means for communicating institutional commitment to diversity is through the strategic plan. Serving as the basis for what the institutional priorities are and what initiatives get funded, the strategic plan can reflect the institution's true commitment to diversity by purposefully incorporating plans for diversity throughout the document. This paper will provide systems of higher education and institutions with examples of how, and to what extent, diversity is already being incorporated into strategic plans so that we may have a greater understanding as to what works and should be considered when developing a strategic plan that gives attention and appreciation to diversity.

Diversity in Higher Education and Factors Contributing to Its Importance

Providing a definition for diversity can take on many forms. Williams (2013) offers the following common ideologies on diversity that are used in higher education:

- Equity perspective outcomes based amongst underrepresented groups (ex. Blacks)
- Economic perspective diversity is seen as a concept associated with economic background and class
- Racialized perspective refers to diversity in terms of race and ethnicity
- Centric perspective diversity is attuned to a particular cultural group
- Universal perspective broader definition for diversity and acceptance of all groups
- Reverse discrimination perspective broadly defined definition with many dimensions of difference
- Colorblind perspective diversity is not acknowledged as an idea nor has importance or significance (p. 105).

While diversity can take on many definitions, for the purposes of this paper, diversity will be broadly defined and can represent multiple aspects of human differences (race, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc).

Worth noting about defining diversity within an institution, it is imperative that the organization itself provides a definition that represents the diversity within that particular institution. This can be achieved through active dialogue and the inclusion of a representative body in the decision making on such issues. A reason it may be necessary, if not a good idea, to engage the institutional community on a suitable definition for diversity is to ensure the language adopted truly speaks to forms of diversity represented and to include those forms of diversity not often considered such as intellectual diversity.

In the higher education sector, diversity has been influenced as a result of several factors; two being the legal and political landscape. As recently as July of 2014, the U.S. Supreme ruled on an affirmative action case involving higher education where the University of Texas' use of racial preferences in admission decisions was upheld in *Fisher v. University of Texas*. Although the use of racial preferences was previously deemed appropriate in the 2003 University of Michigan's *Grutter v. Bollinger* decision, the Texas ruling is subject to appeal in the lower court for lack of clarity or focus on intended goals, thus, ensuring the debate over college affirmative action practices will continue (Somin, 2014). The recent ruling on affirmative action is preceded by similar cases brought before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Hopwood v. Texas* in 1996 and *The University of California v. Bakke* in 1978 (Somin, 2014).

The quest for diversity within higher education does not go without merit. Inevitable demographic changes to our nation's general population has implications for colleges in that we are likely to, in the near future, see a substantial increase in student diversity. Couple that with the fact that the American workforce is changing to the point that ultimately, the kinds of jobs that will be created in what is described as an emerging knowledge-based economy workplace will warrant some type of postsecondary education or advanced training (Florida, 2003). Evolving social dynamics gives rise to the need for increased postsecondary access and completion.

Historically, postsecondary institutions have had a key role in shaping and training tomorrow's workforce. Part of that training has included attention to good citizenship and the need for college graduates to have an expanded outlook about things and a more broadened perspective. In addition, many students from historically underserved and underprivileged groups have looked to postsecondary institutions as a means for accessing greater opportunity. Therein lays the importance of diversity. If colleges are seen as stewards of human capital by playing a key role in curbing inequality by opening doors to expanded opportunities that will eventually lead to better employment and a better life, then these same institutions need to make sure they are able to respond to the vast needs of its constituents who are themselves becoming increasingly diverse.

Picca and Feagin (2007) noted a growth in college freshmen who are classified as students of color. This increase in student diversity gives rise for the need of college campuses to be inclusive and provide sources of support as retention and degree completion for some minority groups remains low when compared to the majority. For example, when it comes to educational attainment for Blacks and Hispanics, only 12.7% of Blacks and 9.6% of Hispanics have a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). As a result of these low attainment facts, increased attention has focused on efforts to position colleges to better service the increasingly diverse student population. While efforts by postsecondary institutions to address diversity is certainly not new, some suggest that in order for true diversity reforms to take shape there must be an institution-wide effort across the campus as a whole to effectively address diversity (Smith, 1989; Hurtado, Milem, & Clayton-Pedersen, 1999).

