Rethinking Cultural Competence: Key Considerations for Academic Leadership

By Alvin Evans and Edna B. Chun, DM

With the surge of student demonstrations regarding race relations last fall, nearly three-fourths of the demands posted by students at 73 US colleges and universities emphasized the need for new or revised cultural competency or diversity training. The students underscored the need for all campus constituencies, including faculty, administrators, staff, and students, as well as the police to increase their overall cultural competency (Chessman and Wayt 2016).

Clearly, cultural competence is a critical skill needed for college graduates to interact, work, and navigate in a diverse global society. Yet for the most part, colleges and universities have not adopted a systematic, integrated approach to the attainment of cultural competence and diversity learning outcomes in the undergraduate experience. Although the helping professions such as social work, medicine, counseling, and nursing have long recognized the critical nature of cultural competence in working with diverse clienteles, institutions of higher education have struggled with the incorporation of cultural competence as an integral part of the undergraduate curriculum and co-curriculum.

Why has this been the case? The multiplicity of definitions and overlap among similar terms such as multicultural competence and intercultural competence have caused significant confusion. To some, cultural competence is viewed as primarily connected with study abroad programs and international education. Through the medium of celebratory events such as festivals and potlucks, cultural competence is frequently stripped of the uncomfortable connotations associated with inequality, social stratification, and privilege. Furthermore, faculty focused on disciplinary knowledge sometimes view cultural competence as simply a form of politically correct jargon unrelated to critical learning outcomes.

In our new book, *Rethinking Cultural Competence in Higher Education: An Ecological Framework for Student Development* (2016), we suggest *diversity competence*, an alternative term, to encompass the range of educational experiences on campus and to emphasize the attributes that comprise diversity, whether related to cultural differences or not. Further, we examine predominant fallacies that accompany the notion of culture, given the fluidity, complexity, and contextual nature of social identities.

In exploring the ways in which colleges and universities have addressed diversity competence, we draw on the observations of recent college graduates now working as professionals or continuing graduate studies. Most graduates reported that their experiences with diversity were purely accidental, either through elective courses, encounters with diverse individuals on campus, or work as resident advisors. A few reported the significant influence of faculty mentors. Yet in almost all cases, the colleges or universities the students attended did not provide a well-coordinated, intentional, and holistic approach to diversity learning across the multiple domains of the undergraduate experience.

Take, for example, the observations of Martin, who now serves as a clinical professor in a western doctoral research university. Martin viewed cultural competence as simply another vague term similar to diversity and registered his disappointment with the alienation he felt as an African American graduate student at a Midwestern research university. As Martin explains, "Cultural competency is the child of diversity. So, before, we had never talked, then here

The Advantages of an Annual Review of Departmental Data

By Eric Daffron, PhD

Many academic departments now engage in annual cycles of assessment of student learning as well as departmental services. Best practices in higher education, reinforced by regional accrediting bodies, among others, dictate that only when departments assess student achievement and departmental initiatives, integrate those assessments meaningfully, and link them to resource allocation (as applicable) can they truly move toward continuous improvement. Yet can those assessments alone, important as they are, answer all the questions that departmental faculty and administrators pose about students, faculty, resources, and services? As a supplement to those assessment data, a set of pre-established, mission-centered metrics provides a barometer of the department's health and vitality while informing timely decision making in a rapidly changing environment both inside and outside academia.

An annual departmental data is the collection, review, and use of data about the department's students, faculty, programs, and operations. Depending on current priorities (institutional, divisional, college, and departmental), data points may vary but could include the following examples:
- student retention rates
- alumni employment rates,
- number of faculty grant submissions,
- student credit-hour production, and
- student participation rates in departmental programs.

The departmental data review entails as many as five annual steps:
- a collection of data provided by Institutional Research or by the department (depending on the data source);
- a review of the data by the entire department;
- a written response to the data about future decisions, initiatives, and interventions to improve departmental services, programs, and outcomes;
- a review by the dean, provost, and other academic leaders with attention to cross department, cross college, and even cross division synergies, opportunities, and challenges; and
- an archive of data reviews for that year and across time.

