

STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY

Approved on February 23, 1994

Purpose

Quality and diversity have come to be profoundly connected in pursuing goals that are explicit in the mission statements of colleges and universities themselves: goals of expanding knowledge, educating capable citizens, and serving public needs. The 1988 Standards incorporated issues of diversity and the following statement was developed in 1994 to guide institutions in thoughtful engagement of diversity as they prepared self studies. The Commission has reaffirmed the role that diversity plays in the 2000 Standards.

A Definition of Diversity

The word “diversity” has been used frequently in discussions of higher education policy in the last 70 years. It has been used to refer to the great variety of American institutions of higher education—their varying missions, pedagogies, and constituencies. It also has been used to refer to the enrollment of students from various regions of the United States and nations of the world. Beginning in the decade of the 1960s, diversity was used to describe students from historically underrepresented ethnic groups, most of whom were the first in their families to attend college. Shortly thereafter, diversity was applied not only to the student body of an institution, but also to the faculty, administration and board of trustees. The impact and meaning of diversity, however, were still focused upon numerical ethnic profiles, and had not reached issues of student life, curriculum or pedagogy.

As is the case with many other important concepts (e.g., innovation, quality, fairness), diversity is difficult, if not impossible, to define in words that are fully satisfactory. However, it is useful to think of diversity in higher education as having three vital and related dimensions: 1) representation; 2) the nature of campus community; and 3) the impact of group membership on both individual development and the content of academic scholarship and study.

1. Representation. Diversity concerns representation of different groups in the various constituencies of a college or university—its student body, faculty, staff and governing board. Concerns about representation are closely linked to the challenge of achieving educational equity, in terms of the matriculation and graduation of persons from those ethnic groups in the United States that have been historically underrepresented in colleges and universities.*

Given the rapidly changing composition of the population in this region, race and ethnicity are major factors in this discussion of group representation. Other aspects of diversity deserve careful consideration as well, including socioeconomic class, gender, age, religious belief, sexual orientation and disability. Each of these aspects of diversity has been addressed in the self studies conducted by some accredited institutions in this region. In selecting various aspects of diversity for study, institutions have been influenced by the nature of their missions, the nature of their student bodies and the requirements of law (particularly with regard to disability and gender).

* The Commission follows the dictionary definition of “ethnic” as “characteristic of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.”

In thinking about diversity on campus it is important to stress that representation is not merely a matter of numbers, but also concerns how individuals participate in the life of a college or university. The Commission recommends the distinction between diversity and affirmative action drawn by the Diversity Planning Council of the University of California, Davis:

- ☞ “Affirmative action is retrospective in that it is designed to rectify the effects of past discrimination. Diversity, on the other hand, is prospective. It looks forward to the creation of an environment that supports the aspirations of all persons....”
- ☞ “Affirmative action excludes certain groups from consideration under its provisions. For example, it excludes white males except those who are disabled or who are Vietnam era veterans. Diversity includes all groups that are part of the working or living environment....”
- ☞ “Affirmative action is quantitative in that it emphasizes the numerical representation of women and persons of color in the work force. Diversity views affirmative action efforts to increase the number of persons of color and women as necessary but not sufficient to create the changes in the environment that will enhance the chances of success for those who gained access through affirmative action efforts....” (*Building a Diverse Campus*, UC Davis, p. 9, 1991).

2. Community on Campus. A second dimension of diversity concerns the character of the academic community that emerges through the interaction of people of different backgrounds and points of view. An effective academic community calls for respect and cooperation among the various groups represented within the institution. One important goal is the strengthening of collegiality that, in turn, encourages vigorous debate and the examination of competing ideas. Such collegiality becomes impossible where there is domination of members of one group by members of another or the systematic neglect of the perspectives and aspirations of the members of any group on campus.

During the course of discussion of this statement, conflicting positions were expressed with regard to how the issue of sexual orientation should be addressed. Commission Standards state that “religious institutions have the right to select students and faculty on the basis of adherence to religious beliefs.”

There is an extremely important consensus among accredited institutions in this region that all institutions are obligated to adhere to Commission Standards on respect of persons, including policies against harassment, and to provide due process procedures to resolve individual grievances. Whatever an institution’s prohibitions may be regarding the behavior of its members, these must not be accompanied by institutional actions that express animosity or disrespect for persons for reasons of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, age, religious belief, sexual orientation or disability.

3. Group Membership and Identification. A third dimension of diversity concerns the extent to which group differences and affiliations should be recognized and affirmed by colleges and universities. It can be said of each of us, “In some ways you are like everyone else, in other ways you are like some, and in some ways you are like no other.” We are accustomed to thinking of ourselves as part of the human race (“like everyone else”) and as unique persons (“like no other”). Dilemmas arise with respect to group membership (“like some”) and whether the recognition of group membership contributes to academic and community-building goals.