Smith (2009) presents a framework derived from both historical and current trends within higher education for addressing diversity. According to Smith (2009), factors in (1) access and success of underrepresented student populations: (2) campus climate and intergroup relations: (3) education and scholarship: and (4) institutional viability and vitality all represent ways in which diversity is typically addressed. Such efforts "provide a way of understanding what institutional capacity for diversity might mean and what it might look like" (Smith, 2009, p. 64). For institutions more advanced in their diversity efforts, a popular way of conveying a commitment to diversity has been to have a diversity strategic plan that includes "specific designation of accountability, budget and infrastructure, assessment, channels for collective campus input, and

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concrete objectives and time lines" (Chun & Evans, 2009, p. 49). Such a plan can serve as an influential means for implementing diversity as a major priority.

Strategically Planning for Diversity

The landscape in higher education has been one of change and dwindling resources, especially since the last recession of 2008. With a strategic plan, navigating these changes can position the institution for success through thoughtful planning and deliberate focus (Delprino, 2013). A good strategic plan will serve as a guide to the future for the institution (Calareso, 2013). To facilitate success in its implementation, strategic planning should encompass several factors that include but are not limited (1) institutional-wide responsibility with a central command structure, (2) goals and objectives for institutional sub-units should align with the institution's central mission, (3) a representative body of the institution is included within the planning committee composition and duties distributed accordingly, (4) ways of measuring effectiveness needs to be developed and is accessible for reporting and tracking, (5) data driven decision making is embedded within the institutional culture (Nwosu & Koller, 2014).

Not only can a good strategic plan position an institution for the future, it can also serve as a focal point for priorities that are important to the institution such as diversity initiatives (Kezar & Eckel, 2005; Williams, 2013). The strategic diversity plan has been a primary tool for moving the diversity agenda to the forefront of institutional priorities (Williams, 2013). When examining how diversity is considered within an organization, there are some traditional models for implementing diversity that are commonly featured. These models include: (1) Affirmative action/equity model that works to reduce overt forms of discrimination and spur changes in demographic representation; (2) Multicultural model that seeks to culturally align services, programs, initiatives, and offices; (3) Academic diversity model where diversity is defined as an

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essential environmental condition for providing high quality learning experiences (Williams & Clowney, 2007).

Most diversity plans today includes a "diversity definition, rationale, goals, recommended actions, assignments of responsibility, timelines, accountability processes, and a budget" (Williams, 2013, p. 306). Williams (2013) categorizes diversity plan implementation into three distinct groups. The first group is the *Integrated Diversity Plan* concept where diversity goals are embedded with the broader institutional strategic plan. This is a common concept adopted by most postsecondary institutions as diversity can simply be incorporated into the institutional strategic plan whereby feedback and updates are included within the broader campus strategic initiatives (Williams, 2013). The downside is that there is the likelihood that diversity could be overlooked as an actual strategic priority because other goals within the plan could imply they are attentive to diversity. Hence, diversity as a standalone initiative could go unrecognized and unfunded. The second group, Centralized Diversity Plan, diversity is symbolically featured throughout the strategic plan and communicated as an institutional priority. This type of concept also presents diversity as an intentional focus within the strategic plan, thereby warranting the necessary resources for implementation. Also, diversity is more likely to be tailored to the institution, thus, enabling more in-depth analyses and targeted strategies. As with the previous concept, caution is warranted with the concept as there is the potential to underfund diversity initiatives and relegate tasks to only a few committed diversity champions (Williams, 2013). The third group, Decentralized Diversity Plan, takes its cue from the central overarching framework and strategic diversity goals, but in addition allows for subunits within the institution to take ownership with the development and implementation of

their own plans. Although it can be a challenge integrating the various plans, a more targeted approach to diversity can be addressed within the lower levels of the institution.

Most diversity plans tend to take on a common format (Williams, 2013). The plan will normally lead off with a definition for diversity which is followed by a rationale for the plan. Goals and recommended actions are then stated, where you will oftentimes see alongside those goals a person or unit/office that will be responsible for carrying out that goal and action. A timeline for completion is then presented as is an accountability process. Perhaps most importantly, a budget is then offered for meeting the established goals within the plan.

Typically, common language is used and presented throughout the diversity plan. Some diversity plans will speak to diversity issues and the campus climate. Caution should be given that by simply mentioning diversity within the description of the campus climate or for other descriptive purposes, this does not mean diversity is adequately covered. There must be a willingness to be intentional about the use of diversity within the plan and make diversity a true priority by establishing goals for diversity. By purposefully including diversity initiatives within the plan and offering measurable outcomes, the institution is demonstrating a true commitment to diversity as opposed to taking on a passive approach to diversity planning. Another popular tool for addressing diversity is to establish numerical goals related to diversity within the student body, as well as faculty and staff composition. These goals are notable; however, they should not be seen as the only kind of diversity initiative needed for diversity planning. Other forms of diversity language that is often included within diversity plans are references to training and hiring, as well as programming.

