**Stirring the Pot: A Recipe for Diversity**

***Post Deliberation Report***

***Overview***

Presented by Delaney Elling, Emily Moyer, and Siena Salvaggio

With increased representation of different ethnic groups nationally, diversity as a whole has become a prevalent discussion topic. Specifically, diversity is being both implemented and searched for at the university level, for the value of diversity is growing with the changing nation. Inclusion of all racial, financial, and cultural backgrounds is vital to create a safe and accepting environment for all students at college campuses. It is important to indicate that diversity is not easily defined, although today’s society focuses mainly on race and gender. Nonetheless, there are several other aspects of diversity that are often overlooked, especially on college campuses where they try to attain diversity. However, in recent years, colleges have been focused on inclusive diversity, specifically targeting more than just race, as society often does. For instance, Ferris State University uses the term diversity to describe “the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs" (“Diversity and Inclusion Definitions”). The inclusion of students with various backgrounds encourages critical thinking and fosters educational growth, benefiting all students. Diversity is being valued now more than ever. Thus, our efforts to foster an accepting and respectful inclusive environment come from the common goal of improving the academic success of all students. In an effort to reach this inclusive environment for all students on our campus, we hosted a deliberation reaching out to students, government officials, and administration to produce an effective discussion on ways to improve inclusivity at all universities. Entering this deliberation, we assumed unanimous support for improving diversity on college campuses, since research supports the correlation between diversity and academic success. The main goal of this deliberation was to encourage all members of the Penn State community to help foster further diversity. Although diversity is held generally as a common value among universities and workplaces, there is still opposition and limiting factors to achieving inclusive diversity. Colleges devote millions of dollars and resources to strengthen diversity on college campuses, however, these efforts, though evident, often leave people from diverse backgrounds still feeling segregated and isolated. For this reason, we asked for open mindedness and other suggestions in achieving the mission of diversity.

As the deliberation began and stakeholders delineated their purpose in this issue, the general consensus was that creating a combination of programs would foster diversity. There was a unanimous notion that college campuses need to cultivate a new way to improve inclusion on campuses because the success has not been as extreme as one would hope. The first approach that was discussed was to improve financial aid for low income students. This approach is an effort to improve financial diversity among campuses, since economic status strains diversity. An immediate concern of where this aid/scholarship would be provided from was discussed during the deliberation. A consensus was reached that it is important not to take funding from grants or academic scholarships. Rather, a notion was born, aiming for alumni scholarships to be donated in the form of financial aid.

As moderation of the deliberation continued, the members of the audience were asked how university programs could be implemented to increase inclusive diversity on campus. One member of the audience, who works specifically with the subject of diversity at Penn State’s Campus, brought to the floor the idea that clubs specific to different ethnicities and nationalities need to have better advertisement, so that those who are not of the certain group can still feel welcomed to learn, appreciate, and respect the differing cultures. In essence, advertisement would allow those who may not “fit” the club’s title to still come and partake in learning about the club, and the people who may be diverse from the group. This idea of mass media and publication of the events/clubs was generally accepted by the fellow deliberators. For example, a student in the deliberation mentioned she had interest in the Russian club, however, she is not Russian and did not know if she would be allowed. With the clubs having a stronger publication, and mentioning that they are accepting of all, she and her peers would know they are more then welcome to learn about the other cultures by partaking in the clubs’ activities. The group also came to a consensus that a university wide culture fair would benefit all. With the implementation of a culture fair, one is more likely to approach a student group/club that they would not have known about prior. Also, education of other cultures will only enhance the appreciation for the diverse populace of the campus. Overall, the discussion of approach two, University Programs, contributed to new ideas and action on how to foster diversity on college campuses.

Following the understanding and agreements of approach two, the group was posed with discussing how housing could play a role in maintaining successful, inclusive diversity. The design of dormitory buildings was a major talking point during this portion of the deliberation. The group unanimously agreed that dorms with large study rooms/entertainment areas allow for diversity to be recognized, without feeling forced. Some members of the discussion were hesitant to have forced diversified floors, however, all agreed that housing can contribute greatly to one’s diversified experience indirectly. In fact, the group decided that floors must participate together more often. Whether the RA initiates communication, or the New Student Orientation is built around one’s hallmates, all found that more must be done for members of one floor to interact, and in turn diversify their experiences. Overall, housing was a topic which met some hesitation, but overall found agreement in implementing spaces for natural and legitimate diversity.

