

Diversity and Internationalization: Collaborating, Not Just Co-Existing

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Author Note: This article is written by a diversity practitioner from a perspective that represents the opinions voiced by some diversity practitioners in higher education on the topic of collaboration between diversity and internationalization.

In recent years, higher education has seen many challenges to diversity efforts, ranging from legal (e.g., affirmative action and race-conscious admissions policies) to fiscal challenges (e.g., the Great Recession; Davis, 2010). It is clear to many who work in the field of diversity that much work remains to be done, and that there is a more pressing need for entrepreneurial, collaborative approaches to advance and sustain these efforts. An exploration of synergistic approaches to institutionalizing the work of diversity has led to the search for possible on-campus allies. While proponents of internationalization may be allies, the field is viewed as the enemy of diversity to some, presumably shifting campus focus from often challenging and sensitive work to that of the “glamorous, exciting,” and global (Tapia, 2007). To discuss the possible collaboration, however, requires an understanding of how each field is generally conceptualized.

Conceptualization of Diversity and Internationalization

If one were to conduct an Internet search for “definition of diversity,” countless results would arise. This alludes to a basic truth: a definition of diversity in higher education, and in general, has been elusive. In recent years, diversity has often been presented

as a process toward developing quality learning environments (Milem, Chang, and Antonio, 2005) which promote an understanding of and valuing of differences within and across various identity groups. Its history, however, is rooted in a desire to correct societal injustices often framed through concepts such as privilege, oppression, and the “isms” such as racism and classism as they are experienced within a U.S. context. This historical focus is viewed by some as the most important and yet often unstated focus of diversity initiatives in higher education—addressing challenges in access and success faced by students, faculty, and administrators from traditionally underrepresented groups.

A number of terms are also associated with internationalization, such as global learning, globalization, international education, and global engagement. The American Council on Education (ACE) places its emphasis on comprehensive internationalization—“a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges or universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected” (ACE, 2012, 3). This definition underscores the process orientation, but also incorporates a focus on programs, policies, and practices that support student learning and highlight the grounding of the global in the local. It is through this connection between the global and the local that many institutions find success in advancing student learning associated with global citizenship, which is focused on encouraging students to understand their responsibilities to both the world and the local community (Green, 2012). It is

also through this lens that a potential bridging concept between internationalization and diversity can be found (Olson, Evans, and Shoenberg, 2007).

Challenges to Collaboration

Several challenges to developing collaboration between diversity and internationalization exist; the two highlighted in this section are the most prevalent.

Diverging Histories

Diversity initiatives in higher education can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Olson et al. 2007). Institutions began to increase access for students of color, women, and other groups in parallel with the political and social movements of the era. This increased presence of various subpopulations eventually led to an awareness of the need for support services. Structures were put in place to meet the needs of individuals who were not part of the majority, and a focus on diversity and multicultural education became significant for many institutions.

Internationalization, on the other hand, gained attention during the post-World War II and Cold War era (Olson et al.). According to Cornwell and Stoddard (1999), internationalization is rooted in a Western perspective and was historically “motivated by apparently contrary desires to promote international peace and understanding on the one hand, and to bolster U.S. strategic interests on the other” (as cited in Olson et al., p. 18).

Historically, the work of diversity was resisted by many institutions and was literally forced upon some through federal mandates. Internationalization, on the other hand, has been better received by some institutions. The differing receptions, historically rooted and currently displayed, have symbolic relevance and create challenges to collaboration between the two fields. Being aware of this can aid institutions in understanding the importance of making a clearly articulated commitment to diversity’s historical relevance in addressing social inequities within the U.S. context, while at the same time highlighting potential benefits of collaboration

to achieving the shared aim of enhancing cultural awareness and understanding.

Perceptions

Another key challenge to collaboration is how campus stakeholders perceive diversity and internationalization. Olson et al. (2007) captured the perception of the two fields through the lens of a participant in a 2006 ACE roundtable, who noted internationalization “is perceived as fun, glamorous and optional—an ‘asset’ model that brings prestige to an institution. In contrast [diversity] is viewed as hard work, a necessary endeavor...but lacking in glamour—a ‘deficit’ model” (p. 30). This perception has surfaced during discussions at conferences and workshops on this very topic in recent years. The “deficit/asset” dichotomy creates a sense of tension, and institutions must recognize that this tension poses a significant challenge to developing and sustaining collaboration between the two fields. Campuses can assuage this tension by clearly articulating a respect for the differing historical missions of each field, while promoting the exploration of possible connections between the global and the local within curricular and co-curricular efforts.