An annual data review has four interrelated advantages:
- An annual data review allows the department to respond quickly to changing environmental conditions.
- An annual data review permits the department to monitor data over time.
- An annual data review integrates with planning and assessment documents. Departmental data can join assessment data to create a fuller picture of the department, its programs, and its students.
- An annual data review serves as a vehicle for regular departmental conversations.

How can an annual data review be effective not burdensome?

Departmental faculty and administrators are inundated with so many requests and duties that the thought of another report can be daunting. Three basic principles can alleviate the perceived burden of a data review:
- Limit the data. Departments should review only data that align with planning priorities.

we go with cultural competency, come the twin flavor of the century with diversity, but we are still at same place: we are still at a place that we have no idea what that means."

Martin was severely disappointed by the campus racial climate and absence of diversity awareness at a predominantly white research university. As he explains, "It challenged my sense of identity because once again I was reminded of what the world thought of me, you know those historical perceptions of race. . . . I found [my]self fighting for four more years to prove [myself]; it sort of made me bitter. I would say it strengthened me in terms of my resolve, but I wouldn't say it was like a positive strategy. But I have seen some of my peers—[either] they rebelled . . . or some of them dropped out. But the others who made it, it was like building up of a callous on the hand; that's what it did for me."

What, then, are some of the concrete steps that academic leaders can take to address the need for diversity competence in the undergraduate experience? One of the areas of highest priority is the development of the undergraduate curriculum to address diversity competence. Even at institutions that have been at the forefront of diversity change, curricular change is still in its nascent phase. Consider, for example, the longstanding and bitter battle over a diversity requirement in the undergraduate curriculum at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). In the view of UCLA political science professor Thomas Schwartz, "Diversity is code for a certain set of politically correct or left leaning attitudes on college campuses. I don't think students should be required to take an ideologically slanted or a politically slanted course."

Nonetheless, as we share in this study, campuses that have successfully engaged in diversity curricular change have benefitted from the following approaches:

- High-level executive support and sponsorship
- Alignment with institutional mission and diversity leadership at all levels
- Implementation of an effective assessment process such as diversity curricular mapping
- Building faculty support within the larger colleges, such as the college of liberal arts
- Creating faculty-led committees for collaborative work
- Developing effective rubrics for gauging cultural or diversity competence
- Supportive infrastructure such as faculty teaching and learning centers with tools and resources for curricular transformation
- Connection to external stakeholders in terms of workforce development needs

A leading-edge example of how cultural competence is translated into concrete learning outcomes is the rubric developed by faculty at the University of Maryland as part of the general education requirement. This rubric was reviewed through faculty surveys and by focus groups and was finalized by a group of campus stakeholders. It focuses on the skills needed for negotiating cultural differences, enhancing cognitive awareness, fostering enhanced communication, and changing one's mindset to achieve integrative understanding.

Given the formative period of the undergraduate years, a cohesive and intentional approach to diversity competency will help prepare students to interact, work, and thrive in a global, diverse workforce. Take, for example, how Paul, a white male entrepreneur, describes his most powerful experience of diversity at a Midwestern research university and the subsequent impact on his career:

"For the sake of being honest— probably comprehending what white privilege is [was most significant]. Not that I could ever truly understand white privilege, but just that I know that it exists and I intentionally, consciously, and obviously unconsciously take advantage of it as often as possible. I suppose that I take solace knowing that if I can take advantage of the systems we have in place in our country to better and improve my own situation as much as possible at this stage in my life, then perhaps I will have the opportunity and power to help others down the road. Call me selfish and unjust if you want."

Our book shares concrete recommendations and best practices for strengthening diversity development in the curriculum and co-curriculum and for establishing learning outcomes that support diversity competence. Paul's observations reinforce the urgent need for campus leadership to create an integrated campus ecosystem for diversity that allows students to explore their own perspectives and identities, understand systems of privilege, see beyond stereotypes and socially reinforced differences, and work collaboratively toward mutually reinforcing goals.