While there was agreement among the participants, the differentiating opinions on how exactly to solve the issue of diversity is what proved to be controversial. Everyone agreed that in a perfect world there would not only be diversity on college campuses, but also an intermixing of different races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, social classes, physical abilities or attributes, religious or ethical values, national origins, and political beliefs.

References:

“Diversity and Inclusion Definitions." Ferris State University Imagine More. Ferris State University, 2016. Web. 10 Feb. 2017.

***Approach One***

Presented by Evan Toomey and Aaron Gersh

The first approach to increasing diversity and inclusion on campus includes increasing access to information about paying for college and access to financial aid itself. Research has suggested that the financial burdens of college can negatively affect a student’s performance (1). The greater the financial burden, the greater the challenge it is to successfully graduate from a 4-year institution (1). Because of this, low-income students are underrepresented at 4-year universities and often have lower retention rates than those of higher income families (1). Additionally, low-income students must often times must work full or part time to help finance their academic careers. That added time commitment and stress of work puts a strain on their school work, extracurricular involvement, social life, and overall quality of living (1). Essentially, the added stress of paying for college creates less diversity because fewer low-income students end up attending and staying enrolled in 4-year institutions. This stress also reduces the sense of inclusion amongst those who must work to pay for their education (1).

One of the first questions asked of the deliberators was, “what are your opinions on the various methods we proposed in order to raise money for need based scholarships?” These suggestions included shifting away from merit based scholarships and towards need-based ones and, for public institutions, increasing federal and state grants through taxes or changes in budget, and increasing federal aid directly to students. One deliberator mentioned that Brandeis University has already made the switch from merit to solely need-based scholarships and could be the guinea pig for future policies depending on how successful the switch is in increasing diversity. Many of the students seemed much more hesitant to make this switch noting that merit scholarships reward hard-working students. Taking away these merit based scholarships could be seen as unfair to those students who are not minorities. Funding by taxes was barely discussed as it was not popular with the group who instead opted for the following solution.

One student suggested that universities create a program that matches donating alumni to low-income students. The program would be very personal in the sense that the student receiving the scholarship would know the name of the donor and would even write a thank you letter to the donor. This was a well received idea amongst the group for two reasons. First, the personal nature of this scholarship program would show the students that someone believes they are worthy of a college education independent of their economic situation. The group discussed that hopefully this would foster a greater determination to succeed thus, creating a student who is more successful and involved in the community. The second big positive of this program that someone mentioned was that this program avoids the politics of deciding whether merit based scholarships should give way to need-based ones or how the government would raise funds to increase aid. By adding this third revenue source, willing participants will be able to donate their money, and students deserving of merit based scholarships could still receive those awards while the taxpayers, who do not want their taxes raised, will not have to give up anything.

The second solution we touched on was making low-income students more aware of their financial situation. This means informing them about the best loans to take, work-study programs, and overall tuition costs. Almost everyone in the group agreed that it would be smart to provide information and assistance to low-income students who may not be aware of the best ways to avoid debt and to pay for college. This includes further emphasizing the financial impact of every decision they make before even entering college. One person pointed out, however, that maybe it should be the responsibility of the high school and not the university to start this education. They also noted that some high schools are better than others, so it may be difficult to uniformly teach all prospective college students about their financial options.

Many agreed that the problem may not be that universities are not providing these informational services, but instead, that there needs to be better communication between colleges and students, so students can be more aware of the myriad of information that is already being provided by universities about obtaining loans, available scholarships, and different work study programs. In other words, the deliberators found that the university does hold informational sessions about paying for college, but the struggle is communicating that these exist to students. More research should be done on the best way to inform students that universities already hold informational sessions. It was also agreed upon that students often times do not realize they are in financial trouble, or at least the extent of their financial perils, until later in their college career. A potential solution discussed was reaching students early, such as during orientation when their parents will most likely be present, to inform them about the financial information a university provides.