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Project Description and Process for Collecting Data

This project set out to understand how postsecondary systems and individual institutions maximize impact and incorporate diversity within a strategic plan. To understand what is already being done in regards to diversity and strategic planning, a data base of strategic and diversity plans accessed from system/institutional websites and organized alphabetically by state was compiled into an excel spreadsheet. Selected postsecondary systems and institutions were determined by purposeful identifying those institutions that demonstrated or were recognized for having good practices for diversity, random selection by state and institutional type.

For each selected institution, a link to their strategic plan and accompanying/pertinent diversity materials was included in the spreadsheet for examination. Then, each strategic plan was examined by institutional type (system, 4-year, 2-year) for how diversity was incorporated, used, mentioned, and or treated. A total of 113 systems and institutions were examined for this project (see Appendix A). This included 36 two-year colleges, 56 four-year colleges, and 21 higher education systems. Data was then ascertained for purposes of offering a glimpse into already used practices by postsecondary systems/institutions on strategic planning for diversity. By examining current practices at selected systems/institutions that demonstrate a commitment to diversity, information can then be relayed about what works and has a greater impact and therefore should be considered when developing a strategic plan that gives attention and appreciation to diversity.

A Glimpse at Some Strategic and Diversity Plans

In examining the strategic plans for postsecondary systems and institutions, I was able to identify within the document where the institution was attentive to diversity within the strategic plan (SP) and/or diversity plan (DP. While some institutions had no mentioning of diversity,

many had diversity reflected in numerous ways. For example, some institution had reflected in

the strategic plan as a means for meeting numerical goals as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1

Numerical Goals Focused

Auburn University- AL:	(SP) attract, support, retain a talented and diverse faculty, staff & students (strategic plan priority 2013-2018) (DP) Strategic Diversity Plan Progress Report
Kentucky Community and Technical College System:	 (SP). Cultivate diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion. –Stated Performance Measure: Student Diversity Percent of minority students compared to percent minority population: Current: 110.0% 2016 Target: 106.7% Performance Measure: Employee Diversity Percent of minority employees compared to percent minority population: Current: 59.2% 2015 Target: 100% Performance Measure: Persistence Rate – Diversity Percent of fall/summer first-time credential-seeking minority students who have earned a credential, transferred to a four-year institution, or are still enrolled at the end of three years: Current: 41.9% 2015 Target: 54.3%
Penn State University:	(SP). Maintain access in representation (students, faculty)

The inclusion of diversity was also viewed in global terms which could be seen institutional strategic plans (see Table 2).

Table 2

Global Perspective

Mesa	(SP) global preparation emphasis (DP) Diversity Infusion Program to assist
<u>Community</u>	faculty infuse diversity into curriculum
College- AZ:	
Arkansas State	(SP) Increase our diversity and expand our globalization (institutional priority
University- AR:	and goal)
Mid-South	(SP) <i>global</i> awareness, an appreciation for diversity (college purposes)
Community-	
<u>AR:</u>	
University of	(SP) Internationalization and diversity <i>Enhance educational excellence by</i>
<u>Iowa:</u>	expanding domestic and international diversity and by bringing the world to
	Iowa and taking Iowa to the world. Strengthen recruitment and retention of
	talented underrepresented domestic minority students and international students and scholars; Infuse international and multicultural perspectives in
	our institutional missions; Expand the proportion of students who study
	abroad; Expand the University's global reach through active partnerships
	with institutions abroad.

Some institutions and systems could be considered advanced in their strategic planning for

diversity. This was certainly seen in the following institutions featured in Table 3.

