Why Aren’t We There Yet?

Taking Personal Responsibility for Creating an Inclusive Campus

Edited by

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**Introduction**

*Are We There Yet?*

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**ARE WE THERE YET?** That question probably evokes memories of traveling by car to some distant location. It signals the anxiety and the desire for the journey to end, to have reached the destination. Those committed to creating welcoming and engaging campus environments for all students recognize that we are not there yet, and that there is much more work to be done. Some ask, “Why aren’t we there yet? We have been addressing these issues for decades now; when will we be done?” One of the possible answers is that these issues were framed in an overly simple manner that focused on assimilation so all people could be seen as similar, which has not been effective. Dealing with difference has always been more complex and more difficult than one could imagine. Too often the creation of welcoming campus environments has been oversimplified. In this book the conversation about inclusion is broadened to explore that complexity and difficulty.

**MAPPING OUT THE COMPLEXITY OF DIVERSITY**

Historically, administrators of diversifying campuses focused on increasing access to those previously denied admittance. Some would argue that our campuses have evolved from being exclusionary and intolerant to tolerant environments that attempt to include everyone. Now the assumption is that institutions strive to be welcoming, accepting, affirming, and engaging. Some members of the campus community believe their institutions have achieved that goal. This belief has lulled educators into thinking that no
further work is necessary. However, admissions, retention, and graduation data tell another story.

The contributors to this book believe that without recognizing the influences of privilege and inequality, educators cannot offer truly welcoming environments. One of the inherent problems in doing more to create inclusive campuses is that many in the United States think American society has entered a color-blind (postracial) era where equality exists for all. The postracial emphasis on individual effort denies the historical and current inequalities based on income and other social identities (Conley, 1999). Professionals working with college students must recognize the tension that arises between the beliefs of a color-blind era versus the current realities of inequalities. How can educators prepare students for dealing with today’s realities in an age of privilege, ever-changing oppressions, and fear of the uncontrollable? In this book the contributors seek to offer new insights to improve student affairs practice, emphasizing action that recognizes this is a complex, multifaceted yet not impossible process.

The contributors believe Americans enjoy holding on to broad, desirable ideals, yet arguably our institutions and our country have not always lived up to their ideals. There are numerous examples of actions not being consistent with the value of equality for all—examples such as Takaki’s (2000) poignant book illustrating the desire for a double victory in World War II. This book exposed the contradiction between President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s war for four freedoms (freedom of speech and expression, freedom of every person to worship God in his or her own way, freedom from want, and freedom from fear) and the reality of many Americans’ lives. Service members of color fought in a segregated Jim Crow army to rid Europe of fascism and returned home without those four freedoms. Takaki pointed out that for many Americans, “The war for freedom had to be fought in their country’s own backyard” (p. 24).

A current example of U.S. society’s not living up to its ideals was provided by Ladson-Billings (2006) in her analysis of unequal school funding in the same U.S. city. This same incongruence can be found on college campuses and can be illustrated through the decline of government funding for public education and the resource disparities between predominantly White and minority-serving schools. Like these societal examples, inequality in higher education has not always been recognized or acknowledged by those who participate in higher education. Hence, as professionals who work in higher
education, it is not enough to simply espouse multicultural and equity values. Instead, we must demonstrate our commitment through our actions.

In addition to more accurately describing the complexity of inclusion, this book focuses on how educators can take action. Previously, multicultural training often focused on the other or on where to place blame. That approach has not been effective in making values congruent with actions. The contributors want to illustrate and add to the literature that knowledge about difference is not sufficient to achieve multicultural competence (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004) and create inclusive campus environments (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Reynolds & Pope, 1994; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). We agree with Watt (2007) that welcoming campus environments are created through difficult dialogues. Every educator should be asking, “In what ways have I initiated a dialogue that promoted human dignity, equality, and community that serves to move institutions to become truly inclusive?” Through engaging in fruitful dialogues regarding differing social identities including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, readers of this book are led through a process that advocates for justice. This advocacy begins by recognizing that I am part of the problem—and responsible for contributing to the solution. This I includes everyone, regardless of social identity. We all live in this environment, and it is important that we all take responsibility for improving and reshaping it. We believe that through dialogue necessary action can be framed and taken. This book integrates concepts highlighted throughout the higher education multicultural literature creating elements of a process that not only advocate for change but also create and manage change.

In this introduction we initiate the exploration of the complex elements that must be understood to create inclusive campuses through difficult conversations. Though subsequent chapters will more thoroughly address elements of the required process that lay the foundation for action, at the outset, a guiding principle campus members must acknowledge is that all of us are never finished learning about ourselves and others—we don’t know it all.

Self-knowledge is the first necessary element (Chapter 1). Only after educators are honest and knowledgeable about their own cultures, beliefs, values, privileges, and biases can they begin to interact with others authentically in their daily contexts. The second element is knowledge of and experiences with others (Chapter 2). This element is often falsely assumed to be needed
only by majority White people. Yet, in today’s world we believe everyone has something to work on, and there are a plethora of others whom we need to know. Once educators begin to genuinely interact with others, we can move into the next element: understanding historical and institutional contexts (Chapters 3 and 4). We believe these contexts inevitably perpetuate the status quo. Understanding how educators need to change the status quo allows us to move into action, the final element. Action is not merely incorporating newly found awareness and knowledge into practice; it also encourages transformation of our institutions and society. During action, difficult conversations are commonplace, and the need for change is acknowledged (Chapter 5). A truly welcoming and inclusive environment is one where difficult conversations are the norm, and individuals are empowered to notice, question, and stop inequality (Chapter 6).