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Accountability in Its Many Forms: Opportunities for Academic Department Chairs

By N. Douglas Lees, PhD

Calls for accountability in higher education have been heard for a number of years, with some of the first salvos being concerned with student learning and continual faculty productivity, the latter of which led to many institutions approving new policies on post-tenure review. There seemed to be a disconnect between what was perceived externally and higher education's inability to clearly articulate what it does, how faculty spend their time, how we measure ourselves, and what impact we have on the lives of our students.

Performance metrics of our colleges and universities are of interest to external constituents beyond merely those with accreditation or political affiliations. Prospective students and their families, employers, graduate and professional schools, ranking organizations, and granting agencies all have interests in data on institutional effectiveness. Beyond external consumers, other important internal constituents may be impacted by institutional performance data. Current students, administration, and faculty (who are renowned for not knowing what their office neighbors are producing, never mind how the

faculty productivity), it seems obvious that department chairs are in the best position to address these issues. Other administrators can set the expectations for improvement, but they are too far removed from individual faculty work to effect changes across several departments that have different cultures that direct their activities. Chairs should keep in mind that the work they face is not just to appease outside critics who have already been forceful in bringing about change, but also to create a better external image and reputation for the unit, increasing productivity and enhancing their personal leadership profiles.

While the institutional research office will gather collective data, the chair may have to request a breakout at the departmental level to see how the department fares relative to others at the institutional level as well as to counterparts at other institutions. To get at issues around student retention, chairs may have to gather additional information. Campus-level offices can likely help with quantitative data, but soft data obtained through surveys may not be available. Should the situation require survey data, chairs are encouraged to consult with a survey expert to make certain the data obtained are valid.

Armed with the relevant data, the chair is now ready to lead changes that will improve the department's position. While a number of examples of weaknesses and solutions might be offered, in the interest of space, I will present two —faculty workloads and undergraduate student success.

Faculty workloads were a major issue about 20 years ago and will likely surface again because this topic has financial implications for higher

> ## "When the data on performance are collected, there will inevitably be elements that will show weakness or shortcomings and the need for improvement."

Today, questions continue, but they are now focused on retention, graduation rates, the cost of higher education, and the value of the degrees in some of our disciplines. In this era, legislatures, accreditation bodies, state boards, and trustees have been very active. In many states, these external groups have established state funding formulae based on degrees conferred (with some being more valuable than others), reduced the number of hours required for a baccalaureate degree (except in cases where accreditation would be jeopardized), mandated common curricula across institutions to facilitate course transferability, established programs where high school credits fulfill college requirements, and capped or frozen tuition to produce more degrees more quickly and at a lower cost to meet the present and future needs of our economy.

institution is performing), would also benefit from select performance data. Thus, our performance on key indicators related to student success metrics and other aspects of higher education (research productivity, engagement, and faculty effort) is critical not only for addressing the concerns of governing bodies but also for our marketing efforts and reputations as well as the morale of current employees.

The title of this piece indicates that accountability initiatives will create opportunities for chairs. This is based on the fact that when the data on performance are collected, there will inevitably be elements that will show weakness or shortcomings and the need for improvement. When one thinks about the issues underlying accountability (e.g., student retention, timely graduation, and aspects of

education. Some institutions have a formula-based workload allocation based on the percentage of time spent on teaching (T), research (R), and service (S; e.g., 40/40/20), while others assign semester teaching loads as measured in 3 credit course equivalents (e.g., 1 + 1, 2 + 3, 4 + 4), with varying expectations for R and S. Here, those at the low end would have major expectations in R. A look at the performance data may show that some faculty members with a 1 + 1 load or a 40% effort are not (sufficiently) R productive. That is, they are not producing research products (books, exhibitions, performances, journal articles, etc.) at a rate proportional to the time they have been given. Some may not be producing at all. What seems to happen is that initial workload assignments are assumed to be permanent and, as a result, a few faculty members continue with light overall workloads.

