

**Synergy and Synchronization: The Impact of a Diversity Center on the
Implementation of College Initiatives**

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Abstract

Synergy and Synchronization: The Impact of a Diversity Center on the Implementation of College Initiatives

As colleges and universities in the United States scramble to address the need for comprehensive and constructive diversity initiatives, the reality of constrained human and monetary resources surfaces. Duplication and redundancy strain remaining resources and lack of visible outcomes frustrate administrators. Coordination and monitoring are missing elements in many otherwise well-intended proposals and programs.

The College of Education in one Nebraska university faced this conundrum in the mid-1990s. Diversity was identified as one of three major threads that would lead the development of a new teacher education program. Once established as a priority, administrators and faculty members explored options available to ensure that diversity would not be lost in the tasks to follow. It was decided to create a *Diversity Center*, a quasi-committee composed of faculty across the departments, key staff personnel, and multicultural education specialists across campus. The first meetings were held in 1995 with a focus on preparing the unit for an up-coming NCATE visit.

Over the last seven years, this group has become a standing committee within the college and has diligently worked to coordinate, supervise, monitor, and lead diversity initiatives both college and university wide. Nearly \$2 million has been received through federal, state, and private grants to support the activities of this coordinating group. The Diversity Center's leadership has been crucial to the strong presence of multicultural education concepts within the newly implemented teacher education program at this institution, the creation of important outreach programs to K-12 schools in the state, and the success of recruitment and retention initiatives within the college and across the university.

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As colleges and universities in the United States scramble to address the need for comprehensive and constructive diversity initiatives, the reality of constrained human and monetary resources surfaces. Levels of commitment vary greatly from one office, one department, and one college to another. Duplication and redundancy strain remaining resources and lack of visible outcomes frustrate administrators. Most agree that coordination and monitoring are missing elements in otherwise well-intended proposals and programs. How can this maze be managed?

The College of Education at one Nebraska university faced this conundrum in the mid-1990s. Diversity was identified as one of three major threads that would lead the development of a new teacher education program. Once established as a priority, administrators and faculty members explored options available to ensure that diversity would not be lost in the tasks to follow. It was decided to create a *Diversity Center*, a quasi-committee composed of faculty across the departments, key staff personnel, and multicultural education specialists across campus. The first meetings were held in 1995 with a focus on preparing the unit for an up-coming NCATE visit.

. Over the last seven years, this group has become a standing committee within the college and has diligently worked to coordinate, supervise, monitor,

and lead diversity initiatives within the college, university, community and region. The Diversity Center's leadership has been crucial to the strong presence of multicultural education concepts within the newly implemented teacher education program at this institution, the creation of important outreach programs to K-12 schools in the state, and the success of recruitment and retention initiatives within the college and across the university system. Over \$2 million has been sought and received through federal, state, and private grants to support the activities of this coordinating group.

Goals of this Committee include

- Working with department faculty to insure all program curricula address multiculturalism and diversity issues.
- Recommending, implementing, and evaluating Recruitment and retention efforts for diverse students and diverse faculty.
- Recommending, delivering and evaluating professional development for faculty on diversity.
- Recommending and developing resources to enhance diversity plans and policies.

College Impact

While this committee is drawn from and supported by the College of Education within the university's structure, members serve in many capacities across the campus, in the community, and throughout the region. Their participation at these levels has been one of leadership in terms of diversity initiatives. Therefore, it is often difficult to separate accomplishments by level.

Within the college, the Diversity Center has provided extensive in-service training for all faculty, enhancing their attitudes, knowledge and skills related to diversity and multicultural education. In addition, the Center developed a curriculum resource guide and provided consultation to facilitate the integration of a multicultural philosophy throughout the renewed undergraduate teacher education program. Grant funding provided the means to hire a college-based Director of Recruitment and Diversity to promote the recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color.

Progress towards goals and objectives within the realm of diversity development is very difficult to measure. However, the design for faculty training is illustrative of the inherent structure of most Diversity Center initiatives. Research and practice support the concept that personal diversity development is a continuous process. Efforts to provide short, one-shot interventions have shown little evidence of long standing change. For that reason, the training of College of Education faculty was designed to allow for processing, reflection, and implementation—suggested components of systemic change. Sessions were held on a monthly basis over two or three semesters.

University Impact

Diversity Center members were intentionally placed on campus-wide committees to advance diversity initiatives within those units. In particular, members have been involved with the establishment of an ethnic studies program, the infusion of diversity curriculum in the first-year experience program, and the development of student services personnel regarding diversity and

campus climate. The Center has served as a model for initiatives developed within other colleges and at the administrative level of the campus.

Through Center leadership, a Multicultural Resource Collection has been established in the university library, which can be accessed by students, faculty, community members and K-12 educators across the state. Through grant funds, over \$20,000 of diversity-related resources have been added to the general library collection. A commitment of a percentage of library funding allotted to all individual departments in the College of Education has ensured continued development of this collection.

Community Impact

In the community/region, the Diversity Center has membership on the local Chamber of Commerce Diversity Task Force and has provided training on cultural awareness to this group. Area practitioners received staff development in the area of mental health services for underrepresented groups. Diversity Center members have become valuable training resources for business and service providers in the surrounding community.

There has been a high level of involvement in outreach to area K-12 school districts. Approximately 300 area K-12 educators have received staff development in the areas of diversity and second/language acquisition and instruction. Center-initiated grant funding has provided personnel and resources to provide staff development, resource and curriculum development, and cooperative programs designed to provide access to higher education for area students from underrepresented groups. One such program, funded through

federal grant money provides training and support of practicing teachers in surrounding communities with high concentrations of English as a Second Language learners. Resources and a network of communication among those eight participating school districts have also been funded through this program. In another cooperative program with partner schools. Center members are also providing Spanish-language instruction for elementary students.

Outcomes

As a result of these various initiatives, a strong focus on diversity is infused throughout the renewed undergraduate teacher education curriculum at this university, ensuring that future teachers are prepared to work effectively with diverse students and families in the education setting. These graduates will continue to have access to accumulated resources while they are actively involved in teaching future generations.

Due to support of the Center for personnel devoted to diversity recruitment and retention, enrollment of students of color in the College of Education has increased three-fold, and 13 students from underrepresented groups have been awarded full scholarship support for their undergraduate study. The entire university is drawing members of its student body from previously underserved areas within the state and in surrounding states.

The Diversity Center's Purpose *"to provide for ongoing development of policies, procedures and plans related to diversity issues affecting College of Education curricula, students, faculty, and resources"* has been well served to date. Future efforts must focus on maintaining momentum and re-visiting earlier

initiatives. Diversity development is an on-going process. The presence of a solid, core group of members has been imperative to date. The Diversity Center continues in its mission to support and to encourage multicultural understanding and initiatives within the College of Education, the University system, the surrounding communities, the State and at the National level.