

Creating an Inclusive Educational Environment – University of Oregon’s College of Education Report on Diversity¹

The 2004-05 academic year witnessed intense concern and controversy regarding diversity issues in the College of Education – a situation that has served to challenge our College community in very important and necessary ways. Given the College’s unique connection with our contemporary society and its efforts to prepare the next generation of teachers, social service professionals, and academicians, such critical examination and questioning of diversity is valued, necessary, and a natural part of the College’s continuing evolution. One of the results of that process is this report, which identifies goals necessary to address in order to integrate diversity into the College’s structure, instructional activities and research endeavors.

The nine goals described in this document provide a common framework in which specific changes and diversity initiatives can be considered, formulated, implemented, and evaluated. On a regular basis, the dean of the College will engage representatives from the College and community to plan both short-term and long-term activities that will address these goals. These continuing efforts will improve the College’s programs, positively impacting its students, its scholarship, and our community.

Through this ongoing process of program improvement, the College will create a more inclusive educational community of students, faculty, staff, and non-campus community stakeholders. In this community we will foster an open, respectful sharing of diversity-related ideas in working toward a systemic approach toward multicultural education². These interactions will promote an academic environment in which all students will receive a high-quality educational experience designed to prepare them to educate and support the children, youth, adults, and families of our state and country in an effective and inclusive manner.

Goal 1: Vision: A College of Full Inclusion

To serve as a foundation that guides the College’s diversity work, the College’s leadership will craft and adopt a statement of the College of Education’s vision for, and commitment to, diversity and the challenges and opportunities that such diversity brings to our College community. We will celebrate the rich dimensions of diversity presented by all individuals and the groups with which each individual identifies. The College’s vision statement

¹ This paper is the product of the hard work of many people. Among those who should be recognized for their contributions are the members of the College of Education Diversity Steering Committee, which was formed with the express purpose of providing input and guidance on this document: Richard Biffle, the College’s Diversity consultant during the 2004-05 school year; Dr. Martin Kaufman, the Dean of the College from 1992 to 2005; Dr. Charles Martinez, the College’s Diversity Director during the 2004-05 school year; and Dr. Carlos Cortes, who served as the College’s diversity consultant during the spring of 2005 and who has a continuing role in the College during the 2005-06 school year.

² At this writing there are multiple definitions of multi-cultural education. Therefore, we have elected to use the description provided by National Association for Multicultural Education in 2005.

should be clear, straightforward, and inclusive. Moreover, it is probable that the vision statement will be revised regularly to insure that it is timely and represents the entire College. Because the College of Education is a sub-unit of the University of Oregon, this vision will be in accordance with the University's diversity statement.³ It also is likely that this report will receive similar and regular re-examination and be revised as needed.

Goal 2: Infrastructure: A System that Supports Diversity Initiatives

Integrating diversity-related considerations and content into the College's curriculum, practicum and community-based experiential placements, research, and scholarship will require hard work, and a balance of short- and long-term effort.

The College will dedicate resources toward establishing an infrastructure to support ongoing initiatives. This infrastructure may include hiring administrators, faculty, and staff dedicated to diversity work; establishing a diversity advisory committee; providing trainings for faculty, staff, and students on diversity and multicultural education; recruiting diverse faculty, staff, and students; developing open and expedient communication systems; promoting scholarship on diversity and multicultural education; rewarding faculty, staff, students for their work and expertise on these initiatives; and continuously evaluating all diversity efforts in regard to their impact and to guide future initiatives.

³ The University of Oregon community is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the development of integrity. In order to thrive and excel, this community must preserve the freedom of thought and expression of all its members. The University of Oregon has a long and illustrious history in the area of academic freedom and freedom of speech. A culture of respect that honors the rights, safety, dignity and worth of every individual is essential to preserve such freedom. We affirm our respect for the rights and well-being of all members.

We further affirm our commitment to:

- ▶ Respect the dignity and essential worth of all individuals.
- ▶ Promote a culture of respect throughout the University community.
- ▶ Respect the privacy, property, and freedom of others.
- ▶ Reject bigotry, discrimination, violence, or intimidation of any kind.
- ▶ Practice personal and academic integrity and expect it from others.
- ▶ Promote the diversity of opinions, ideas and backgrounds which is the lifeblood of the university.

The University of Oregon affirms and actively promotes the right of all individuals to equal opportunity in education and employment at this institution without regard to race, color, sex, national origin, age, religion, marital status, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or any other extraneous consideration not directly and substantively related to effective performance.

In developing, adopting, and implementing this statement, it is critical to recognize that the concept of diversity encompasses acceptance and respect as well as understanding that each individual is unique... It is through the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment that it is possible to reach greater understanding, moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

(taken October 26, 2005, from <http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~asuomca/diversityinit/definition.html>)

Goal 3: Communication: Effective, Respectful, and Safe Discourse on Diversity Issues

Discussions of diversity inevitably elicit varied and intense emotions. For the College community to address diversity concerns and issues, it is essential for the college to establish, offer, and value a climate of open, respectful, and safe interactions in which differing opinions, emotions, and experiences may be shared and considered. Such a climate will be fostered through three avenues of communication.

