

Diversity in educational insti



Introduction Diversity, the new buzzword in the professional world and universities across the country is definitely going to be a major issue as we step into the millennium. Before we get any further, what exactly is diversity? Diversity is a term covering all significant differences between people- not just the obvious ones. These differences include age, education, role, abilities and experience as well as gender, race, ethnicity, language and literacy skills. The dictionary defines diversity as a “ situation that includes representation of multiple groups within a prescribed environment, such as a university or workplace. This refers to difference between cultural groups, although it is used to describe differences within cultural groups”. America is probably the most diverse country, with a majority of the population living in diverse neighborhoods. The rate of immigration is increasing tremendously. A further subset of the population believe that in about 20 years from now, they would be living in neighborhoods twice as diverse as now. Universities across the country consider diversity to be their major assets (University of Miami, Florida). The professional world and universities are stressing on the importance of diversity and undertaking programs to implement diversity successfully. Well before we undertake any discussion on diversity, it is imperative to understand why this term has become so sensational and taken the professional world and universities by storm. Our country has always consisted of people from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the other major happenings around the world today are collaboration, technology advances and globalization. This increasing globalization has resulted in people working in foreign locations. This calls for people from different cultures to work towards a common goal, for which, one needs to learn and accept the cultural differences. Coming from a diverse background

and belonging to a diverse country, we are of the opinion that diversity is important to the success of an organization. Our group members belong to the Indian sub-continent, with 6 of us from India and one person from Pakistan. This society was initially an alien society to us. But the diversity in this country and the value given to it helped us in the process of assimilation. We believe that we can learn from this culture and teach our values to this culture in all our actions. Diversity is a must and as Dr. John Hall of Drexel University puts it, “ Diversity has only advantages, there are no cons. The cons are nothing but barrier to diversity in an organization”. We feel that the advantages of diversity far exceed its disadvantages. With the current emphasis on teams and with the increasing globalization, diversity is imperative to achieve success. Our opinions are expressed in detail in the final section.

In the following sections, we are going to discuss several issues such as diversity – pros and cons, incidents of diversity in the workplace and universities and our view on this issue. Our paper lays an emphasis on diversity in universities, though in certain sections we have discussed diversity in the workplace. A greater emphasis has been placed on diversity in universities. We believe that as we enter the millennium, this issue will be addressed more efficiently if programs are incorporated in the universities to ensure that our students are better equipped in the professional world.

Process of diversifying the College Community
In this section, we discuss briefly the methods adopted by colleges to diversify their community.

College campus community projects are initiated in almost all colleges across the country. Their efforts include expanding the curriculum, diversify

the faculty, and improve campus climate. The college also increases the number of international students. In addition to programs for locals to understand other cultures, orientations are held, so that the international students appreciate and understand the local culture. Thus, it is a two way process. Movement to a heterogeneous environment: Causes and Consequences Many institutions of higher education across the nation are currently struggling with a more diverse population of students, faculty and internal debates about the meaning of multiculturalism on their campuses. Many colleges have attempted to address the issue of cultural diversity through revisiting its mission statement and building linkages with the surrounding community.

In the past, educational systems, like most other institutions assumed that there was a common culture to which all aspired. Whether it was the core curriculum, teaching methods, or just general expectations about the role of faculty, students, or higher education in general, there was comparatively little disagreement about the basic values. This was in part, because the people who populated the higher educational systems of the United States were all socialized into the common values and beliefs of their rather narrow gender, class, and racial backgrounds.

In the past few decades, that world has changed. Higher education is currently struggling to meet the needs of a more diverse student body and to educate students to meet the needs of a more diverse society. To prepare students for such a society may require substantial reform of the conventional curriculum, teaching strategies, and many nonacademic aspects of college life. How colleges respond to these challenges now and in <https://assignbuster.com/diversity-in-educational-insti/>

the future may determine whether they will thrive, and perhaps even survive, as centers of higher education. The following example illustrates how Lenoir-Rhyne College attempted to address this issue. The College revisited their mission statement and building linkages with the surrounding community. About 56% of the student population are female, 11% belong to racial or ethnic minorities or international students and there is an increase in the number of older or non-traditional students attending the night programs. The college was a religiously affiliated institution and had been affected by the increasing secularization. Thus the mission statement was revised and efforts were made to link the strongly religious past with the secular present. Efforts were initiated in 1995 to respond to the increasing cultural diversity of the nation. These efforts included inculcating leadership in students to prepare them for a diverse work setting. They believed in educating them in a community that reflects the reality of the world. This was achieved by increasing the diversity in the campus, by increasing the population of international students, American students of color and increasing the diversity of faculty and staff. Opportunities were made to for students to interact with foreign visitors and enable students to study in other countries and cultures. Diversity was more than just race and ethnicity. It also involves including those that have disabilities. Socialization and interaction among the diverse population was an important component in this learning process. The college emphasized that understanding different populations does not necessarily involve understanding their cultures and cultural differences, but, more importantly, being open to differences. Additionally, race, class and gender are important to understand people's lives, institutional systems, contemporary social issues, and possibilities for

