Chapter 19

Mentorship in Diversity Leadership in Higher Education: Empowering Emerging and Established Leaders

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to 1) review the need for diversity leadership in higher education, 2) explore the challenges of diversity leaders, 3) specify the need for mentorship in diversity leadership, 4) share the authors’ successful e-mentoring experiences as women faculty of color engaged in diversity leadership, and 5) offer recommendations on how to incorporate technology as a tool for mentorship in diversity leadership in higher education. The term “diversity” can be considered as vast as it is vague. For the purpose of this chapter, diversity refers to the recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color in higher education as well as the incorporation of multiculturalism across disciplines and curricula.

INTRODUCTION

In 1978, the landmark case of Regents of the University of California v. Bakke was held before the U.S. Supreme Court in which a White male applicant to the University of California Medical School at Davis claimed reverse discrimination when he was not admitted. Particularly in question was the university’s diversity recruitment efforts through setting aside 16 spaces for students of color through a special admissions program. The U.S. Supreme Court decided to allow race to be considered as a factor for admissions in creating an overall diverse student body. Since the Bakke decision of 1978, institutions of higher education have been called upon to promote diversity as a
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salient part of ensuring inclusive and equitable learning communities. According to the literature, many Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) have historically struggled with the integration or adoption of such diversity efforts (Brayboy, 2003; Brown, 2004; Niemann, Y. & Maruyama, 2005). This struggle or reluctance towards diversity initiatives intensified with the 1998 Hopwood case. This case stated that race could no longer be used as a factor in admissions decisions. The diversity efforts of colleges and universities became even more muddled when the U.S. Supreme Court abrogated or retracted the Hopwood decision in 2003 and once again allowed race to be used a factor in the admissions process due to the educational benefits of a diverse student body (Rudenstine, 1996).

According to Aguirre and Martinez (2002), “Diversity nourishes the institutional climate in higher education much like water brings life to barren land” (p. 55). Diversity enriches the campus learning community by (1) supporting diverse perspectives and voices, which promote intellectual inquiry, (2) providing opportunities to effectively learn how to manage conflict when individuals share different points of view, and (3) establishing an example of the equitable and democratic society we aspire to become (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). There has been a movement by institutions and educational organizations to establish diversity mission statements to publicize a commitment to fostering diversity in higher education (Garcia, et al., 2001; Humphreys, 2000). However, nearly a decade after the abrogation of the Hopwood decision which once again allows race to be considered as a valuable factor in diversifying campus communities, there is still arguably a disconnect between actual diversity initiatives and the educational mission statements of too many TWIs. Specifically, although more colleges and universities have a standalone diversity mission statement or have the importance of diversity embedded within a global mission statement of the institution, little change is evident in the student body, faculty, administration, or curriculum to show the fruits of institutional commitment to recruiting and retaining students and faculty of color and/or integrating diversity into the curriculum across disciplines. As a result, diversity leadership in higher education is vital to moving the importance of diversity from rhetoric to practice.

Unfortunately, most institutions do not have prominent positions in diversity leadership, such as, a Chief Diversity Officer, Associate Provost for Diversity and Inclusion, Vice President for Diversity and Equity, etc. Leadership in diversity on university and college campuses has often been relegated to the margins instead of centered in comparison to other forms of leadership in higher education with diversity work often relegated to committees. “The centering of higher education leadership practices in a Eurocentric consciousness continues to challenge the use of the diversity paradigm to change to social context for higher education and society” (Aguirre & Martinez, 2006, p. 81). According to Aguirre and Martinez (2006), this type of Eurocentric leadership paradigm, which places diversity leadership at the margins, has led diversity in higher education to have a more managerial than true leadership approach. From a managerial approach, faculty are either rewarded or punished by appointed, influential managers (Connerly & Pederson, 2005). Conversely, leaders can be appointed or emerge from the faculty and provide a vision and motivation to achieve major institutional goal changes. As a result, leadership in diversity can be thought of as a collective endeavor with the focus being to promote change as a vehicle to transform the institution.

When no clear directive or organization is put in place by administration to address pertinent issues of diversity when they arise, it is not uncommon for an individual or a collective group of faculty members to emerge as leaders to attempt to initiate diversity initiatives on a micro level (e.g., academic discipline) or macro level (e.g., college or university wide). Because of the lack of clear