CHAPTER 5

Supporting Inclusive Campus Communities: A Student Development Perspective

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Not all students experience college in the same way. For some, attending university is the culmination of years of careful planning and anticipation, while others may view higher education as an intimidating and unfamiliar endeavor. First-time freshmen and transfer students who join our academic communities may be the first in their families to attend college, or may have relocated in order to pursue their studies—perhaps by moving to another state or region within the United States, or even moving to an entirely new country. Some students may find themselves within campus communities where their skin color, religion, language, or ethnicity are the exception to the norm. While student affairs programs and services have occupied an important place in the evolution of the U.S. higher education landscape, inclusive student development programming is becoming a greater priority as populations shift. Designing programs and services for increasingly diverse student bodies[1] requires

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a holistic view of student experiences. Today's students require a different approach to meeting their needs, particularly as those needs are often shaped and redefined by hostile social and political climates facing minority students.[2] I argue that a one-size-fits-all approach to student success and development misses important dynamic opportunities to value and embrace students from all backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Intentional, multicultural, and intercultural programs and services are deeply necessary—and cannot be accomplished through paying lip service and offering empty rhetoric. Rather, institutions must support the staff and faculty who are committed to providing programs, services, and spaces that demonstrate to our students, in words and in action, that we see them, that they matter, and that all are welcome.

This chapter draws from important lessons learned within the Multicultural Center and International Student Affairs (MCISA) office at Webster University, which promotes an inclusive approach to diversity programming by coordinating both international student affairs and multicultural affairs within one campus unit. We provide services and special programs that address the academic, social, and individual needs of all students, focusing primarily on cultural minorities and international students. We recognize that learning happens in both curricular and cocurricular[3] experiences, and use the hashtag #learninghappenseverywhere as a motto for the entire Student Affairs division. Our person-centered mission aims to "prepare citizens of the world through cultural awareness" by "encourag[ing] and foster[ing] an environment where a student's personal growth and development will enhance the retention and academic success of all students." Indeed, our aim is "to create a community environment that embraces individual differences and emphasizes the unity of humankind" (Multicultural Center and International Student Affairs, n.d.-a). The MCISA provides large-scale, campus-wide programming on diverse topics and themes, some focused on domestic diversity and others on international cultural diversity. Smaller-scale initiatives focus on intercultural skill building, as well as social justice awareness and education. We also serve as the organizing hub for international student orientation to campus on a nine-week, five-term cycle. Additionally, we advise, advocate for, and mentor student organizations, as well as international and domestic minority students on individual and small group bases.

To understand the value of the MCISA on our campus, it is important to acknowledge the office's central role for international and minority

students during times of crisis and uncertainty. When the Saint Louis community was rocked by the 2014 police shooting death of Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson, Missouri, for instance, the MCISA opened its doors as a gathering space for students, faculty, and staff. (Our office is located in a small ranch-style house that can accommodate small gatherings in its lounge, which is equipped with a few bean bag chairs, a small couch, and a scattering of chairs.) As in other times of crisis—including following the 9/11 terror attacks and the devastating 2011 tsunami in Japan—the MCISA became a touchpoint for members of our campus community who were experiencing all stages of confusion, anger, grief, and shock. In partnership with our colleagues in Counseling and Life Development, as well as Housing and Residential Life, the MCISA offered a safe space to talk over pots of coffee, to watch the news, and to seek solace in fellowship. In the days and weeks that followed, our community converged at the MCISA to weep and mourn, to share experiences from the "front lines" in Ferguson where many peaceful demonstrations turned violent, often as police fired rubber bullets and tear gas at nonviolent demonstrators. International students came with questions about what was happening, while their parents contacted us to ask if it was safe to send their children to school in the weeks to come. Similarly, international students contacted the MCISA for information and resources—as well as comfort and reassurances—when the Trump administration announced travel bans on resettled refugees and immigrants from select countries in 2017. That same year, the acquittal of Saint Louis police office Jason Stockley in the shooting death of Anthony Lamar Smith renewed calls for systemic change to end police brutality and the extrajudicial killing of minority citizens in our city and beyond; many of our students were splitting their time between classes and protests, putting their bodies on the line in their calls for human rights protection. When White supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, international students visited our office to ask simple-yet-heartbreaking questions such as "Will they march in our city and on our campus, too?"[4]