Another point someone brought up was that low-income students often times overload on courses to speed through their major. While at first, this may seem cheaper for low-income students, they end up overwhelming themselves with the workload and have to drop or repeat courses. This costs them more money in the end because they pay for a class they don’t get credit for and then have to pay for the course again in order to graduate. Because of this, universities should launch a campaign where the school is more “in-your-face” about emphasizing the financial loss of dropping courses. This could be done through filling out a module before scheduling classes or even telling instructors to emphasis this when they tell student about deadlines for dropping their course.

References:

1. Engle, Jennifer, and Vincent Tinto. *Moving Beyond Access: College Success For Low-Income, First-Generation Students*. Rep. ERIC document reproduction service no. 504448. The Pell Institute, 2008. Web. 10 Feb. 2017.

***Approach 2***

Presented by Aidan Mattis and Mihir Alve

Lack of diversity on college campuses is an issue that can be addressed in a number of ways, most directly at the university-specific level. Diversity on campus creates an environment in which students of different backgrounds can interact and understand the world around them more easily. Many schools have either a non-diverse student body, be it mostly white or historically black, or a diverse but segregated student body. Potential solutions to this issue could be explored through University led incentives offered to students for engaging in more activities designed to increase diversity and multicultural interaction among students. From admissions to discretionary student funding, the administration of a college can use the carrot and stick method to improve the climate of diversity within a school. Options available range from extra credit offerings, increased funding for cultural organizations, and diversifying admissions standards.

Offering extra credit to students who take part in diversity and culture oriented activities and courses, will allow schools to create an atmosphere in which diversity is encouraged but not forced. The sentiment of organic versus forced diversity kept popping up throughout the deliberation with nearly all the attendees favoring the more organic approach. Students who are interested will be able to both become more immersed, as well as earning some extra boost to their grades. Certain activities, such as culture days, films, social projects, and other small scale activities could be rewarded with an extra percentage point or two on exams or course grades. This would be an easy method of encouraging diversity and providing a small boost as a reward. For students desiring a more immersive, long term experience, one or two credit courses could be offered that aid a student in boosting his or her GPA. This would provide not only a huge opportunity, but also give students a longer experience than just a culture day or activity.

This suggestion is not without its flaws, however. Currently, there are many small initiatives used to encourage diversity, but students often fail to take advantage of such opportunities. Such general lack of interest in diversity activities could cause problems for the extra credit strategy. Students already fail to take advantage of extra credit, so there is doubt they would change even if more opportunities arose. Grade inflation, another potential downside as a result of handing out more extra credit, did not seem to be a major concern for the group, potentially because the group consisted overwhelmingly of students and not faculty. In order to account for the failure of the carrot and stick method, the university could also increase cross-cultural general education requirements for students. One faculty member of Penn State brought up that the current percentage of the International Cultures requirement should be raised to 50% diversity related courses. Another issue that was brought up alongside overhauling the general education requirements was the aspect of making sure that the classes counting for the cross-cultural requirement actually delve into various cultures. At the moment some of the current classes that fulfil the International Cultures requirements do not really offer students a look into different cultures, and the International Cultures designation that Penn State currently uses may need to be updated to reflect these concerns. This would, in effect, make being interested in diversity or at least attending significant diversity courses a graduation requirement.

In keeping with the carrot and stick idea, it was also suggested that universities increase available funding for culture organizations and encourage the hosting of cultural days. Increased available funds would take a considerable amount of the stress of planning an event out of the way for students attempting to do so. With concerns over funding dissolved, students would be free to plan larger and more inclusive events. Ohio University has held a very successful International Street Fair involving students from over 100 countries and offering up an opportunity for students to easily explore various different cultures 1. The idea of holding a similar culture street fair, something that other universities could readily adopt.

In the case of Penn State University, there actually is a full diversity event calendar put together by the cultural center in the HUB-Robeson building, yet according to a faculty member in attendance, it is seldom used and few people are even aware that it exists. Many organizations also have their own web pages, calendars, and facebook groups. A few students at the discussion referenced that they’d joined pages dedicated to multicultural organizations but had seen little to no activity from them. Student run organizations would need to become more involved with their members, and the university could perhaps help by leading a workshop to teach students how to better reach their club constituency.