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social change. History of other cultures was included in the curriculum. Working relationships with community based organizations for addressing issues such as cultural diversity, racial justice and cultural harmony were created. To this effect, the Institute of Multicultural Education and Training (IMET) was formed. Since then, various projects were initiated by the College which were successful in creating a coherent diverse community (Building Community from Diversity, American Behavioral Scientist – Feb 99). Diversity Promotion Projects and Studies in Colleges and Universities

In an earlier section, we discussed how Lenoir-Rhyne College handled diversity in its community. In this section, we would like to look at projects initiated in other universities.

a) University of Pennsylvania

We approached the President of the University of Pennsylvania, Dr. Judith Rodin, for an interview. We wanted her views on this topic and understand how this issue is addressed in another university. We had already interviewed a few members of the Drexel administration, faculty and student body for their views. We believed that views from the President of an Ivy League university would deepen our understanding of this topic. However, Dr. Rodin due to her busy schedule was unable to grant our request. In turn, she supported our project with two strong articles written by her on this topic for the University's newsletter. We received the photocopies from Dr. Rodin and the following section is based on the information we received from her.

To make the campus more diverse, Judith Rodin, the President of University Pennsylvania, announced a four-point program. This program included, Additional annual allocation of \$1 million for the recruitment and retention of minority students and staff.

A \$20 million fund raising effort, with proceeds to create an endowment to improve diversity in the university.

Effort to secure \$250, 000 for research by Penn faculty and students to study the educational benefits of diversity in an university setting.

Appointment of a member of the standing faculty to serve as Special Advisor to the President, to monitor and report the progress made by the other initiatives.

Dr. Judith Rodin believes that one can learn the best and most “ from those who are different than us in race, culture and beliefs”. She explains that a diverse setting may certainly be complicated, but one would undergo real education with commitment and hard work to understand new perspectives.

As a member of the Ivy League, U Penn intends to set an example by creating an environment of diverse views and opinions, life that is good for all students and recognize and accommodate the diversity in the society.

She defines the goal as “... not to homogenize our differences, but to capitalize on and learn from them”. b) Universities in Florida***** Need the REFERENCE HERE *****According to the New Florida Survey, students say Diversity Education Brings Society together. Nearly two in three Florida students (64 percent) say that, on balance, America is growing apart and 66 percent think diversity education can bring society together. Two in three (66 percent) believe students should have to study different cultures in order to graduate. Nearly nine in ten (88 percent) say that courses and campus activities that emphasize diversity and diverse perspectives have a positive effect in terms of the education of students. As Eduardo J. Padron, President

of Miami-Dade Community College, mentions “ Higher education cannot occur in a distant ivory tower; our institutions can and should be laboratories to understand our changing world. Our students need to be prepared to deal with different people and cultures.” Independent surveys conducted on this topic in Universities produced the following results. Eighty-two percent of respondents agree that the changing characteristics of America’s population make diversity education necessary. Ninety percent think that, in the next generation, people will need to get along with people who are not like them.

Eighty-six percent say that the global economy makes it more important than ever for all of us to understand people who are different than ourselves. Seventy percent say they expect their future work environment to be more diverse; 19 percent say it will be about the same; and 11 percent expect it to be less diverse. Three in five (60 percent) say the ability to work in teams will be more important in the future, and 39 percent say individual knowledge and expertise. Ninety percent say that business schools should offer courses on managing a diverse work force.

More than half (55 percent) say that diversity and multicultural courses raise academic standards and one-third (33 percent) say they have no effect. Just 12 percent of students say these courses lower academic standards. More students of color than white students say these courses raise academic standards.

Fifty-eight percent of students say that diversity education creates division and conflict. Yet two in three (66 percent) say that, in order to graduate, every college student should have to study different cultures.

It is evident from these results that diversity is becoming increasingly popular among students, college boards and faculty. An enormous amount of money is being invested to improve education on this issue. Colleges are gearing their students to enter the diverse workplace. Education in this respect has truly extended beyond national frontiers. We are living in a heterogeneous society and tributes have to be paid to all universities addressing diversity to resolve conflicts and instead improve education. Drexel University and DiversityViews of Profs, students and board members. We are thankful to be a part of the diverse community in Drexel. There is definitely something to be gained and nothing to be lost.