While critics may argue that these specialized services and programs are supplemental or redundant, my experience with the MCISA indicates how important and affirming this emphasis on diversity and inclusion is for under-served students, as well as for the Webster community as a whole. As higher education seeks to meet the needs of a changing student demographic, inclusive campus programs and services must respond

to under-served populations in direct ways—as well as aim for greater impact by positioning intercultural and diversity learning within the wider campus community. Student development programming serves to support student learning and engagement through intentional cocurricular opportunities. Taking a student development practitioner perspective in support of the ideals associated with human rights education, this chapter examines how student life programming can contribute to creating a more rights-protective, inclusive, and culturally aware campus. It begins by defining the terms "diversity" and "inclusion" as they relate to student development, thus highlighting the importance of campus community and belonging for student success. With these key terms in mind, the chapter highlights three components for designing inclusive student support: orientation to campus (particularly for international and underrepresented minority students), development through mentoring, and cultural and social programs.

Defining Diversity and Inclusion for Student Development

While the terms "diversity" and "inclusion" appear frequently in mission and vision statements across higher education, these terms are often approached in varying ways. For the purposes of this chapter, diversity "refers to the variety of similarities and differences among people, including but not limited to: gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, native or indigenous origin, age, generation, sexual orientation, culture, religion, belief system, marital status, parental status, socioeconomic difference, appearance, language and accent, disability, mental health, education, geography, nationality, work style, work experience, job role and function, thinking style and personality type" (O'Mara and Richter 2016, 1). I have opted for this expansive definition because it encompasses the wide ways in which humanity organizes itself, how we define our identities, and how those identities intersect and overlap. By outlining the ways in which we are similar and different—and also how some parts of our identity are ascribed and some are achieved—we can engage in dialogue about the ways in which we navigate our world, experience discrimination and privilege, and examine how hierarchies serve to support systems of oppression that can inhibit students from achieving their full potential on our campuses. Defining and describing diversity in this

detailed manner thus helps to uncover hidden aspects of power and privilege that exist within higher education, since dominant culture tends to ignore or dismiss the experiences of marginalized groups when their lived experiences do not align with dominant narratives.

Within this chapter, inclusion can be defined as "a dynamic state of operating in which diversity is leveraged to create a fair, healthy, and high-performing organization or community" (O'Mara and Richter 2016, 1). From this perspective, "[a]n inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated and valued, for who they are and for their contributions toward organizational and societal goals" (O'Mara and Richter 2016, 1). Much has been written about the distinction between equity, equality, and justice in diversity literature, but suffice to say that treating all students exactly the same way (equality) does not provide for an inclusive environment if not all students have what they need to be successful, particularly if systemic barriers are present. Indeed, campuses are increasingly challenged to provide structures of support to meet the needs of diverse student populations in ways that may stretch the capacities of institutions to deliver. And much like the foundation of modern human rights, building inclusive communities ultimately rests on a commitment to respecting inherent human dignity; "the truth of personal identity is at stake when any individual is treated as if he or she is not a human being like any other, and therefore treated as more or less than human" (Kateb 2011, 10). Bernardo M. Ferdman (2014) argues, "focusing on inclusion not only allows doing diversity work that emphasizes reducing negative and problematic processes—such as those grounded in prejudice, discrimination, and oppression—but also fosters a positive vision of what might replace those undesired behaviors, policies, and systems" (11).