Modifying admissions standards to better reflect the country’s demographics was another issue that was explored during the deliberation. The idea is to create a more diverse student body that more accurately represents the United States as a whole than Penn State currently does. This idea was not greeted with a lot of enthusiasm by the group as many brought up the legal issues that this approach could run into with respect to Affirmative Action laws. However, one of the faculty members brought up that President Barron was working on a similar plan but instead of reflecting the nation’s demographics, it is focused on mirroring the demographics of Pennsylvania 2. President Barron’s plan would also focus on having a more diverse faculty body, seeing as minorities are not very well represented in the current Penn State Faculty Body. This approach to diversifying the University was greeted with legal concerns and touches upon some of the earlier concerns of organic and forced diversity, but as President Barron’s plan shows, it is not completely improbable and would possibly require careful legal analysis.

Achieving more diversity on college campuses is not something that will happen overnight and encouraging a more wholehearted effort by the student body to engage with diversity is one of the most promising steps that can be taken on behalf of the university. This approach is not without its drawbacks but if successful, it could potentially result in a more diverse and tolerant student body.

References:

1. Johnston, Taylor, Luke Torrance, Meghan Morris, and Georgia Davis. "Street Fair Celebrates the Bond between Domestic and International Students." The Post. N.p., 4 Apr. 2016. Web. 14 Mar. 2017.
2. "Barron Stresses Demographics', Diversity's Importance in Future of Penn State." Penn State University. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Mar. 2017.

***Approach 3***

Presented by Andrew Johnson and Gabrielle Stewart.

University housing is an extremely important aspect of students’ lives as a place for study, sleep, and socialization. However, from both anecdotal experience and broad studies, the capacity for social interaction and relationship building in dormitories is lacking. In the quest for inclusive diversity on college campuses, focusing on creating social living spaces can be a catalyst for change. More interactive atmospheres foster opportunity for cross-cultural interaction. In our discussion, we focused on three main approaches to achieve this goal: implementation of dormitory floor orientation programs, architectural renovations to create social spaces, and engaging students with dormitory discussions and events. All three approaches saw some support and opposition; although, the collective group agreed that each plan of attack could work to some extent. By far, the renovation of dormitories was the most popular and agreed upon option, being supported especially by the students in the room. In addition to students, two women involved in President Barron’s diversity initiative attended the deliberation and brought many important insights to the discussion from their experiences as well as the experiences of their children in college. Overall, many cogent insights were shared, compromise was achieved, and the issue was put into a new perspective for each of the attendees.

To start the conversation, we first approached the issue with dormitory orientation events. Most schools require students to attend some sort of orientation programming anticipating the beginning of their first semester to acclimate them with the university, its policies, and campus life. Our proposal was to focus these orientation programs on the creation of strong relationships between residents in order to foster community and diversity organically in the student body. The first issue raised with this approach was that incoming freshmen have vastly different schedules and would not be able to attend orientation events as complete floor groups. We determined instead that any programming would have to take place once the school year started so that all floormates could be present simultaneously. Another point raised was that these orientations could be focused on one or more complete dormitory buildings instead of floors to foster even wider student interaction. Some reservations presented themselves when the conversation shifted to how cultural diversity could be achieved in individual halls. Many participants felt uncomfortable with the idea of apportioning rooms to members of certain socioeconomic or cultural groups, and wanted to ensure that students would have more of an independent role in choosing their rooms. Emphasis was repeatedly placed on allowing students to get to know one another naturally and not be forced into relationships through excessive icebreaking and activities. As a whole there were very few minor disagreements, and these enumerated amendments to the approach were adopted essentially by all in the conversation.

