

# **Collaborative Efforts: Raising Students' Multicultural Consciousness through Academic Affairs and Student Affairs Partnerships**

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This article presents the need to shift language around multicultural competence to multicultural consciousness in the context of college students' learning and development. Engaging in collaboration between academic and student affairs around multicultural consciousness supports student learning. Finally, the article outlines examples of three collaborations that can enrich students' learning and development in the area of multicultural consciousness.

*“People collaborate when the job they face is too big, is too urgent, or requires too much knowledge for one person or group to do alone.”*

(American Association for Higher Education [AAHE], American College Personnel Association [ACPA], & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 1998, p. 1)

For decades, student affairs literature has stressed the importance of collaborating with faculty in academic affairs to enhance student learning and development. College student learning and development demand a collaborative effort, as the task of fostering students' holistic development is far too great for a single person or entity to accomplish. The *Student Learning Imperative* (American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 1996) and *Powerful Partnerships* (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998) focused on creating learning environments that enhance student learning and development. More recently, *Learning Reconsidered* (Keeling, 2004) and *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006) argued that student learning and development are activities that must be shared between student affairs and academic affairs. These documents outline seven shared learning outcomes for college students: cognitive complexity, knowledge acquisition and application, humanitarianism, civic engagement, interpersonal and intrapersonal competence, practical competence, and persistence and academic achievement.

Although each of these outcomes is important, this article will emphasize the need for collaborative efforts between academic affairs and student affairs to achieve the outcome of humanitarianism (i.e., understanding and appreciating human difference and developing cultural competency).

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This article presents the need to shift language around multicultural competence to multicultural consciousness in the context of college students' learning and development. Next, the article identifies the importance of collaboration between academic and student affairs around multicultural consciousness. Finally, the article outlines examples of three collaborations that can enrich students' learning and development in the area of multicultural consciousness.

Humanitarianism is an ethic of kindness extended universally and actualized as an understanding and appreciation of difference and cultural competency. This is often referenced in higher education as multicultural competency and is part of the mission of higher education (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012; Keeling, 2006; Rogers, 2003). As the United States—and with it U.S. institutions of higher education—becomes increasingly diverse, multicultural competence has become a vital imperative for both academic and student affairs. Faculty and student affairs practitioners in both fields recognize the urgent need for students to develop multicultural competence and the key role universities play in helping students explore and understand social complexities (Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, & Shuford, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). Research has shown that college attendance promotes racial understanding, increases openness to diversity, and advances knowledge of societal and systemic disparities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). By including the development of multicultural competence as an element of their mission statements, institutions of higher education acknowledge the need for students to possess cultural and global competence to succeed in a diverse world (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Because multicultural competence is a core value of higher education, and because academic and student affairs share the responsibility for college student learning and development (Keeling, 2006), student affairs practitioners must collaborate with faculty to

achieve these outcomes. For decades, student affairs researchers have investigated the nature and the value of students' connections with faculty both inside and outside the classroom (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1996). The scholarly literature has documented the impact of faculty-student interaction on student learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Relationships with faculty have been shown to increase student retention, advance career development, and enhance knowledge. The benefits of these connections transcend classroom learning, demonstrating the critical role of faculty in influencing students' receptiveness to diverse ideas (Kodama & Takesue, 2011; Milem, Change, & Antonio, 2005). Partnering with academic affairs will increase the likelihood that multicultural competence will be integrated into students' collective college experience.

### **Multicultural Competence**

The concept of multicultural competence, which emerged from the field of psychology and the counseling profession, has been adopted and adapted by student affairs professionals (Pope et al., 2004). In student affairs scholarship, *competence* is defined by three constructs: awareness, knowledge, and skills (Pope et al., 2004). Cultural competence encompasses an individual's awareness of assumptions, biases, and values; understanding of worldviews; knowledge of cultural groups; and ability to develop intervention techniques and strategies for working with diverse individuals (Pope et al., 2004). Although the phrase *cultural competency* originally referred to a skill necessary for professionals, today it is often applied to college students to identify an outcome of college matriculation.