Community building, sense of belonging, and student support form the foundation of successful inclusive student development programming. It is not solely the individual student's level of involvement that determines student success, but rather it encompasses a much broader understanding of why such involvement can have a positive impact—especially for underrepresented minority and international students. Vincent Tinto (2012) explains that involvement, "academic or social, do not occur in a vacuum. They take place within specific social and cultural settings and among individuals whose values give them meaning…

Decisions to stay or leave are shaped, in part, by the meaning students attach to their involvement, the sense that their involvement is valued and that the community with which they interact is supportive of their presence on campus" (66). Therefore, inclusive student support and student development programming must aim to build and sustain a sense of belonging for students, while also creating community connections and advocating for positive social change on campus—thus leading to greater student retention among populations that traditional models of support do not always reach.

Designing Inclusive Student Support

Orientation to Campus

If we take the norms of educational rights, diversity, and inclusion seriously, then creating a framework of student support from the very beginning—starting with orientation to campus—is imperative. The existing literature provides important starting points; for instance, Tinto (2012) categorizes the key conditions for student success and retention into four areas: expectations, support, assessment and feedback, and involvement (8). My own work with the MCISA has shown me that orientation programs can play an integral role in clearly outlining expectations for student success, celebrating a commitment to diversity through diverse leadership teams, and providing workshops for affinity groups to connect within the overall campus. Yet if we consider a linear model of student development as simply "clusters of necessary functions in a sequence…entering services, supporting services, and culminating services," it becomes clear how many universities limit their programming for international students and underrepresented minorities to basics such as "recruitment, admissions, financial aid, employment, orientation, educational planning, academic skills assessment, prior learning assessment, and registration" (Chickering and Reisser 1993, 438). These seemingly comprehensive services often fail to provide support and opportunities for engagement that can strongly impact success and retention. Kumea Shorter-Gooden (2014) notes that "a useful framework for considering the degree and depth of diversity and inclusion in colleges and universities is to focus on four components: institutional commitment, access and success, infused programs, and an affirming climate" (455).

Therefore, inclusive programming starts with institutional will and a supportive climate on arrival—but it certainly cannot end there.

At Webster University, the MCISA has customized international student orientation into a hybrid model that includes pre-arrival peer mentoring, access to an online orientation called "Before You Board: International Student Orientation Online," and airport pickup by staff and student leaders. These support services combine with more traditional on-campus orientation programs that take place in the week before classes start, as well as a variety of workshops (often in partnership with other campus offices such as our Academic Resource Center, University Library, First Year Experience and Undergraduate Persistence, Career Planning and Development, and International Services). In our largest terms of entry (August and January), the MCISA offers an international orientation within the campus-wide university orientation, providing specialized workshops on cultural adjustment, visa and immigration rules and regulations, and academic expectations in the U.S. classroom. This programming constitutes an operational balancing act with entering student cohorts every eight to nine weeks throughout the year; international students who arrive in October, for instance, need the same support as students who arrive during the more traditional entry terms in August and January, but campus-wide programming is designed on a 16-week semester model. We have developed an interconnected web of services to help provide the necessary support for entering students, but of course these programs and services are only successful if students participate.

One of the MCISA's most successful initiatives impacting international student success is our orientation leadership and mentoring program. New student orientation leaders and connection leaders (peer mentors) represent a diverse cross-section of the student body, selected for their passion for serving others and their dedication to encouraging involvement on campus. Based on longstanding success of the campus-wide model for orienting new undergraduates, the MCISA recently partnered with the First Year Experience and Undergraduate Persistence (FYE-UP) Programs to expand new student programs to include a small group of International Connection Leaders (ICLs). The ICLs provide pre-arrival mentoring to new international students and expand opportunities for international student leaders to work for/with orientation programs throughout the academic year. In its first few years of programming, the ICL program has already exhibited positive outcomes for

new student adjustment, engagement, and sense of belonging among our international students. We have found that new international students value the pre-arrival ICL outreach—including the experience of being welcomed personally at the airport—and are becoming increasing involved with on-campus orientation programs and other programming. Undergraduate orientation also includes special receptions and workshops for first-generation college students and African-American students, with intentional focus on connecting students to resources and to one another. Graduate international students often play key roles in leadership of international orientation, as well as in mentoring new graduate students and leading student organizations. Visible, active, and engaged international and minority student leaders serve to support new students in seeing possibilities for personal and professional advancement and in envisioning their own place in the campus leadership community.