Every person is simultaneously a member of many groups, and these group memberships have different saliency with respect to various functions carried out by academic institutions. For example, a student may begin her day by attending early Mass. For this purpose, her religious identification is crucial. She may then visit the financial aid office where socioeconomic class and age are relevant. In her history class her Vietnamese heritage may well affect her perspective on the matters under discussion and how she serves as a resource for her fellow students. Later in the day, as a member of the College task force responding to the Americans with Disabilities Act, her reliance upon a wheel chair is the group identification of most importance. And, finally, as she returns to her living group, her gender has helped

determine where she lives and with whom. This person is a unique human being. But important aspects of her uniqueness are shaped by her simultaneous membership in many groups. A campus that recognizes these groups, and seeks to serve the needs of each of them, is not negating the uniqueness of this student or the shared humanity of all, but rather, is striving to enhance and build upon some of the group memberships that shape a student's life.

Identification with groups, including ethnic identification, is certainly nothing new on American college campuses. But what is new is the number of groups now pressing for recognition and their proportions within the student bodies of most institutions. In particular, the proportion of students of color has now grown to the point that they represent the majority of students in the public elementary and secondary schools of our region and on many of our college campuses. The negotiation of new relationships among individuals and groups is underway, and these changes produce a good deal of the controversy that accompanies diversity. Such changes are often awkward and sometimes difficult. But these changes also bring new intellectual challenges and can contribute greatly to educational quality by offering a more profound understanding of ourselves and our world and an education of greater relevance to participants in a multicultural society.

Educational Quality and Diversity

Discussions of quality in higher education are often dominated by measures such as student scores on examinations taken at college entrance (the SAT or the ACT), scores on the Graduate Record Examination or examinations for entrance into professional schools, the proportion of applicants refused admission, endowment per student, or the reputation of faculty members in individual disciplines. As measures of the quality of teaching and learning, especially at the undergraduate level, these measures are plainly inadequate. When the meaning of educational quality is examined at a deeper level, the connections between quality and diversity become clearly important:

- ☞ A quality education introduces students to the richness of the intellectual world and broadens the range of scientific and cultural topics on which students can exercise discernment, logic, and balanced judgment. Many colleges and universities have found that these purposes are advanced by curricula that examine more fully the philosophies, values, perspectives, history and achievements of the various cultures of the world and of the United States. In extending the curriculum, these efforts have not replaced study of Western and European values, but rather can connect with and extend beyond these traditions. Such efforts have had substantial effects on the content and methodology of political science, literature, philosophy, art, sociology and history and of certain professional fields such as law, medicine, and business.
- ☞ A quality education helps students acquire the habit of critical analysis of data, assumptions and argument. It is therefore of educational value when students, through classroom instruction, study, and interaction with students and faculty of diverse backgrounds learn to evaluate differing points of view. Immersion in an environment of diverse and competing ideas is important to the development of independent thought.
- ☞ A quality education prepares a student to grasp and respond constructively to persons, ideas, situations and challenges novel to his or her experience. In most college and university mission statements these purposes are connected with the importance of higher education in equipping students for the responsibilities of life after graduation. Today's students will live in a society, and quite likely in a locality, of many ethnic and cultural traditions. They will live in a world of highly interdependent national economies. This world will call for the ability to understand and work with people of other backgrounds. Diversity and educational quality are thus connected in accomplishing, in today's terms, the task of preparing students for the worlds of work and civic participation.

- ☞ One of the contributions of a quality education is greater awareness of the vicissitudes of the individual life, including one's own. Higher education can promote an understanding that people can succeed under adverse conditions. Diversity is of special value here. For example, a college has enhanced the future of its graduates if its students come to know disabled persons who are participating, contributing members of the campus community.
- ☞ Participating in a quality academic program enriches faculty as well as students. In a diverse academic community faculty are called upon, in their teaching, to be aware of the differing experiences and perspectives of students and their varying interests and learning styles. In responding, faculty also learn.

The colleges and universities accredited by the Commission have enormous assets when using diversity to enhance quality in these ways. Among these assets are:

- ☞ The demographic diversity of the region
- ☞ Their traditions of scholarship that commit them to the extension of knowledge
- ☞ Their tradition of cosmopolitanism—the tradition that educated people are citizens of the world, and not only of nations, classes, and ethnic groups
- ☞ Their traditions of free inquiry

On this final point we are mindful that some claim that a focus on diversity brings with it an intimidating environment on campus that discourages individuals from freely expressing their ideas within the very broad boundaries set by judicial interpretation of the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. As the foregoing discussion of diversity and quality would suggest, the Commission firmly rejects curtailment of free expression and inquiry. The bedrock of education in a democratic society is free and open discussion. Indeed, one sign of a healthy institution is the thoughtfulness of its internal disagreements and the extent to which all segments of the institution feel free to participate in its debates.

