

## ***Making Diversity Count***

A Position Paper by the Committee on Diversity and Cultural Competence

University Faculty Senate -- May 2013

The Strategic Plan for the State University of New York, *The Power of SUNY*, is very clear that “diversity counts” -- this theme is woven throughout all six big ideas. The question that emerges however, is how to make it so. There are many initiatives on campuses around our system; this position paper aims to provide goals and suggestions on how to recognize and incorporate achievements in this area into the faculty review and reward processes. In doing so, faculty who make meaningful and important contributions towards enhancing their academic community’s diversity will be recognized and empowered to continue their efforts, and all of SUNY will benefit.

### Summary:

- Excellence for the 21<sup>st</sup> century implies an education that prepares all students for a diverse society, global interconnectedness, and the rapidly changing work environment.
- The University Faculty Senate can provide the proactive and determined leadership necessary for systemic change by endorsing this document's recommendation: faculty (and staff) reward systems are to be organized to support diversity efforts and foster cultural competence.
- To promote interest in educational diversity a college must demonstrate clear, consistent internal policies and practices designed to facilitate such changes. Serious commitment to building diversity and cultural competencies in faculty, staff, and students, must be planned, annually evaluated to measure the success of the programs, and updated annually or as often as is needed to be aligned with changing campus needs. Through this commitment, diversity may become a part of the fabric of the college community.
- Specifically, the recommended policy changes for consideration by each campus include establishing an Office of Diversity that reports to the campus President or the Executive Governing Body, developing a campus diversity plan central to the Strategic Plan, and mapping and assessing diversity outcomes (e.g., course and degree programs, student life, etc).

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Citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires sound intellectual foundations that prepare students for life in a modern, multicultural society with rapidly changing global interconnections. SUNY must help students acquire the skills and knowledge to evaluate, critique, and re-conceptualize ideas, as they negotiate changes in the creative, ecological, social, technical and political aspects of the human and natural world. Our curricula should challenge students to examine fundamental assumptions about cultural identity and difference, privilege and power, inclusive community and social justice, and the means by which significant knowledge is constructed. The skills acquired through a SUNY education must serve as foundation for continued learning and enable students to overcome barriers of privilege, bias, class, income or ethnic differences. The University Faculty Senate Committee for Diversity and Cultural Competence believes all SUNY campuses can fulfill the Chancellor's goal to make diversity truly count by starting with the faculty.

This paper calls for policy changes in the faculty reward system: We are specifically asking that a demonstrated commitment to diversity be included across the five criteria for faculty evaluation and that diversity be understood as defined by the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: *Diversity can be broadly defined to include all aspects of human difference, including but not limited to, age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression and identity, language heritage, learning style, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, social-economic status, status as a veteran and world-view.* The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion focuses in particular on achieving equal access, meaningful academic and intellectual inclusion in curriculum, research and service, and holistic integration into the academic culture of higher education at all levels for New York State's underrepresented populations and students who are economically disadvantaged. Specifically, the policy changes include the following recommendations for discussion by each campus:

- To establish an Office of Diversity
- To place this permanent position in the President's Cabinet or the Executive Governing Body
- To develop a strategic diversity plan central to the campus' Strategic Plan
- To map and assess diversity outcomes (e.g., course and degree programs, student life, etc.)
- To include diversity across the criteria for faculty and staff evaluation.

Before moving any further, it is important to define diversity as used in this document.

- Structural diversity refers to the numerical and proportional representation of students and faculty from different racial/ethnic/gender groups at each institution; this type of definition does not mean “quotas,” but actually strives to create campus representation of all segments of the population. Diversity will assure that, across the board, the students will be afforded an expanded range of contacts and experiences – the contacts and experiences that will be needed in a marketplace that has become increasingly global and which can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas, and viewpoints.
- A second type of diversity concerns the interactions that the whole campus community has with “difference.” Researchers argue the obvious: that structural diversity is a necessary precursor for diverse interactions to occur (Gurin). Gurin provides evidence that such diversity enhances learning for students. Students who reported higher levels of contact with diverse ideas, pedagogies, and peoples were more likely to show growth in their “active thinking processes” which were represented by increases in complex thinking and social/historical thinking.
- Cross-cultural competence, moreover, was identified as the most critical human resource need created by globalism. Bikson and Law argue that if colleges are to meet the challenges presented by an increasingly global economy, they will have to make changes in areas such as curriculum, extracurricular activities, faculty development, and innovative collaborative ventures with colleges and universities around the world as well as with private industry. Specifically,

Colleges should make better use of the cultural diversity already available in their student bodies and localities to cultivate global awareness and cross-cultural competence.... Colleges should provide faculty with incentives (and, if possible, with resources) to develop new courses or adapt existing courses to address globalism. Faculty currently receives strong signals that the only relevant performance criteria are publication records and teaching evaluations. (qtd. in Miley, p. 14-15)

To establish a compelling interest in educational diversity, then, a college must demonstrate clear, consistent internal policies and practices designed to facilitate such

changes. The educational benefits associated with diversity require active engagement in institutional transformation. The evidence of the educational benefits of diversity cannot be challenged. Research suggests that diversity enhances student growth and development in the cognitive, affective, and interpersonal domains:

This educational benefit is universal in that all students learn from it, not just minority students. [...] Indeed, majority students who have previously lacked significant direct exposure to minorities frequently have the most to gain from interaction with individuals of other races. (Milem)

Twenty first century knowledge requires specific forms of literacy: the ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with others through cross-cultural literacy, to work with new forms of media through technological literacy, to understand language and culture in context through historical literacy, and to analyze, organize and make sense of information through information literacy. Both the global economy and our ethnically diverse society need citizens who understand the languages, traditions, and histories of other cultures as well as their own in order to foster service learning and civic engagement. Finally, real learning goes beyond the classroom. A SUNY education ideally will enable students to explore methods of inquiry and ideas that will give them the tools for ethical decision-making, critical reflection, continued pursuit of knowledge, and the flexibility to work productively in diverse environments and with diverse peoples.