While the procedural and informational aspects of orientation are necessary, orientation for international and minority students serves a more important function of planting the seeds of social and academic membership (Chickering and Reisser 1993)—thus contributing to a positive sense of belonging and engagement that will bear fruit for student success throughout the student experience. While we continue to have aspirational goals for improving and increasing the capacity of orientation programs, focusing on building community and sense of belonging must remain at the forefront of these initiatives. Indeed, such orientations serve as the key first steps for scaffolding continued learning experiences in the cocurricular space.

Student Development Through Mentoring

A closer look at the impact of peer and staff mentoring reveals the central importance that mentors can occupy in bridging international and minority students with the broader campus community. Studies show that mentoring is especially important for low-income and first-generation college students (Torres 2004; Crisp and Cruz 2009), providing safe haven and emotional support for many minority students who might otherwise feel isolated and unsupported (see Tinto 2012, 28–29). Similarly, mentoring programs can provide an essential link for international students who are navigating new cultural norms while also facing the challenges of higher education. Indeed, research points to the role that peer mentoring can take in providing social support: “Student

groups or communities that provide social support, especially during the critical first year of college, may take the form of residential settings, extracurricular activities, and in some cases in shared learning programs like learning communities" (Tinto 2012, 28–29).

At Webster, the significance of mentorship is clear. For instance, our ICL program extends the positive impact of orientation with relationship building, cultural adjustment, community cohesion, and leadership development. Our ICLs meet with new international students on a regular basis, especially in the first few weeks of the semester. Additionally, they are responsible for planning two events for mentee interaction per month, or participating in MCISA or Campus Activities events with mentees. In conversations with mentees, ICLs serve as cultural informants, helping international students meet Americans, navigate new norms and values, and understand expectations. ICLs familiarize new students and family members with campus services and building locations, explain academic opportunities and procedures to new students, and serve as a resource for students by answering questions from a peer-to-peer perspective. Most importantly, ICLs foster an environment that helps mentees develop their identity as Webster University community members and global citizens. We have observed increased interaction between international and domestic Connection Leaders, while ICL mentors are frequently involved on campus with organizations such as the Student Government Association (SGA), Residential Housing Association (RHA), International Student Association (ISA), Self Defense Club, WebsterLEADS (a student leadership program), Career Planning and Development peer career counselors, Student Ambassadors, and Gorlok Guides (a campus tour program). One mentor, for instance, helped form the Graduate Student Association and encouraged her mentees to petition SGA to form the "Viva the Yoga" club and SANGAM Indian Student Association. These connections grew international student leadership and involvement on campus, with many of the mentors and mentees receiving Student Leadership Awards.

Beyond peer mentoring programs, mentoring by the MCISA's professional staff is another important aspect of the work we do. Students seek out information and support on all aspects of their adjustment to college life and path to graduation. This includes social, cultural, and academic adjustment; orientation to campus and community; taxes and immigration regulations; local resources; and a variety of personal, financial, and career topics. In our office, a coordinated team meets with

individual students for one-on-one appointments, drop-ins, and small group meetings; this team includes the Associate Dean and Director, the Assistant Director for International Student Affairs, the Coordinator of Minority Students, Department Associate, and a graduate assistant. The professional staff counsels and mentors students on all the aspects of retention and success, often describing our office as a "first stop" when students are unsure where to begin. When students are at risk of dropping out or failing academically, for instance, we offer holistic advising and mentoring while serving as a bridge for active referrals to necessary resources and contacts. By building personal relationships based on trust and shared rapport, our professional staff provides encouragement and assistance, contributes to a greater sense of belonging and community within campus, and builds a core of students who regularly attend programs and volunteer for leadership opportunities.