Expectations for Institutional Review and Presentation

The Commission expects that a climate of respect for a diversity of backgrounds, ideas, and perspectives is fostered on each campus and that issues of diversity are appropriately engaged. Under Standard 1, Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives, Criterion 1.5 states, “Consistent with its purposes and character, the institution demonstrates an appropriate response to the increasing diversity in society through its policies, its educational and co-curricular programs, and its administrative and organizational practices.” The 1994 Statement on Diversity raises the following points respecting diversity:

1. *Institutional mission and purpose should be reexamined.* Governing boards have an especially important role in this regard. As students, faculty and staff within institutions become more diverse, there is an even greater need to focus on common purposes and to identify core values. For example, Occidental College has identified this set of values to which it is committed: honesty, integrity, promise keeping, pursuit of excellence, pursuit of truth, caring, compassion, and respect for others. The reexamination of institutional purpose, which should be at the heart of every self study, also implies a sober assessment of conflicting goals. As an example, how might an institution balance its desire to diversify its student body by providing more financial aid for low-income students with the objective of increasing faculty salaries or providing more academic support services to all students on campus?

2. *Institutions should seek and achieve diversity within their student bodies, faculty, administrative staff, and governing boards.* In many cases colleges and universities choose, at their own initiative, to compare their composition to regional or state populations or to the United States as a whole. In other instances, the reference group is the particular constituency, often religious in nature, that the institution has pledged to serve. In applying its Standards, the Commission respects the institution's own view of its constituency, based upon its unique mission. For example, a single-sex institution or a college that requires adherence to a particular religious faith as a requirement for admission need not give up those requirements in order to increase its diversity. Each institution can, however, analyze the diversity present in the constituency it chooses to serve and actively seek to reflect that diversity in its membership.
3. *Each institution will work toward "appreciation of diversity" as an outcome of undergraduate instruction, and consider all forms of diversity as they affect the educational process.* Colleges are diverse in many ways (e.g., the various academic disciplines and fields of professional study as well as the diversity of the college community in terms of age, political belief, socioeconomic class, religious faith, interest in the arts and athletics, regional and national background). How can the various forms of diversity be understood, appreciated, and valued in the curriculum?

A desirable objective is that all students learn from and about each other. As the Association of American Colleges declared in its 1985 report, "Integrity in the College Curriculum":

"All study is intended to break down narrow certainties and provincial vision.... In a sense, we are all from the provinces, including New Yorkers and Bostonians, whose view of the world can be as circumscribed as that of native Alaskans who have never left their village.... At this point in history colleges are not being asked to produce village squires but citizens of a shrinking world and a changing America."

Faculty of each institution have primary responsibility to rise to this challenge as they plan curricula, design courses, and teach and advise students. Each institution is free to pursue these goals as it sees fit. Institutions have chosen a variety of means, including the integration of the study of diversity into existing courses under the sponsorship of existing disciplinary departments, the development of courses that stress the comparative study of different cultures, and the creation of women's studies programs and ethnic studies departments.

4. *In addressing the need for a co-curricular environment that fosters the intellectual and personal development of students, the variety of students already enrolled at the institution should be addressed.* In particular, we recommend steps to achieve a better understanding of the characteristics, interests, aspirations and learning needs of all segments of the student population. As institutions address problems faced by students from historically underrepresented groups and women in terms of classroom learning, support from faculty, the availability of academic support services or the quality of residential life, they often find that the appropriate responses benefit all students. We have in mind here programs of collaborative learning that have served to increase student success in introductory calculus classes and residential programs that have successfully enhanced cross-cultural understanding and student retention by involving a critical mass of students from at least two different ethnic groups.
5. *Institutions should assess the strength and weaknesses of efforts to make diversity integral to its plans for institutional improvement.* What are the next steps to be taken? Whose cooperation and effort is needed to make those steps effective? How will the institution assess its diversity efforts over time? Some of the answers come from retention statistics and other quantitative data. It may be helpful to look at comparable data over time and examine trends in individual schools and departments as well as for the campus as a whole. Of equal importance is probing beneath the numbers to illuminate individual perceptions and patterns of interaction among the members of various groups. The Commission urges institutions to conduct systematic assessments of

how different students, faculty and staff view their experiences on campus (often referred to as studies of “campus climate”). These assessment tasks are complex and difficult. For example, expressions of disappointment that an institution does not yet meet goals regarding diversity may be more the product of forward progress which raises expectations rather than the result of a lack of commitment. Questionnaires and small group meetings of students, staff and faculty from different backgrounds can bring such experiences and perceptions to the surface and can serve as the source of creative suggestions. One important result of such discussions is likely to be the healthy questioning of stereotypes about what people think and a high degree of interest in improving human communication and understanding within the institution. In this regard, institutions may want to review the reports of diversity committees of various institutions throughout the region. In addition, the Commission sponsored the creation of *Dialogues for Diversity*, with the assistance of The James Irvine Foundation. This new book is a resource for campuses wishing to organize campus dialogues about diversity issues. This book is part of the American Council on Education Series on Higher Education.

The fundamental challenge is to create a culture on campus where the wisdom and will to build trust among people and groups is widely distributed and opportunities for enhancing diversity and community are encouraged and supported. There is no expectation that within the richness of our institutional variety that there will be a uniform response. Nevertheless, we all have the same challenge—to perform well the special role of higher education in effectively realizing the human potential of all of our citizens, a goal critical for students, faculty, staff and for the common good of our society.