Casual support for diversity programs has no measurable benefit. Intentional and coherent integrated programs must touch all sectors of the campus and make everyone accountable for the new learning required for 21<sup>st</sup> century citizenship. Faculty must engage in developing integrated, interdisciplinary curricula with global learning outcomes which will necessarily require the concurrent construction of methods and measures of assessment for evaluating the deep, relational learning involved. In the area of service recognition, faculty initiatives in curricula and diversity programs should be weighted more favorably in performance evaluations.

Excellence for the 21<sup>st</sup> century implies an education that prepares all students for a diverse society, global interconnectedness, and the rapidly changing work environment. Colleges

should aim to prepare learners who are intentional; that is, learners who understand and participate in the process of learning, who create coherent connections among their courses, and easily negotiate different environments. Intellectual study helps intentional learners connect formal education to work and personal interactions, and social responsibility to knowledge. Intentional learners are able to place themselves in the context of a diverse world, draw on difference and commonality, and produce a deeper experience of community.

In institutions that are intentional about achieving their missions and providing high-quality education to all students, the infrastructure, processes, decisions, resource allocation, and culture will collectively and coherently communicate and advance that mission. According to Robert M. Diamond, “the closer the match between the mission of an institution and the priorities as described in the tenure and promotion system, the more productive the faculty will be in helping the institution reach its goals.”

The Committee has identified interesting precedents for innovative processes for the evaluation of faculty at Colgate University and the University of Nebraska. Colgate University’s firm commitment to the integration of knowledge finds its way into all faculty personnel processes. For example, new faculty hires get written expectations for interdisciplinary work. Third-year review, tenure, and promotion decisions depend, in part, on interdisciplinary contributions. All dossiers must document participation in the interdisciplinary core curriculum, whose director votes on promotion and tenure (Greater Expectations, p. 34). If interdisciplinary work can be a criterion for renewal and ultimately tenure and promotion, so should diversity.

To make diversity count, SUNY’s firm commitment to diversity should be evident in the reward system for college personnel. The ways to accomplish this goal might include adjustment of the criteria for sponsored professorships, reformulation of the processes for discretionary salary increases, or establishing a President’s/Provost’s Award for Diversity, to name just a few. That is to say, mechanisms for the assessing the success of diversity

initiative must be created and, once these goals are articulated, achievements need to meaningfully recognized.

A liberal education for the new century looks beyond the campus to societal and workplace issues with the goal of producing global thinkers. A quality liberal education prepares students for active participation in the private and public sectors, in a diverse democracy, and in an even more diverse global community (Greater Expectations, p. 25). In its very essence, liberal education for the twenty-first century is diverse and inclusive in every way. It seeks out varied perspectives, crosses disciplinary lines, pursues wisdom from multiple cultures, and employs a range of teaching strategies. (p. 27)

*College Learning for the New Global Century*, published through the LEAP (Liberal Education and America's Promise) initiative, spells out the essential aims, learning outcomes, and guiding principles for a twenty-first-century college education. It reports on the promises American society needs to make—and keep—to all who seek a college education and to the society that will depend on our graduates' future leadership capabilities. The LEAP initiative will continue at least to 2015, and it is very likely that many more colleges will endorse its outcomes. To quote from the report:

The essential learning outcomes recommended in *College Learning for the New Global Century* reflect an important emerging consensus—among educators and employers—about the kinds of learning needed for a complex and volatile world. This new consensus reflects a dawning awareness that America's future will depend on an unprecedented determination to develop human talent as broadly and fully as possible:

- In an era when knowledge is the key to the future, all students need the scope and depth of learning that will enable them to understand and navigate the dramatic forces—physical, cultural, economic, technological—that directly affect the quality, character, and perils of the world in which they live.
- In an economy where every industry—from the trades to advanced technology enterprises—is challenged to innovate or be displaced, all students need the kind of intellectual skills and capacities that enable them to get things done in the world, at a high level of effectiveness.

- In a democracy that is diverse, globally engaged, and dependent on citizen responsibility, all students need an informed concern for the larger good because nothing less will renew our fractured and diminished commons.
- In a world of daunting complexity, all students need practice in integrating and applying their learning to challenging questions and real-world problems.
- In a period of relentless change, all students need the kind of education that leads them to ask not just “how do we get this done?” but also “what is most worth doing?”

Democracy, global and intercultural learning, active citizenship, and even the skills and knowledge essential to economic innovation remain low priorities at all levels of the educational system because of regulatory and assessment frameworks that largely ignore these crucial areas of learning. Unfortunately, the report only identifies what we consider the main reason change does not happen quickly in universities: “Faculty reward systems almost invariably emphasize individual rather than collaborative excellence in both scholarship and teaching, which results in systemic disincentives for faculty members to spend their time in the collaborative redesign of undergraduate education.” (p. 47)

The University Faculty Senate has provided the proactive and determined leadership necessary for systemic change by endorsing this document: Campuses should engage in conversations with the objective of organizing reward systems to support diversity efforts and foster cultural competence. This engagement is necessary to support The Strategic Plan for the State University of New York, *The Power of SUNY*, and to make diversity count.

### ***Works Cited***

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