Mentoring can also take shape in less formal ways through relationships between students and community participants, as is the case with the Webster International Friendship Program. Through this informal, social program, international students are paired with community friends to share and exchange cultural knowledge, form relationships through shared experiences, and support cultural learning of all participants. "Webster International Friendship program may extend beyond sharing meals and could include invitations to international students to participate in family events, holidays, off campus events and excursions, exchanging phone calls and letters. Many people like to share meals, go on outings and celebrate holidays together" (Multicultural Center and International Student Affairs, n.d.-b). Students benefit by learning more about American life and customs by sharing personal experiences with local residents. Community members benefit through learning more about the world, often including being exposed to cultures that participants have not personally experienced. The program has grown from less than 20 participants in the first year to more than 100 in the past two years. This program helps extend the university's welcome through the community beyond campus, supporting a greater sense of belonging and increasing cultural awareness.

Cultural and Social Programs

Much of the literature focused on student success and persistence analyzes the conditions by which community is built and sustained for

university students, highlighting the value of campus community as a key indicator of student development. Cultural and social programs play a central role for building such community within universities, particularly when it comes to bridging differences and creating a culture of respect for diversity and inclusion. Practically, community building programs serve to foster higher levels of student development when such programs are offered regularly enough to "provide a foundation for ongoing relationships" as well as "provide opportunities for collaboration and shared interests, for engaging in meaningful activities and facing common problems together" (Chickering and Reisser 1993, 398–399). It is important that groups are "small enough so that no one feels superfluous" and include people from diverse backgrounds, and that they serve "as a reference group, where there are boundaries that indicate who is 'in' and who is 'out'" (Chickering and Reisser 1993, 398–399).

Cultural and social program development is most successful when designed to engage with faculty, staff, and students throughout our intellectual network, thus bridging gaps between student affairs and academic affairs. Indeed, student development professionals and faculty work in tandem to provide learning experiences for students, in the classroom and beyond; "if teaching faculty are the bricks, student development staff are the mortar. Both must be in good condition or the building will crumble" (Chickering and Reisser 1993, 427). One method for building institutional capacity for integrative work with faculty and staff emphasizes the collaborative planning of cocurricular programs and events (Ferrin and Paris 2015, 15). By building intentional opportunities for diverse student groups to engage with one another—such as programs with cultural and human rights themes—we can advance student learning associated with intercultural competence development.

The MCISA has a long history of providing cultural and social programs, all valuable for their capacity for building campus community.[5] One of our cornerstone cultural programs is the annual International Festival, or I Fest, which is held every spring to celebrate and showcase various cultural performances. In 2017, the theme "Together in Community" focused the event on local international talent and integrated an international fashion show, which was organized by the International Student Association. The festival regularly draws more than 300 attendees, creating a visible community space for valuing cultural traditions and to facilitate experiential aspects of culture—which

has included storytelling, drumming, dancing, sampling international cuisine, and participating in cultural activities such as creating art and playing games. This event is made possible by the dedication of a staff, student, and community volunteer team—as well as partnerships with student organizations and campus departments; in 2017, more than 90 volunteers helped pick up foods at local restaurants, decorate the university's gymnasium, serve cultural foods, lead activities, and welcome guests. During the 2017 I Fest, we collected "learning reflections" from participants. Among the responses were received were insights such as: "every culture is different but it's fun to learn about them all"; "a lot of the Latinx dances have African roots"; and "Indian dances tell a story." These quick reflections indicate that stimulating curiosity about the world helps students connect with learning outside of the classroom.[6]