The discussion then moved to a more long-term approach focused on dormitory structure. When dorms are designed with elements conducive to social interaction, communities are more likely to form organically. It was established that certain factors of a community space are heavily influential in determining its use. More open areas with wide entrances rather than closed doors are far less intimidating for students to enter. This was affirmed by some residents of the GLOBE in Simmons Hall; this floor has spacious lounges and a main lounge/kitchen used frequently due to its comfortable atmosphere. Many groups of students may share such a multi-activity space at the same time, encouraging dialogue between them. This strongly resonated with students residing in East and Pollock Halls agreed with this as many of the work rooms and lounges on their floors are smaller and more restrictive to enter - “like a closet,” according to one student. There was widespread agreement on the value of these open spaces for social interaction; for one GLOBE student it was through studying in the lounges and talking to other students in the same space that he was able to make friends. One drawback of this approach was logistics. Renovating old dorms or building new halls is expensive, and the additional cost of furnishing a dorm for community building would likely be funded by increased tuition. As such, lower-income students could be discouraged from attending, reducing the socioeconomic diversity of the institution. The concept of using dorm design for community growth was met with universal approval, but the group agreed a balance between excessive spending and worthwhile investments for students was necessary.

Another housing-oriented approach was the implementation of living-learning communities. This would entail discussions or events open to every resident of the floor. There were several questions surrounding the specifics of this approach. Many people agreed incentivization would be necessary to motivate residents to participate but wondered if this activity would be mandatory for residence status. If required, involvement in such communities lends more questions. How does the university determine the population of said dorms? One student acknowledged that it is unrealistic to require such a living experience for every student, so how can students be influenced to invest their time and effort in their dorm community? A University employee mentioned the dangers of these structured programs. If too targeted and forced, diversity initiatives can backfire, making students feel uncomfortable. It is especially important for students to be comfortable in their home, so the need for organic interactions was emphasized by this individual. This issue of balance was also covered in the previous sub-approach and became focal to the group’s view of diversity programs in general: too much intervention by the institution is counterproductive and can actually make disconnects between groups worse.

***Summary***

*Presented by Michelle Doherty and Dana Solomon*

Incorporating diversity has become an increasingly prevalent topic on college campuses. Universities have begun to discuss developing a system of inclusion of all racial, financial, and cultural backgrounds in order to create a more well-rounded and accepting environment for students. During the deliberation, we discussed the ways that Penn State could make changes to housing, provide more financial aid to minority groups, and develop more campus activities and events to promote inclusion on campus.

A fairly diverse group of participants attended the deliberation. Among the participants, were students who live on the Globe Floor in Simmons Hall at Penn State, as well as two women from the organization of CORED, which is the Commission on Racial/Ethnic Diversity at the Pennsylvania State University. Among the participants, there was a wide range of both genders and ethnicities. Of the ten participants, five identified as female, four identified as male, and one identified as “non-conforming/gender fluid.” Of the ten participants, six were Caucasian, three were Asian American, and one selected “other,” specifying that he was of the Indian background. This created a diverse group of participants, from which many different opinions were presented.

Throughout the deliberation, there were topics which the audience found common ground on, and other topics that were left without unanimous agreement. Most participants agreed that providing more grant money to low-income and minority students would be great in theory, although raising and putting aside this money may be difficult for some universities. It was suggested that Penn State University could try reaching out to more of its alumni in asking for donations. Several participants also mentioned that simply bringing a more diverse range of students to the University would not be enough. A majority of participants strongly agreed on the importance of making minority students feel more included in campus life once they are already at the university.

During the discussion of renovating housing in order to diversify living areas, one participant mentioned that students should have “organic interactions” with one another. While it was unanimous that this had the potential to be a good idea, some people thought that forcing very different people to live together could be stressful and may cause more problems than it may fix. It was also mentioned that minority students may feel more comfortable being with people who have similar backgrounds to them.

In our survey, we asked participants about actions or ideas that should be taken into account by students and the University. Although their responses varied on several statements, all participants agreed on the following three things:

* *Support of inclusive diversity will, in the long run, enhance our community.*
* *Students should attend university for experiences that will prepare them for life after university, rather than to solely obtain a degree.*
* *The University should create housing more conducive to forming diverse living spaces.*

The post-deliberation surveys brought in various opinions from the audience. The following is a more in-depth analysis of the final opinions of the deliberation participants. There were two instances which generated the greatest range of results across the board. Both of these instances were with regard to the admissions process and how it should play a role in increasing campus diversity.