Common Ground

Those who conceptualize diversity as understanding and valuing difference often place a strong emphasis on exploring individual differences in supportive environments in an effort to transform individual thinking and functioning from mere tolerance to embracing and finding value in differences. Those with this perspective are also more inclined to embrace a broad conceptualization of diversity, which moves beyond historical origins to a focus on creating inclusive environments that promote global citizenship: the habits of the mind that support effective engagement within diverse, multicultural communities (Green, 2012; Schattle, 2007). A second, related viewpoint is that of interculturalism—skills and competencies needed for effective communication and engagement between and across cultures (Olson and Peacock, 2012). Both interculturalism and global citizenship have emerged as bridging constructs that seem to fit within the overlap between diversity and internationalization (Green, 2012; Olson & Peacock,

2012). Many institutions are now exploring efforts that may exist at this intersection as a way to advance a shared agenda for both fields.

Aware of the need to explore the overlap between internationalization and diversity, ACE launched its *At Home in the World* initiative in 2006. This initiative explores the common ground and mutually supportive goals of these two distinct fields. The primary motivation for this work is to ensure that students are well-equipped to be effective, productive citizens in an increasingly diverse and global society. Through this initiative, ACE identified three principal areas of common ground (see Olson et al., 2007, for a more complete description of these areas):

- **Shared values** are at the core of each effort, such as the appreciation of difference and the desire to transform institutional structures.

- **Shared nature of the work**, with a focus on experiential learning that is interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary in scope.
- **Shared learning outcomes**, presented under the headings of knowledge, attitudes, and skills, and including such outcomes as understanding the connections between power, class, privilege, gender, and knowledge.

When explored with an awareness of these significant points of common ground and through the lens of global citizenship or interculturalism, collaborative efforts may seem a logical approach to advancing some aspects of both diversity and internationalization. Of course, before pursuing collaboration, institutions are well cautioned to recognize the aforementioned challenges inherent in such efforts.

Tips for Engaging in Collaboration

While there may be some significant challenges, several insights on how to successfully collaborate have emerged in ACE's work.

- **Ensure senior leadership is on board.** A key strategy for any successful change effort is to ensure that senior leaders support it (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Participation in some way by those who set institutional priorities and have authority over campus resources is an important success strategy for collaboration between internationalization and diversity.
- **Engage key stakeholders in conversations throughout the process.** Those who understand and are sensitive to the perspectives held by each camp should be involved in discussions at the onset. Ensure that vocal individuals among senior leaders, faculty, and students are engaged in discussions about collaboration. Take the time to discuss what collaboration might yield for the institution, for each area, for the students, faculty, and so on. Do not be afraid to engage those who may be naysayers—they, too, have perspectives that should be heard, and perhaps by engaging them in

conversations about possible benefits, they may be won over as allies.

- **Start with student learning outcomes.** Student learning outcomes can be a great way to frame initial conversations around possible collaboration because they ultimately focus on the common ground between the two fields. From this perspective, collaboration has the potential to enhance students' learning and preparation as effective citizens in a diverse world. This approach has traditionally sparked fruitful conversations about the shared nature of the work, as well as possible areas of synergy through existing programming that address the desired learning outcomes.
- **Get to know each other.** It is important that individuals working in diversity and internationalization take the time to understand one another's respective goals and desired learning outcomes within the campus context. Discussions aimed at familiarizing each with the other may uncover common goals shared between the two fields. As noted earlier, a possible place to begin this discussion might be through the lens of student

Tips for Engaging in Collaboration (continued)

learning outcomes (see Olson et al., 2007, for a list of previously identified shared student learning outcomes).

It is also important to look for areas of possible overlap within existing efforts. As Kezar (2009) indicated, many campuses have multiple initiatives in place which already have some degree of overlap, but those involved with the efforts might be completely unaware of this. One suggestion is to conduct an internal audit of diversity and internationalization initiatives, examining their goals and corresponding student learning outcomes to see more clearly where alignment and opportunities for possible partnerships exist.

- **Recognize that change takes time.** For many institutions, the notion of collaboration between diversity and internationalization will start a change process. First-order change, which will impact only a few aspects of the institution, may take less time than second-order change, which affects the mission, culture, processes, and

structures of an institution (Kezar, 2001). Second-order change, which is more likely to be sustained and have lasting impact on an institution, can take 10 to 15 years (Kezar, 2009). Recognize that if your institution pursues this approach to meeting its diversity and internationalization goals through collaboration, it will require a time commitment.

In 2010 ACE conducted interviews with several institutions to understand the process associated with developing collaboration between internationalization and diversity. One institution which successfully developed collaborative practices indicated it took almost two years just to move key stakeholders from beginning conversations to really seeing and agreeing upon points of synergy between the two areas, let alone to determine the most appropriate ways to collaborate (Davis and Butto, 2010). Change leaders and institutions must be aware of the commitment required at the onset, so as not to rush the process and allow it to organically take root.

Conclusion

Most in higher education are keenly aware of changing student demographics and the need to prepare students to effectively engage in an increasingly diverse world. Finding successful ways to do this is a challenge, and exploring collaboration between internationalization and diversity as a means to achieve this goal may be a difficult but worthwhile task. While collaboration must be done in a way that respects the historical trajectories, political nuances, and social context of each field, it may in fact go a long way to prepare students as future leaders who can address pressing societal issues.

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