

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Multicultural Services on Campus: Building Bridges, Re-Visioning Community

edited by Dafina Lazarus Stewart

(USA: ACPA, College Student Educators International, 2011, 298 pages)

Multicultural Services on Campus is a timely book that confronts contemporary issues related to global diversity in higher education. With an increasing number of immigrants and international students arriving each year, there is a growing need to address the varied issues associated with multicultural communities. The book is divided into four parts: history, issues, goals, and recommendations for future actions. The discussions are primarily concerned with the development of multicultural student services on U.S. campuses.

Part 1 traces the legal history of multicultural student services (MSS) that limited access to education and created elite institutions that impacted several different groups. While the U.S. Slave Codes prohibited the education of African Americans, Native Americans were educated in the late 19th century to adopt Euro-American culture, which compelled them to abandon their indigenous identity. Similarly, Mexican Americans were placed in separate schools to learn the English language and American culture and in most cases provided with inferior education. When a Chinese family won the legal right to attend public schools in San Francisco, California supported a “separate but equal” educational system. The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) judicial decision determined that separate was not equal and that practices of educational exclusion touched other groups beyond issues of ethnicity.

Part 2 discusses the MSS that affirm and integrate diversity by engaging race, sexual preferences, and faith differences. An analysis through the lens of Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings, 1995) suggests a continuing need for MSS as long as race remains a defining feature; however, care must be exercised to ensure MSS do not in turn neglect the needs of other student populations. A call has been made to professionals within and beyond MSS to serve the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. Lastly, although MSS cannot solely support students’ spiritual explorations, they can serve as a conduit for interfaith conversations.

Part 3 compares MSS at private liberal arts colleges, public institutions, and community colleges with minority-serving institutions such as black or tribal colleges. Although private liberal arts colleges evince a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, they need to define

diversity more clearly and commit personnel and resources to support MSS. The multicultural educators at public institutions demonstrate a commendable commitment to fostering an educational environment in which underrepresented communities can thrive. However, two-year community colleges were found to vary in their view toward MSS. Given that community college populations are growing, there is a pressing need to explore the ways in which they respond to increasing diversity.

Although tribal colleges have successfully increased the transfer of Native American students to mainstream, four-year institutions, support at the new institutions is critical to ensure a smooth transition. A key challenge in tribal colleges is the need to balance the promotion of culture with that of academic disciplines. Perhaps more than the other institutional types, tribal colleges need the collaborative support of their tribal councils, local communities, and the institutions of transfer (Stein, 2003).

Part 4 appropriately closes the topic with recommendations for stronger MSS, including negotiating purpose; collaborating with student affairs, academic affairs, and the majority of the student body to engage issues of oppression and diversity; providing leaders with multicultural and social justice advocacy; and re-visioning the future of MSS. MSS units must continue to collaborate with related organizations to achieve sustainable institutional renewal by changing culture, structure, mental modes, and webs of exclusion that disenfranchise certain groups. MSS professionals should continue to create opportunities for student engagement and reach out to new entities beyond colour to include sexual orientation, disabilities, and religion in the discussion.

Although collaboration with academic affairs to enhance support for diversity management is important, one needs to evaluate such a partnership with a checklist that includes assessing the institution's structure, campus climate, mission, composition of MSS staff, and classroom collaborations (Kodama and Takesue, 2011).

To ensure the survival of MSS offices, it is proposed that MSS practitioners work with the broader student population—not just the ones who seek their assistance—by reaching out to unexpected supporters, encouraging conversations at a deeper level across differences, and involving faculty and staff members of majority groups. Three paradigms are proposed to develop diversity-change leaders (Palmer, 1989): Paradigm 1, Diversity, appreciates differences but may not engage them; Paradigm 2, Justice, equalizes exchanges of power and control; and Paradigm 3, Pluralism, effects a social structure capable of sustaining engagement across differences for purposes of accomplishing what no individual or group can achieve. Thus, finding a balance between multicultural competence and social justice approaches allows MSS practitioners to combine knowledge, awareness, and advocacy directed at institutional change. The re-visioned approach would then shift practice toward social justice and organizational structures and leadership toward inclusion, justice, and fairness. Through this approach, interpersonal relationships are forged to promote intergroup dialogue and resolutions to the critical issues of our time—including global warming, ethnic conflicts, and economic turmoil.

Overall, the book is well edited and chapters support each other. Each chapter's topic is well framed and discussed. There are two suggestions for future writings on the issue of multicultural student services on campus.

First, although racial/ethnic diversity is related to cultural and religious differences, the issues related to sexual orientation and physical disabilities are common to all societies, irrespective of race and nationality. In light of this distinction, should a common service for sexual orientation and physical abilities be available to all races rather than shouldered by the MSS, which may be burdened with managing cross-cultural issues and needs of international students?

Second, although the book offers valuable insights into the development of diversity management and change leaders, the context seems confined to Western democracies that champion individual rights and freedom of speech. In Eastern societies, even the democratic ones, views may differ. For example, Arab and Muslim nations share a different perspective on sexual orientation, participation of women, and the Jewish race. In some Asian countries, where the government is of a dominant race or faith, national policies promoting “positive discrimination” are common, and entry to higher education is based on race or faith instead of merit. Furthermore, the right to openly practise one’s faith is often denied. On the other hand, there are Asian nations such as Korea and Taiwan that openly embrace all faiths.

It is important that proponents of MSS promote a consistent message worldwide. Western activists have been criticized for attacking soft targets. For example, when Caucasian police personnel suggested that women protect themselves from rapists by wearing less revealing attire, activists demanded an apology or resignation. When a cleric of a middle-Eastern faith said the same, activists remained silent. Such cultures would benefit from the focused efforts of proponents of MSS.

Thus, future writings would benefit from a framework addressing the multicultural needs of higher education students beyond America—one that would shift the emphasis of national leadership to the inclusion, justice, and fairness that the book champions.

Mark Loo, Concordia University College of Alberta

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