*It is fair for admissions to accept students simply because they would contribute to a more diverse student body*

* 10% of the participants strongly favored this statement
* 30% of the participants somewhat favored this statement
* 10% of the participants remained neutral
* 30% of the participants were somewhat opposed to this idea
* 20% of the participants strongly opposed this statement

*Admissions should provide financial aid to certain students to enhance campus diversity regardless of their academic skill*

* 1/10 participants strongly agreed
* 2/10 participants somewhat agreed
* 6/10 participants remained neutral
* 1/10 participants were somewhat opposed

All of the audience members believed that a more diverse campus would lead to a better community in the long run. Similarly, all of the participants strongly favored the idea that students should attend university in order to attain a more cultured education, and for the opportunities to interact with a wider range of cultures. With regard to creating housing that is more conducive to forming diverse living spaces, 100% of the participants agreed that reorganizing the housing system would benefit the campus as a whole. Having said this, it was also agreed upon at many points during the discussion, that the cost of renovation may be the core issue preventing a university from implementing such a process.

One question nearly equally divided participants between agreement and disagreement.

*Penn State should enforce mandatory events about inclusion on campus.*

* 40% of the participants somewhat agreed
* 10% of the participants remained neutral
* 50% of the participants somewhat disagreed

Despite this divided array of results, about 50% of the participants who left additional comments desired for more citizens in their community to “break out of their comfort zone and attend a new event.” Creating such mandatory events would help to solve this problem. When asked to explain what they had learned from attending the deliberation, nearly 80% of those who answered, said that they hadn’t thought of housing as a key component of this issue. One participant noted that she used to think of a solution to increasing diversity on campus as “purely [related to] affirmative action, but now [she] realizes that it’s a more dynamic problem.”

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly agree** | **Somewhat agree** | **Neutral** | **Somewhat disagree** | **Strongly disagree** |
| Students tend to surround themselves with students alike, rather than venture out to new cultural communities. | 50% | 50% |  |  |  |
| Support of inclusive diversity will, in the long run, enhance our community. | 100% |  |  |  |  |
| Admissions should provide financial aid to certain students to enhance campus diversity regardless of their academic skill. | 10% | 20% | 60% | 10% |  |
| Penn State should enforce mandatory events about inclusion on campus. |  | 40% | 10% | 50% |  |
| More diverse housing communities would allow students to develop social skills with people of all backgrounds. | 40% | 40% | 10% | 10% |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly agree** | **Somewhat agree** | **Neutral** | **Somewhat disagree** | **Strongly disagree** |
| The University should provide more funding for clubs that encourage diversity. | 40% | 30% | 20% | 10% |  |
| The University should host more events that spread awareness of the diversity on campus. | 40% | 30% | 30% |  |  |
| The University should allot more funding for students in need of financial aid, so that they can attend regardless of socioeconomic status. | 50% | 40% | 10% |  |  |
| The University should create housing more conducive to forming diverse living spaces. | 100% |  |  |  |  |
| Students with exposure to more diverse communities will gain a more global perspective. | 80% | 20% |  |  |  |
| Our campus is currently both very diverse and inclusive. |  | 20% | 30% | 50% |  |
| The University should establish more opportunities for students to create a more diverse campus community. | 40% | 50% | 10% |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Statement** | **Strongly**  **favor** | **Somewhat**  **favor** | **Neutral** | **Somewhat**  **Oppose** | **Strongly**  **Oppose** |
| It is fair for admissions  to accept students  simply because they  would contribute to a  more diverse student  body. | I  10% | I  30% | I  10% | I  30% | I  20% |
| By sharing a common  living area with people  of various backgrounds,  students will become  more globally aware. | I  90% | I  10% |  |  |  |
| Students should attend  university for  experiences that will  prepare them for  life after university,  rather than to solely  obtain a degree. | 100% |  |  |  |  |
| Penn State should  require students to  attend information  sessions that  discuss the importance  of a diverse college  experience. | 30% | 40% | 20% | I  10% |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Yes** | **No** |
| Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum? | 70% | 30% |
| In your forum, did you talk about aspects of the issue you hadn’t considered before? | 70% | 30% |