Diversity: Pros and Cons) Pros: It can increase the creativity and innovation in organizations. In this era where companies constantly seek competitive advantage through new innovations, this can be of vital importance. Working in teams has become popular in academics as well as in the workplace. A diverse team can improve decision making by providing different perspectives on problems (Robbins, Organization Behavior – Pg. 14).

People look forward to work with other cultures as it is a personal learning process and they can recount their experiences to others.

The textbook mentions that diversity in teams can improve efficiency, as there is a lot of intellectual conflict within the members of the team.

Diversity in Universities can help prepare students for the increasing diversity in the workplace.

In universities, diversity establishes values and build personality. For e. g. experience with diversity may alter one's attitude to other cultures and eliminate any racist attitudes previously held. It is a process of self-education. It also helps students understand the cultures to which their friends belong to and broaden their knowledge of the world and traditions followed across the globe.

b) Cons: Diversity is like a double-edged sword and has to be managed properly. Dissatisfied employees in an organization could respond with high rates of absenteeism and turnover. It could also lead to lower performance on the job that could produce disastrous results. A major problem resulting in a diverse environment is the possibility of miscommunication. Words and expressions have different meanings across different cultures. Thus, there is a potential for the intended meaning not being communicated to the other party. Another disaster is the potential of cultural shocks. Certain members in a diverse setting may not be able to adjust with the other cultures and assimilate with it. This mental block could be a barrier and result in negative synergy.

Loss of originality could also be a long-term disadvantage of diversity. E. g. America is a diverse country. A Chinese person settled here, soon loses his typical Chinese culture and assimilates into the American culture. After some time, his behavior and attitudes are almost American, though his values may be Chinese. Thus we see that the situation is not entirely diverse as we expected it to be. With globalization, we observe that individualism suffers a blow and cultures are no longer distinct. The charm of a particular culture in a setting disappears.

Diversity when mishandled could result in interpersonal conflicts. Institutions could face situations where members go against one another.

Racism and negative attitude towards acceptance of other cultures, is not a con, but can be mentioned as a barrier to diversify a community. When a society tends to discriminate, it functions as a barrier to diversity, which we believe, affects the coherence in the community.

Diversity is known to improve the productivity of teams. However, diversity within teams increases the number of ideas and can be more time consuming if there is failure to agree to a certain suggestion.

Conclusion We have now discussed, in our opinion, the major facets of diversity in universities and, to a smaller extent, in the workplace. Most of our examples included the use or initiation of diversity programs in Universities and their success. These do not include those organizations and universities that have not realized the importance of diversity within their organism. In the introduction and in the section about diversity in the workplace, we mentioned the “ Global Village”. With more and more collaboration between the major firms, improved telecommunications and globalization, this global village is going to be complete shortly. More and more people are likely to work if foreign locations. We believe that the disadvantages of diversity are few and can be managed. Their benefits on the other hand, are immeasurable. We believe that at this instant we are at this University to educate others about our culture, our values and the traditions we follow. As a responsible member of a diverse community, our duty includes to learn what members from other cultures have to offer about

their practices and beliefs. We believe that this process is a lot more than just understanding their culture. It is a process of learning to work with others productively, achieve a common goal, take their input, combine with ours and produce the best results. Diversity in our opinion is important to attain SYNERGY. This project was a learning process for us. It helped us rediscover our definition and understanding of diversity. As we undertake our daily lives, we now look at our friends from different backgrounds with a different perspective. We have learnt to respect their ideas and value their opinion. As I mentioned earlier, our group members consisted of 6 Indians and a Pakistani. Though India and Pakistan are neighbors and their culture is believed to be the same, the main religion in both the countries is distinctively different. Diversity also includes religion. Through our association previously and currently, during the course of this project, we have exchanged several ideas. This is a small example, but definitely an indicator of the importance of diversity. In conclusion to this paragraph, I would like to emphasize that our group members are strongly advocating for diversity in any organism. It is important for all to realize the importance of diversity and work towards achieving a coherent diverse setting. Diversity helps us to appreciate people from all backgrounds. It teaches us to accept the drawbacks of others and learn from their strengths. A diverse organism will definitely possess the very best and with cooperation can overcome their cumulative drawbacks. To be concise, one can only gain and not lose by learning to live in a diverse community. We can create a community in which individual and group differences form a mosaic, not a melting pot that tries to mask them in a heterogeneous mix. We are a community of different identities, and we must create a context in which a true diversity of views,

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opinions, persons and groups, politics and perspectives, is nurtured, valued and shared (Judith Rodin, President of U PENN). We must learn to appreciate our similarities and differences and become responsible members in the community. When you have rich cultural diversity, you have something out of the classroom as well as in the classroom that you can take to the workplace in terms of intellectual development.