To remedy this, the chair might convene the research faculty and ask them to define what it means to be *research active* and *research productive*. The former might be new faculty who are getting started and those who have changed their research direction/area and are retooling. Those who do not meet the standard for being research productive would be provided with time to meet expectations, but there would be an understanding that if this is not accomplished, there would be a ramp-up of additional assignments in T and/or S to bring the total effort up to 100 percent. This can be formatively accomplished by the chair during the annual review process by providing the opportunity for the faculty member to take on meaningful and substantive (i.e., eligible for merit consideration) new assignments in teaching or engagement (negotiated or differential workloads).

Undergraduate student success is a complex issue with several outcomes that can be affected by a large number of factors. Here the focus will be on low retention and graduation rates, although root causes and potential solutions may be shared with other aspects of department health. Retention is defined as the fall-to-fall continuation of first-time, full-time freshmen. The retention of students beyond that time period is referred to as persistence. Both of these impact graduation rates, but low rates in each will have different causes for the most part.

Because retention is a first-year measure, one needs to look at major courses that students take in their first year. Examining the course GPAs and grade distributions of the retention cohort may provide some insight into the issue when the retention rate is low. Consultation with the instructors is essential because they have insight into the segments of the course that seem most problematic. It should be noted that students take classes from more than one department each semester, and, if they are first-year courses, the chair should inquire as to whether the home departments are analyzing the performance of the retention cohort in them. In any event, if the courses in the majors show negative data on student success, they should be examined for flaws. If the conclusion is that students need more support to facilitate their learning, some models being used have shown to be effective in increasing retention. Some of these models include developing a summer bridge program or themed learning communities, using undergraduate peer mentors as recitation leaders, and designing specialized programs targeted to at-risk populations (Atkinson and Lees 2015). Chairs would have to take a leadership role in seeing that the inquiries are made and the changes enacted, but this is a large venture that would involve the course instructors and the curriculum committee at the very least.

Improved retention will mean increased graduation rates, but there are other reasons students do not earn degrees in a timely fashion. Reviewing the data on persistence, one may find that the department is losing students at the junior level. Surveys from students who remain and who have left as well as course GPAs may reveal numerous possible culprits: inconsistent advising; a lack of co-curricular experiences that are common in competing programs elsewhere; key courses not being available at the best times for the students; a bottleneck course where a single faculty member has unreasonable expectations for student performance, making retakes far too common; or a stale curriculum. These are all correctable problems.

Many of the issues outlined here have real dollar costs associated with them. On the institutional side, students not retained do not return to pay additional tuition, and every student who is not retained or who leaves before graduation means less performance-based funding for the institution. On the student side, course completion delays due to poor advising, course nonavailability, or steep expectations translate into increased tuition costs and extra semesters, both of which increase student debt. Chairs who recognize these outcomes as avoidable negatives can act to satisfy external critics while improving the experience for their students and elevating their reputations as well as those of their departments and institutions.

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One Change That Increases Student Persistence, Retention, and Satisfaction

by Thomas J. Tobin, PhD, MSLS, PMP, MOT

The president and the provost were talking about their biggest challenge: retention. Between students' freshman and sophomore years, the college was losing almost 40 percent of its students. For many students, the causes were well documented: time and money. The college's "average student" was no longer an eighteen-year-old white male coming straight from high school and taking a full load of five courses while living on campus. These days, the typical student was a 32-year-old Latina mother of two with a job at a big-box retail store taking one or two courses at a time. That described most students at the college: nontraditional learners had become the majority, a group not tied to the campus or able to focus on study full time: both danger signs for retention problems. If work or family demands became too pressing, adult learners dropped out of college temporarily or permanently.

"If only there were a way," mused the provost, "that we and our faculty members could help more students find more time for studying and engagement with their courses." The college didn't have a lot of online courses, and most of the college's students lived within 20 miles of campus anyway. The president thought for a while, then asked the office manager to print some data from their most recent student outreach surveys. When the office manager brought the printouts, the president put forward a radical idea. "It says here that 86 percent of our students have smart phones (Chen et al. 2015), and that the numbers are even higher for students near or below the poverty line."

