

President's Advisory Committee on Inclusive Excellence

Year-End Report, May 2006

May 18, 2006

A Short History of Diversity at Wheaton

There are three interwoven threads of the history of racial and ethnic diversity at Wheaton. One is the population itself: who is here? The second is the curriculum: how are we thinking about race and ethnicity in our intellectual lives of teaching, learning, and research? The third is relationships within the Wheaton community: is there an affirming and supportive social environment for all members of our community?

Racial and ethnic diversity in population was achieved slowly at Wheaton with the most change occurring in recent years. **The history of the college's admission of students of color, and of the hiring of faculty and staff of color** was recently explored by college historian Paul Helmreich, who drafted his findings in a working manuscript. Some of this history has been placed on-line in an electronic exhibit by Katherine Freeman of the Madeline Clark Library. You can see the exhibit at: <http://www.wheatoncollege.edu/Library/exhibits/Feb2006/home.html>.

In recent years, Wheaton College has dedicated considerable energy and institutional resources to expand its compositional diversity at all levels, and its efforts have paid off. Academic departments committed to affirmative recruitment practices, and, as a result, nearly 50% of the tenure-track faculty hires in the past six years were people from historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. **Individuals from these groups now constitute nearly 20% of Wheaton's tenured and tenure-track faculty.** Similar strides in administrative positions have led to significant changes in that population as well. In the past four years, five of seven new senior administrators have been people of color. On the student level, **Wheaton's gains have been smaller, but significant nonetheless. Since fall 2002,** the self-reported representation of historically underrepresented groups in our entering class has risen from 11.4% to 15.2%.

Racial and ethnic diversity in the intellectual life of the college began with the balanced curriculum project of the 1970s. Progress in achieving diversity goals **has also been made through efforts to "infuse" diversity across the curriculum.** Now heralded as a national model for undergraduate intercultural learning, the **Wheaton faculty have committed themselves to ensure that, "The education of Wheaton College students shall emphasize the study of race/ethnicity and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, religion, and technology in the United States and globally..."**

The effort to implement this commitment has been led by Derek Price, Alex Vasquez and the Infusion sub-committee of the Educational Committee. In the Summer of 2002 a group of these faculty and students attended an AAC&U conference on diversity in Snowbird, Utah. There we were introduced to the notion of Inclusive Excellence and the implication that for curricular infusion to fully succeed we needed also to recognize the importance of diversity in the co-curricular lives of students, staff and faculty. This broadened the work of the infusion sub-committee, and we came to realize that another committee would need to address many of the campus climate and co-curricular issues. In this way **the work of Infusion is now linked to the work of the President's Committee on Inclusive Excellence (PACIE)**, which was created by President Crutcher (see below for more on PACIE)..

Efforts to address issues of campus climate also have a long history with a similar pattern of change. The Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) was convened **early in former President Dale Marshall's tenure. Led by the Dean of Students** and comprising a broad campus representation, MAC addressed campus climate issues raised by students and staff. This committee met until the fall of 2004. In 1994 the grassroots Diversity Working Group (DWG) emerged as a faculty-staff effort to engage the community on diversity issues. Additional faculty efforts go back at least to a workshop in the Spring of 1999 in which faculty and graduate students from Temple University came to talk to the faculty about the climate for faculty of color. Early that summer a group of faculty staff and students attended an AAC&U **conference on Wheaton's campus in which they began to develop a diversity plan** for the college. The ideas that grew out of that conference underlay much of the work of MAC for the next few years. When President Crutcher arrived he suggested we re-form MAC and broaden its purview. This timing fit well with our understanding of the need to broaden the work of the Infusion Committee to include co-curricular and campus climate aspects of Inclusive Excellence.

As with any significant institutional change, it is important to pause, reflect, assess, and identify needed improvements. Wheaton is at that place in its history. While Wheaton has made significant progress, it still has unmet aspirations and some unresolved tensions that hinder its commitment to diversity as an educational asset.

The President's Advisory Committee on Inclusive Excellence

In November 2005, President Ronald Crutcher created the President's Advisory Committee on Inclusive Excellence (PACIE) composed of faculty staff and students. His charge to the committee was to "...oversee the process of achieving educational excellence through diversity and developing a truly multicultural community as proposed in Wheaton's strategic plan."

PACIE members began by engaging in their own dialogue on where Wheaton is with respect to its diversity goals, where it would like to be, and how it will achieve its vision. This was complemented by parallel initiatives on campus: visits from and conversations with prominent educators Derald Wing Sue of Columbia and Mark Chessler of the University of Michigan and several conversations among various groups of the faculty.