Conclusion

The unique needs of diverse and changing student populations demand that we take diversity and inclusion seriously. As Ferdman (2014) notes, "the practice of inclusion is dynamic and ongoing: because inclusion is created and re-created continuously—in both small and large ways—organizations, groups, and individuals cannot work on becoming inclusive just once and then assume that they are done; it is a recursive and never-ending approach to work and life" (13). With concern for recognizing and respecting individual differences, Arthur W. Chickering and Linda Reisser (1993) caution that without attention to these topics, we are "likely to face increasing social conflict, a two-tier society, and economic stagnation" (473). This chapter challenges us to rethink our institutional futures with inclusivity and respect for human dignity as central frameworks in order to better prepare for, and to embrace, the changing landscape of higher education. By leveraging our own experiences and working collaboratively together as faculty and student affairs staff, we can better understand the complexity of inclusion in higher education—and find ways to advance effectiveness, team building, inclusive student services, and intercultural program development.

If higher education is to serve a public good in providing high quality learning experiences for an increasingly diverse student body, then fully examining how inclusion of diverse students is manifested and the spaces in which learning occurs—both inside and outside of the classroom—is

necessary for better understanding the ways in which students develop and succeed. The value of higher education not only comes from the credential achieved upon graduation, but through the transformational capacity of student growth and development. When diversity and inclusion are woven throughout the university experience, especially in cocurricular and social settings, students learn in multiple directions—from one another, with each other, and through engaging with faculty, staff, and administration. Inclusive student support becomes not only desirable, but also increasingly relevant and necessary for multi-dimensional learning to occur. Building relationships with students—ranging from admission, to advising, to classroom experiences, to student life, to alumni development—should continuously celebrate and highlight the ways in which students make unique contributions to their campus community, thus building a culture of respect for diversity, inclusion, and human dignity.

Notes

1. According to a Pew Research Center (2015) study on population growth and change through 2065, for instance, non-Hispanic Whites are projected to constitute less than half of the U.S. population by 2055 and 46% by 2065. In the near future, no racial or ethnic group will make up a majority of the U.S. population.
2. Consider the so-called "Trump Effect" referring to increased hate speech, hate crimes, violence, and intimidation against minorities in the United States in the year following the 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump (see Potok 2017).
3. Use of the term "cocurricular" is intentional (as opposed to "extracurricular"), since it emphasizes that learning outside of the classroom is an important component of a student's education—not something that is merely additional (Peck 2016).
4. While the MCISA doesn't have all the answers for upholding rights and ensuring social justice, we can at least provide a space for students to process their experiences without having to explain their pain or confusion. Before and since the Ferguson uprising, minority and international students appreciate being present, without judgment, in a space that feels safe from outside turmoil. Our lounge space and sense of personal welcome to all students forms an integral part of how we do our work in support of diversity and inclusion at Webster University. It is important to keep in mind, however, that our space is small, our staff is stretched to capacity or

beyond, and our resources are limited. Much of our work is done on a personal, individual level in situations like these. The ability to dialogue with and get to know our students provides the relationship-building needed to support marginalized communities. This model is not a perfect one, but it is a deeply important one for students who need us—and who seek us out for services and support they often cannot access elsewhere.

5. Past MCISA events that are not detailed in this chapter include Ramadan Iftar potluck dinners, local excursions to nearby attractions (such as the Missouri History Museum and Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site), Diwali celebrations, International Drum Festival, Kane Smego Spoken Word, Step Afrika, Black History Month Read In, *Selma* film screening, Free Hugs with Ken Nwadike, and lectures by an array of inspiring scholars, activists, and artists.
6. Notably, the spring of 2017 also brought the first Egyptian Night to Webster University. Students organized cultural speeches, trivia, videos, belly dance performance, traditional foods, and henna art demonstrations. Much like I Fest, this program stood out for its high-attendance and its notable cross-section of participants from throughout our campus community, including an array of students, community members, and alumni. Many of the student organizers were preparing to graduate and return home to Egypt, so the event was symbolically important for marking their time at Webster and sharing their culture and traditions with the campus that they had called a second home.

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