The provost put his hand to his chin and added, "That makes sense. If it's a choice between a computer for the family and a phone, the phone wins. It does more, and it's less of an up-front investment."

"Where are you going with your idea?" the president asked. "How can we help our students overcome the clock? Their problems are less time management and more just not having enough hours in the day. What if we could give them back twenty minutes here and forty minutes there?"

The provost laughed. "If only there were such a magic time-adding process, we'd adopt it in a heartbeat. But there's no such thing."

"Only there is," countered the president. "It's called universal design for learning, or UDL, and it provides learners with access, engagement, and choices about their learning—all from their phones, tablets, and other mobile devices."

If you have heard about UDL, you probably know it as a way to make course materials accessible to students with disabilities. That's the reason higher education hasn't yet tapped its potential as a broad mobile-device outreach strategy: by and large, we're thinking too narrowly and too negatively.

Most faculty members and institutional staffers have had the experience of working on requests for accommodations from students with disabilities. However, most people have not received training or done research about UDL (Lombardi and Murray 2011), and are unlikely to know specifics about it. This sets us up to color our emotional response to UDL with the valence we associate with accommodations. For neuropsychologists, the term "valence" has to do with how we add emotional coloring to "events, objects, and situations" that "may possess positive or negative valence; that is,

they may possess intrinsic attractiveness or aversiveness" (Frijda 1986, 207). In plain English, this means that our emotions affect how we perceive the events that we experience.

Researchers have been asking college and university faculty members for decades about how they respond to having students with learning differences in their courses. We all know how faculty members should respond when students come to them with forms for accommodating learning differences. Of course, their response should be, "Sure, I'll set that up. Thank you for letting me know." This, thankfully, is how most people do respond.

But how do faculty members actually feel when presented with accommodation requests? Based on several large research studies (Cook et al. 2009; Murray et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2010; Lombardi and Murray 2011; Murray et al. 2011), the emotional valence associated with accommodations is uniformly negative. In many faculty members' minds, the fact that one must accommodate learners with disabilities brings up feelings of uncertainty about the legitimacy of giving one student different treatment, confusion about where to start or what actions to take, annoyance at having to do extra work, and even anger at the student for asking for a perceived unfair advantage over others in the course.

By reframing UDL away from its narrow application in disability support situations, campus leaders can advocate for adopting simple UDL strategies that allow faculty members to reach out to students on their mobile devices. Think of the single mother who has to put her children to bed but still wants to watch a professor's how-to videos. She turns

the sound off and the captions on, and she finds forty minutes for school work that she would not have had before. The sports team studying on the bus to an away game, the working student studying on the train on the way home from work—everyone benefits from having at least one choice about how they interact with their courses, peers, and faculty members.

UDL, according to its neuroscientist originators at CAST, involves creating multiple ways for learners to be engaged with their learning, multiple ways to represent information, and multiple ways for learners to demonstrate their skills (CAST 2014).

We can simplify this even further by saying that UDL is merely "plus one" thinking: wherever there is an interaction in a course, add one more way to have that interaction. Student persistence, retention, and satisfaction consistently correlate with learners whose courses provide them with choices about how they get information, show their knowledge, and stay engaged with the course (Tobin 2014, 18–20). Faculty members already likely know the points in their courses where learners always:

- bring up the same questions every time the course is offered,
- get things wrong on quizzes and tests, and
- ask for alternative explanations.

Those are the three "pinch points" in each course where offering choices to learners helps increase access and understanding. Where learners always ask questions, create a FAQ and then make an alternative format, like video responses to some of the most common questions. Where learners always get things wrong on tests, create a study guide that takes more than one format: text and audio, for instance. Allow learners to create a traditional three-page essay or turn in a five-minute video report, as long as the same objectives cover both formats. Where learners always want different explanations, provide encouragement to

help them go out and find answers that fit their questions.