From these conversations, it became clear that Wheaton would benefit from a more systematic assessment, but that the scope of that assessment needed refining. PACIE then convened small roundtables of staff and students to engage in their own dialogues on inclusive excellence at Wheaton. The staff roundtable consisted of approximately fifteen individuals who met four times in March, April, and May. The student roundtable consisted of approximately twelve students in addition to the two student-PACIE members; they met twice in two different groups. The faculty roundtable included seventeen individuals and met on two separate occasions. Based on these roundtables, faculty conversations linked to **other campus activities, and PACIE's own conversations, PACIE has identified** these concerns.

- Wheaton embraced diversity in numbers and in the curriculum without a **corresponding level of attention to how diversity would affect the institution's** culture, interpersonal dynamics, problem solving, and decision-making.
- Across constituencies, there is little shared sense of responsibility for diversity goals and objectives. Too many people are apathetic or, worse, resistant to or bored or frustrated with the topic of diversity.
- Too few people can articulate *why* diversity matters at Wheaton; too few **people can articulate Wheaton's core values and how** members of the Wheaton community model a commitment to inclusive excellence.
- **Wheaton's culture exacerbates these problems:**
 - Conflict is viewed as a problem, not an opportunity for personal and institutional learning or growth.
 - Change and challenges to comfort zones are resisted.
 - Politeness is common but it masks aggression.
 - Silos and hierarchies persist across constituencies, linked to disciplines, positional authority, status (e.g. faculty and staff), and student cliques. Many people feel that their views are **unwelcome or don't count.**
- **Students feel that they lack the skills and "tools" to manage intercultural** dynamics.
- The campus lacks ground rules for intergroup dialogues and, more generally, **for "how we do our business."**
- There are not enough spaces – physical or built into programs and activities – for engaging in difficult dialogues and building community.

Next Steps

PACIE reconvened after the final student, staff, and faculty roundtables to discuss the issues and create a set of action strategies for the 2006-07 academic year.

This list is drawn from comparisons of lists created by students, staff, and faculty:

- I. Report to the President and the Campus Community (May 2006)
- II. Assessment and Campus Dialogues on Assessment Findings (Summer 2006 through March 2007)
 - Review existing data on Inclusive Excellence (e.g., graduation rates, attrition rates, majors, awards, etc.) (Summer 2006)
 - Compile and report out on findings (September 2006)
 - Initiate conversations about the findings (September 2006)
 - Convene homogeneous affinity groups to discuss findings relevant to that group
 - Convene heterogeneous (student, staff and faculty) groups to discuss assessment results
 - Follow ground rules, guiding principles, and study circles approach (see appendix A) employed by PACIE this year (incl. facilitators)
 - Conduct campus climate survey (Fall 2006)
 - Compile and report out on findings (by February 2007)
 - Host campus dialogues on the assessment results (beginning February 2006)
 - Convene homogeneous affinity groups to discuss issues relevant to that group
 - Convene heterogeneous (student, staff and faculty) groups to discuss assessment results
 - Follow ground rules, guiding principles, and study circles approach (see appendix A) employed by PACIE this year (incl. facilitators)
- III. Train facilitators
 - Train between 15 and 20 students, staff, and faculty to lead study circles and other dialogue initiatives (Fall 2006)
 - Establish a community of practice for facilitators and consider studying a variety of models for intergroup dialogue and public discourse: study circles, issue forums, town meetings, public conversations, appreciative inquiry, open space technology, sustained dialogue, etc.) (Fall 2006)
- IV. Create a Subcommittee for Campus Communications
 - **PACIE learned this year that the axiom, "if we build it, they will come" does not necessarily apply to diversity work. For many reasons – people are too busy, people are indifferent, people don't feel safe talking about difficult issues – it is hard to get people to sit down and talk about diversity.**