Table 3

Advanced Strategic Diversity Priorities Identified

University of Wisconsin- Madison:	campus climate survey administered, goals and measures, excellent resource site for diversity
City College of San Francisco:	(SP) (community college) Strategic Priorities and Major Objective identified (#D.) Diversity and Inclusiveness (Strategic Plan 2011-2016)
San Diego City College:	(SP) Institutional priorities – Equity, Inclusiveness, DiversityStrengthen and support an inclusive and diverse campus culture which enhances student, faculty, and staff success at City College and in a global community. **budget development and resource chart included***
California Community College System:	(SP) Strategic GoalCollege Awareness and Access: Increase awareness of college as a viable option and enhance access to higher education for growing populations(A1.) Early Awareness of College as a Viable Option (A2.) Removing Barriers to Access and Student Success (A3.) Innovative Programs and Outreach for Growing Populations (A4.) Multiple Delivery Methods (A5.) Institutional Capacity for Diversity
Colorado State University:	(SP) Strategic Plan Area 5: Diversity (CSU Strategic Plan 2006-2015)
<u>University of</u> <u>Colorado</u> <u>System:</u>	(DP). Diversity Policy, Reaffirming Board's commitment to diversity, diversity definition , principles for developing campus diversity plans.

Because no plan can truly be effective without some means for measuring success, it was

refreshing to see diversity represented with identifiable outcomes and benchmarks included (see

Table 4).

Table 4

Identifiable Outcomes and Benchmarks Included

Florida State University:	(DP). Outcomes outlined in separate diversity plan
Long Beach City College:	(SP) measurable objectives examples
Purdue University:	(SP) Strategies, includes benchmarks with real-time progress/completion, outcomes
Kansas State University:	(SP). Action and Outcomes (what we plan to do)
Jefferson College	(SP). Community Collaboration—good example for aim/objective/strategies/indicators
(Montana):	
University of Georgia:	(DP). Separate detailed Diversity plan
Southern Illinois	(SP) Goal: Diversity & Inclusiveness – Celebrate Our Commitment to Diversity
University-Carbondale:	Communent to Diversity

Some institutions did include language within the strategic plan on the campus culture and

climate (see Table 5).

Table 5

Speaks to Campus Culture:

University of	(SP) Goal #6 Enhance our role as an inclusive place of collaboration for people of all identities Further diversify the campus's ideas and people
Kentucky:	and intentionally facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding .
Towson	(SP) A model for campus diversity Towson University will further
	strengthen its commitment to diversity and continue to provide a safe,
University:	inclusive, welcoming and peaceful community respectful to all. Towson will
	continue as a recognized national model for diversity and closing the
	achievement gap. Our institutional strategies will expand and continue to
	provide a forum for campus dialogue and action.
Middlesex	(SP). We will drive innovation, enrich community and broaden the
	learning experience for all by fulfilling our shared responsibility for

Community	<i>diversity</i> through expanded activities that promote a broader understanding
	and appreciation for diversity and recognize the importance of globalization.
College (Mass):	We will improve policies and practices to recruit, support and retain a more
	diverse student body and workforce. Together, students, faculty, and staff
	will create a working and learning environment that values diversity in all its
	forms as the essential element inspiring improvement and innovation. We
	will focus on research, pedagogies, and initiatives that assist in identifying
	and closing achievement gaps for diverse student populations and effectively
	support student success for all.

Discussion

In evaluating the strategic plans for those institutions selected for this project, most plans took on the traditional format of including the purpose, areas that needed addressing, structure, and resources. For reasons known only to those involved in the strategic planning process at that particular institution, diversity was represented in a broad range of ways that included a focus on the numerical goals (enrollment and retention) to attention paid being towards the climate and culture of the institution.

Because the kinds of institutions represented varied by region, institutional type, mission, and by other distinct features, it is only natural that diversity would be viewed and treated differently. Perhaps, for the diversity conscious, one should be relieved that diversity was, after all, included into something as important as an institutional strategic plan. Then again, is it just enough to mention diversity within the strategic plan. What good is a simple reference to diversity if there is no "meat on the bone" to borrow a popular cliché. In other words, mentioning diversity was not the goal of this project. The goal was to see how institutions and systems were purposefully using diversity within their strategic plans to communicate its importance. A simple mentioning does nothing to instill long term commitment to diversity even

though it is in the strategic plan. Without purpose and without stated outcomes and measurements, diversity language, despite all good intentions, can linger and eventually be set aside for other priorities. Only when diversity is purposefully included into a strategic plan can true diversity strategic planning take shape. A purposeful diversity strategic plan will include stated diversity goals or priorities for the institution, have broad constituent support, include means for measuring progress, and have well thought identifiable outcomes. While some institutions demonstrated excellence in purposefully incorporating diversity into their strategic plans, others did not. This does not in any way mean there is a lack of commitment to diversity at that institution. It may only suggest that they are at a different stage for handling diversity or they are addressing as they find it necessary and unique to their particular institution. In any event, it is impossible to know all the facts and considerations that went into the planning process for the strategic plan.