First, college-wide trainings on diversity-related topics will be developed and offered to faculty, staff, and students to create a common, shared knowledge of these issues, by improving (a) the ability of persons in these groups to address conflicts in a mutually respectful manner, (b) the capacity of the faculty and staff to address diversity effectively in classes and interactions with students and non-campus community stakeholders, and (c) the interactions among all individuals by seeking to know and understand the “group identities” which affect communication and inter-group relations.

Second, through the College’s current and ongoing curriculum review, diversity topics and multicultural education will be highlighted and integrated into the curriculum through coursework and practicum experiences. Instruction of this type will allow students to experience content concepts, issues, and themes from the perspectives of diverse groups and their respective identities.

Third, the College will establish an ongoing and open communication system that will provide timely information on diversity-related events and opportunities for engagement in academic, research, and social-cultural activities to members of the College, University, and non-campus community stakeholders. This sharing could include electronic media, websites, college-wide presentations and trainings, to name but a few possibilities.

Goal 4: Curriculum and Instruction: A Thorough Examination of Diversity

The College’s curriculum and class offerings provide a basic structure through which students are taught to enter and succeed in their chosen careers. Including instruction on how to teach and support diverse children, youth and their families is critical for such learning and for preparing students to enter their chosen careers and work successfully with all members of our society in a variety of contexts. The College will include in its curriculum review process a careful and ongoing examination of diversity issues and recommendations for integrating instruction on diversity into all classes, with the goal of providing continuous multicultural education for all students. This work will result in a curriculum that (a) is intellectually rich and inclusive; (b) fosters inquisitiveness, analysis, critique, and respectful discourse; and (c) includes content and examples reflective of diverse perspectives.

Goal 5: Organizational Development: Continuous and Effective Training for Faculty and Staff

The College will develop and implement a college-wide training agenda for faculty, staff, and students. The goal will be to establish a training agenda that will be offered annually and that

can be adjusted to address critical immediate needs on the part of faculty, staff, and students. This training will (a) foster critical inquiry on institutional processes, policies, and culture that perpetuate inequities and (b) focus on the professional development of individual faculty, staff, and students related to diversity. The training efforts will strengthen the College's organizational capacity to create a professional community in which all faculty, staff and students -- especially those from traditionally isolated and marginalized groups-- can feel valued, included, supported, safe, and respected.

Goal 6: Fostering Diversity: Recruitment and Advancement of Diverse Students, Faculty, and Staff

The successful recruitment, retention, and professional advancement of a diverse student body, faculty, and staff will help to establish a distinctive social-cultural and intellectual "learning community" that will offer a high-quality education to all students and enable the College to fulfill its instructional and research mission.

As a public institution of higher education, with the responsibility of preparing the next generation of educators, social service providers, and academicians, the College will recruit and graduate students from diverse backgrounds.

The College also will recruit, support, and promote faculty with diverse backgrounds and advance our commitment and ability to address diversity issues and multicultural education effectively in their teaching and scholarship, using an array of pedagogical and research methods.

Finally, the importance of the College's staff as a first-line in communicating and working with students and community members must be recognized and valued. Consequently, the college also will recruit and advance staff from diverse backgrounds and expertise.

Goal 7: Community: A Commitment to Engagement

By virtue of the College's responsibility to educate the next generation of educators, social service professionals, and academicians, students must be afforded educational, social service, research, and other professional experiences in diverse community settings. Accordingly, to promote students' learning experiences and foster their successful entry into their chosen career paths, the College must strengthen its working relationships with a wide array of educational and social service agencies that serve diverse clienteles and that have nondiscriminatory hiring and professional practices that are consistent with the College's diversity policies and vision.

The College will work with these schools and community-based organizations to provide students with the highest-quality learning opportunities. School and community partners will be encouraged to engage faculty, staff, and students to identify and address issues and questions regarding diversity in the instructional and practicum process. Similar efforts will be made to insure that the College's research efforts include diverse populations and topics of study relevant to non-campus community stakeholders and topics that are critical for our faculty and students to

learn about to serve our increasingly diverse society in a culturally inclusive, appropriate manner.

Goal 8: Evaluation: An Ongoing Process

Evaluation is central to the College's diversity work. This document provides a structure to focus the College's diversity work by providing specific goals that will serve as a template for planning both short- and long-term initiatives. That is, on a regular basis the goals will be used to identify and plan key systemic initiatives and changes. An essential part of these initiatives will involve evaluating the development, implementation, and impact of these efforts across College and community contexts using a diverse array of methods. The primary evaluation focus of the College's diversity initiatives will be internal and conducted by COE staff, supplemented as needed by third-party evaluations. The work conducted by the College on diversity, and the related evaluations will be summarized in a yearly report that will be publicly available and used by the College to guide and focus upon new and ongoing diversity initiatives.

Goal 9: Oversight and Accountability: An Introspective Community

The College will establish a diversity advisory committee composed of students, community members, faculty, and staff that will meet regularly with College administrators and representatives. This committee will provide specific guidance and constructive input on the College's diversity work and initiatives, assisting in the planning, implementation and evaluation of those activities.