- PACIE will create a subcommittee specifically dedicated to creating a compelling message and recruiting people to the process. (Summer 2006)
- V. Staff Activity - Engage in Department-by-Department Dialogues on Diversity (Fall 2006):
- Have each department articulate a rationale for diversity and its diversity goals beyond numbers and percentages. Why does diversity matter at Wheaton? Why does it matter to me individually?
 - Adhere to the processes established during this initial PACIE year by including facilitators and ground rules for the conversations
- VI. **Create a "hub" for "difficult dialogues" (January 2006):**
- Carve out consistent space in the campus calendar weekly
 - Establish an activity such as a weekly lunch
 - Make clear that it is open to all members of the Wheaton community
 - Devote some dialogues to intergroup dialogue, others to relevant issues (e.g., demographic changes nationally or immigration or hot topics or incidents on campus), and others to open space for casual conversation
 - Adopt a campus model for these conversations – a model that adheres to ground rules and guiding principles
 - Weekly gatherings should be facilitated by a trained facilitator
 - **Hold these dialogues out as a new model for "the way we do our business"** at Wheaton and as practice for classroom teaching and for citizenship in a diverse democracy
 - Approach issues from both an intellectual and an interpersonal angle
 - Select the physical space for these activities carefully
- VII. Run a Student Leadership Institute (January 2007)
- Seek nominations from faculty and staff
 - Invite freshmen and sophomores
 - Consider the 2.5 day model at Skidmore College on leadership, study circles, and diversity
- VIII. Reconvene PACIE (Fall and Spring 2006 and 2007)
- Replace students who are leaving
 - Add individuals who can lead above initiatives
 - Fall meeting, to discuss assessment results and progress
 - Spring meeting, to discuss progress

Conclusions:

PACIE gained invaluable insight when it engaged in its own study circle on inclusive excellence and by hosting exploratory roundtables with small groups of faculty, staff, and students. We learned that Wheaton College is deeply committed to diversity and intercultural learning, but that the campus community needs to address head-on some barriers linked to its campus culture and practices. More

"diversity training" and one-day "diversity events" won't work. Faculty need to examine pedagogical issues, and will do this through Infusion next year. Staff need to articulate a rationale and strategy for achieving diversity while simultaneously managing conflict and interpersonal dynamics. Students need to break down social cliques and other barriers to social engagement. All members of the Wheaton community need to revisit individual and shared responsibility for an **institutional goal of being a "truly multicultural community."** And everyone needs to rethink **"how we do our business here at Wheaton"** and decide what kind of intercultural learning community we want, and how we are going to achieve it.

Appendix A: **Summary of Study Circles Process, Guiding Principles, and Ground Rules**

Background

Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) in Pomfret, Conn., was founded by the Topsfield Foundation, a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC carries out its mission by providing technical support to communities and organizations that want to find new ways of bringing people together to talk about and effectuate change on matters of public concern.

A Typical Study Circle...

- Is a small group, usually 8-12 people, who meet over a period of time to discuss a critical issue,
- Is led by impartial facilitators who are not experts but who keep the conversation moving
- Is governed by ground rules
- Considers issues from many points of view
- Gives every participant a chance to be heard and
- Does not require consensus but uncovers areas of agreement and common ground.

A Study Circles Program...

- Consists of multiple study circles that run concurrently or over a period of time and involve **significant percentages of a community's population**
- Welcomes all comers to the table
- Seeks diversity in perspective and life experiences among participants
- **Involves a steering group, a public "kick-off" and a concluding "town meeting" where study circles share their views and action ideas**

A Typical Study Circles Progression ...

1. Personal reflections and stories: Why am I here? Why is this issue important to me?
2. What is the nature of the problem? Explore definitions, common understandings
3. Crafting a shared vision, How do we envision the ideal future, if the problem did not exist? What is being done elsewhere, nationally?
4. Action: What can *others* do? What can *we* as a group do? What can *I* as an individual do?

Guiding Principles:

- Involve everyone – these are community-wide conversations
- Seek out and encourage diversity of perspectives and lived experiences
- Share knowledge, resources, power, and decision-making
- Connect the dialogues to social, organizational, and/or policy change
- Follow ground rules: Typical ground rules might be:
 - ◆ Everyone gets a fair hearing
 - ◆ Check your titles and positions at the door
 - ◆ Seek first to understand, then to be understood
 - ◆ **Share "air time"**
 - ◆ **Say "ouch" if necessary, then educate**
 - ◆ Be honest, candid
 - ◆ Conflict should not be **personalized; don't label, stereotype, or call people names**
 - ◆ Speak for yourself, not for others
 - ◆ Everything said in this room stays in this room until we agree otherwise

These processes, principles, and ground rules can be adapted for one-day events or activities, open forums, retreats, teach-ins, classroom discussions, strategic planning initiatives, community-university projects, troubleshooting, and conflict management.

For more information on Study Circles Resource Center, see www.studycircles.org.