Conclusion

Academic diversity is important to quality within higher education in several ways. If the goal of higher education is to shape minds and provide students with a greater understanding of a world that is increasingly diverse and growing more connected, then engaging these students in issues related to diversity through scholarship is essential. It is also important that in order to maintain institutional viability is an increasingly diverse society, diversity must be represented at all levels.

On senior leadership, Williams (2013) stresses that "if diversity is to become a core institutional value, it will be because leaders are committed to high-caliber diversity planning and implementation" (p. 309). This entails communicating to the campus community the

importance of diversity, establishing the necessary structure and incentives to promote diversity, establish goals and hold people accountable (Williams, 2013). Although diversity is everyone's responsibility within the institution, it is the leader of the institution who has the true ability to lead diversity efforts. In order to adequately address diversity within postsecondary institutions, the leader of that institution, the president, must possess the "courage, commitment, and determination of the chief executive officer who practices self-accountability and holds other unit leaders to the same level of accountability" (Michael, 2006, p. 23). College presidents are instrumental for advancing the diversity agenda because they possess the authority and can hold people accountable within the institution (Birnbaum, 1992). If the strategic plan is going to at all be an effective tool within the institution for addressing diversity, there needs to be assurances that the strategic plan purposefully includes diversity initiatives. The type of assurances that can only come from a president.

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Appendix A:

List of Systems/Institutions in Sample

Systems:	Four-year Institutions:	Two-year Institutions:
University of Alabama	University of Alabama-	Mesa Community College (AZ)
Arizona Board of Regents	Tuscaloosa	Mid-south Community (AR)
California Community College	Auburn University	College of San Francisco
System	Arkansas State University	Los Angeles City College
Colorado State University	University of California,	Long Beach City College
System	Berkeley	Sacramento City College
University of Colorado System	San Diego State University	San Diego City College
State University System of	Colorado State University	Community College of Denver
Florida	University of Connecticut	Palm Beach College
University System of Georgia	University of Florida	Miami Dade College
University of Hawaii System	Florida State University	Georgia Piedmont Technical
University of Illinois System	University of Georgia	College
Indiana University System	Georgia Tech University	Georgia Perimeter College
Iowa Board of Regents	University of Hawaii-Manoa	City College of Chicago
Kansas Board of Regents	University of Illinois-Urbana	Des Moines Area Community
University of Maryland System	Champaign	College
University of Missouri System	Southern Illinois University-	Kansas City Kansas Community
University of Nebraska System	Carbondale	College
University of North Carolina	Purdue University	Elizabethtown Community &
System	University of Iowa	Technical College

Penn State University System	Iowa State University	Southcentral KY Community &
University of Tennessee System	University of Kansas	Technical College
University of Texas System	Kansas State University	Howard Community College
University of West Virginia	University of Kentucky	(MD)
University of Wisconsin System	Louisiana State University	Prince George's Community
	University of Maryland-College	College (MD)
	Park	Middlesex Community College
	Towson University	(MA)
	Univ. of Mass-Amherst	Grand Rapids Community
	Boston College	College (MI)
	University of Michigan	Hinds Community College (MS)
	University of Minnesota	Jefferson College (MO)
	University of Missouri,	College of Southern Nevada
	Columbia	Mesalands Community College
	University of Missouri, Kansas	(NM)
	City	Wake Tech Community College
	Rutgers University	(NC)
	University of New Mexico	Rhodes State College (OH)
	SUNY-Albany	Harrisburg Area Community
	City University of New York	College (PA)
	University of North Carolina	Southwest Tennessee
	Chapel Hill	Community College
	North Carolina State University	Nashville State Community
	Ohio State University	College
	Ohio University	

University of Oklahoma	Dallas Community College
Oklahoma State University	Austin Community College
University of Oregon	Northern Virginia Community
Oregon State University	College
Portland State University	Tidewater Community College
Penn State University	J. Sargent Reynolds Community
Temple University	College
University of South Carolina	
Clemson University	
University of Tennessee-	
Knoxville	
University of Texas-Austin	
Texas A&M University	
University of Utah	
University of Virginia	
Virginia Tech	
Virginia Commonwealth	
University	
University of Washington	
Washington State University	
University of Wisconsin-	
Madison	