The president jotted down a few notes on her legal pad and asked the provost to speak to the faculty senate at its next meeting to get the members' guidance about how to reach out to the college's students on their mobile devices. Although neither of them would use the words "universal design for learning," their vision would be guided by the thought that they were trying to carve time out of already busy student lives, and reduce the need for anyone—disability or not—to have to

ask for special treatment. The provost took some notes, looked at his watch, and realized he was already late for his next appointment. As he hurried off, the president smiled quietly, knowing that UDL would be the faculty's idea, and that she would support it wholeheartedly.

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Universities Prepare for Crisis Communications

By Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti, MS

When your institution faces a crisis, be it a dorm fire or a cyberattack, it is important to be ready to handle not only the event but also the communications and PR challenges that come after. According to a small recent survey by Dick Jones Communications, most colleges and universities feel generally prepared, but the level of preparedness varies by type of crisis.

Overall, the survey found that nearly 70 percent of respondents believe their institution is prepared if a crisis should occur on campus; likewise, over 70 percent have held a crisis drill in the past year, and almost two-thirds have an up-to-date crisis manual in place.

Even more impressive, over 80 percent have plans in place for dealing with the media, including having a trained spokesperson in place. All of these facts point to a high degree of crisis preparation among colleges and universities.

Not surprisingly, colleges and universities "are prepared for things that are more common," says Scott Willyerd, president and managing partner of Dick Jones Communications, like adverse weather, power failures, deaths and injuries, and fires. However, institutions are less prepared for more uncommon events such as terrorism, cybersecurity breaks, shootings, and race-relations events. These events should be of some concern to institutions planning for crises especially as the tenor of the student body changes.

For example, Willyerd notes that the current wave of the Millennial generation is more activist than students

have been in perhaps 40 years. And with race relations coming to the forefront of the national conversation and political discourse becoming more contentious in the face of a national election, Willyerd expects this fall to be "hot" on many campuses.

This is why he is pleased at the level of preparation and self-awareness among those who handle crisis communications and preparedness for colleges and universities. Nearly all of those surveyed handle at least some of their preparation in house, and Willyerd is impressed with "the sophistication level of PR pros" that he encounters. At the same time, he emphasizes the importance of some of the areas upon which institutions also focus. He reiterates that it is very important for institutions to have a media strategy in place to follow in the case of a crisis. He also urges institutions to have an up-to-date crisis manual and to make it "an active, living, breathing document" that can adapt to the changing needs of the institutions. By continuing to refine existing plans, colleges and universities will be in a good position to handle any crisis that comes their way.

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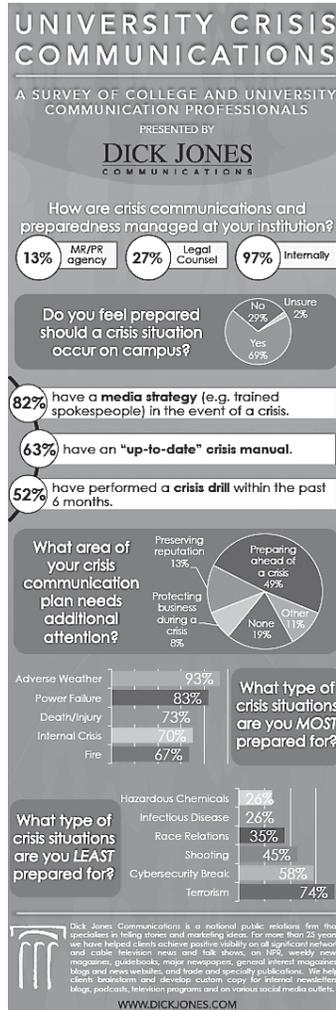
BEST PRACTICES
From Page 2

- Provide the data. An office such as Institutional Research should collect as much of the institutional data as possible and provide them in a standardized format.
- Incorporate the data review into routine departmental business.

The 21st-century university cannot escape the need to make data-informed decisions—and the urgency to make those decisions rapidly. An annual departmental data review should be integrated into a comprehensive institutional effectiveness program. Those data, if reviewed annually and used effectively, can advance departmental decision making.

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