We framed this book around the five elements of the process of engaging in difficult conversations that not only advocate for change but also create change. It is our goal that by threading these elements together educators, student affairs professionals, and faculty will be better able to deal with the complexities of difference and take action to create campus environments where students can learn, grow, and thrive.

CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

This book focuses on guiding individuals and groups through learning how to have difficult conversations that lead us to act to create more just campuses. We also provide illustrations of multiple ways to respond to difficult situations. We focused this book on the elements identified by the 2007–2009 Student Affairs Educators International (ACPA) Presidential Task Force, “Engaging the Complexities of Difference: What Does Inclusion Really Look Like,” charged with identifying the next steps in achieving inclusion. During task force meetings members agreed on the elements of the process, which are described in the preceding section. The following chapters, written by student affairs professionals, provide an in-depth treatment of each element. To understand the process, we recommend reading the chapters as stand-alone but sequentially successive chapters.

“Awareness of Self,” the first chapter, is the first of the process elements to enact change. Anna M. Ortiz and Lori D. Patton offer insight on how interpretations of the self influence this work and how this work is influenced by
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others’ interpretation of us. There is a synergistic relationship between self-awareness and understanding one’s own culture and its influence, and how they influence our interactions with the outside world. This means that how we are identified influences how we identify ourselves and others. To be knowledgeable about differences, we must be knowledgeable about the self. The perspective of ourselves influences our attitudes, reactions, and relationships. For example, a sense of confidence in one’s ability to make a difference is fundamental to one’s willingness to engage in action for the betterment of inclusion.

With a sense of the self, the next process element that Jan Arminio and Vasti Torres focus on in Chapter 2 is the self-in-relation (Ivey, 1995) with the other. By the other we refer to those racially different from us, but simultaneously we include considerations of multiple social identities. While this second chapter focuses on the other, the inclusion of all groups as others is intentional. Therefore, when we write of the other, we refer to African Americans; Latinos; Asian Americans; White people; the poor and working class; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people; Muslims; Jews; and Christians, to name only a few. Educators must acknowledge the powerful learning potential of self in transactional relationships.

The self cannot be extracted from its historical context. Indeed, “all our knowledge about human nature is historically conditioned” (Levin, 1988, p. 59). The next process element guiding individuals and groups through difficult conversations is to explore how who we were influences who we are. In Chapter 3, John A. Mueller and Ellen M. Broido discuss the importance of historical context in conversations and present a synopsis of the historical context of higher education in the United States. This chapter provides the setting for exploring how it is that we can honor inclusion and welcome others today in the context of a past where we did not. With the historical context set, Raechele L. Pope and Lucy A. LePeau in Chapter 4 examine the influence of current institutional contexts on attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. How does the national context influence our institutional cultures? How do our institutional cultures and missions influence how dialogues can occur? Within institutional contexts, how can interventions that positively influence these dialogues occur?

This process begins to frame the action that must take place in Chapter 5. Sherry K. Watt offers tips and cautions about engaging others in dialogue and being intentional advocates. This work conjures uncomfortable and
even unsettling emotions, such as guilt, acquiescence, resentment, and fear. It can also elicit liberation and fulfillment. This chapter’s author seeks to instill the hope, courage, and confidence that educators can do better by supporting and challenging others as they place themselves in challenging and growth-producing opportunities. Learning is never complete. To facilitate dialogues that encourage action requires making meaning of the knowing/being gaps within ourselves, our students, and our institutions. Komives (2000) asked educators in higher education to address the gap between how we know to behave and how we actually do behave. This chapter offers findings of a more inclusive theory that seeks to narrow this gap.

To illustrate there is no one right way to initiate change, Chapter 6 contains two case studies with responses from a variety of individuals who represent many different social identities and roles in higher education. By including multiple responses, authors Matthew J. Weigand and Lucy A. LePeau illustrate there is no one magical response or no silver bullet; rather, there are essentials that help us think through issues in deciding the best ways to create change in one’s context. The cases and corresponding responses embrace the notion that life is a lab—we must all learn to see multiple options in determining how best to respond.

The final chapter summarizes the key points of the preceding chapters and offers suggestions and resources for beginning or continuing the process of examining the internal and external growth necessary to create lasting change. Plenty of other books detail the myriad problems and barriers to inclusion; while we the editors certainly acknowledge the causes and effects of the intolerance that still exists on college campuses, that is not our purpose. Instead, we hope to provide a process that encourages transformation. While complex in many ways, we believe it can be accomplished with this blueprint for change. Returning to the opening paragraph, some individuals are frustrated by the impatience of the question, Are we there yet? However, we hope to conclude through discussion and case examples that the problem is not impatience but rather the question itself. Asking if we are there yet assumes there is a recognizable end point we can all achieve. If we are to truly embrace the complexity of inclusion, it is essential we understand the open-ended nature of multicultural change and the lifelong journey it requires.
REFERENCES