However, some researchers have recommended a shift in terminology from *competence* to *consciousness* to more accurately capture the goal of fostering multicultural understanding among college students (Dean, 2014; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Landerman, 2003). Both competence and consciousness suggest a level of awareness and knowledge, yet they differ in

their constructs of interpersonal skill and disposition. *Interpersonal skill* refers to the ability to interact effectively with others. *Interpersonal disposition* refers to one's attitudes and beliefs about interactions with those who are different from oneself. Interpersonal disposition is a necessary component of the interpersonal skill construct; however, interpersonal disposition does not imply that an individual puts these beliefs into practice by associating or interacting with those who are different.

Because one's attitudes toward those who are different from oneself are key to fostering interpersonal relationships with those diverse others, the construct of interpersonal disposition still fits within the theoretical framework of awareness, knowledge, and skills. However, interpersonal disposition is more applicable than interpersonal skill within the context of college students' development. The growth that occurs is primarily in the area of attitudes toward difference, rather than in the mastery of relationships across differences. Students are more likely to develop multicultural awareness than to achieve competence during their college years. Recognizing that students' consciousness is complex and continually evolving during college is particularly important in understanding the distinction between multicultural consciousness and competence among young adults, as well as the proposed shift in language (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005).

### **Multicultural Consciousness**

It is necessary to define and understand the role of academic and student affairs in order for them to collaborate and foster students' multicultural consciousness. There are many dimensions of diversity encompassed in the term *multicultural*; some of the most frequently referenced include race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and religion (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Johnson, 2001; King & Baxter

Magolda, 2005). Multicultural consciousness encompasses three components: *awareness of self*, *knowledge of difference*, and *interpersonal disposition* (Dean, 2014). These are defined as follows:

1. *Awareness of self*: acknowledgement and appreciation of one's own cultural heritage and how that influences biases, values, beliefs, and emotional responses to culturally different populations; recognition of one's own limitations regarding competence (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1994; Marcia, 1966; Reynolds, 2001).
2. *Knowledge of difference*: acknowledgement of diverse beliefs and values; specific knowledge about others' cultural heritage and sociopolitical contexts and familiarity with specific populations (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry 1968/1999).
3. *Interpersonal disposition*: willingness to interact with diverse others; willingness to form relationships in which multiple perspectives exist; attitude of acceptance toward intergroup friendships, relationships, and multiple identities (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Johnson, 2001; Kappler, 1998; Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Nagda & Maxwell, 2011).

The phrase *multicultural competence* conveys a skill set developed by counseling educators and student affairs practitioners, and represents the actualization of these professionals' knowledge and awareness (Pope & Mueller, 2000; Pope et al., 2004). Therefore, although this phrase is more widely used in education than the phrase *multicultural consciousness*, for capturing college students' depth of understanding of themselves, others, and

difference itself, the term *consciousness* is more descriptive of the growth and development that takes place among college students.

### **The Value of Collaboration**

It is vital to understand the importance of collaboration and its impact on student learning and development before delving into specific collaborative opportunities. Academic and student affairs share responsibility for college student learning and development (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; Keeling, 2006). The student affairs literature discusses at length the profound impact faculty can have on student learning and development (Astin, 1993, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1996). Research has also shown that college students who have meaningful interactions with faculty are more likely to persist and graduate (Astin, 1999; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Furthermore, interaction with faculty increases students' academic and social satisfaction (Braxton, Hirschy & McClendon, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); academic achievement and intellectual and personal development (Lamport, 1993; Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011); and global awareness (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Moreover, students are influenced not only by what takes place in the classroom, but also by what occurs in other areas of their college experience (Astin, 1993). Students who engage in learning inside the classroom that is reinforced by co-curricular activities outside the classroom learn and benefit the most (Cabrera et al., 2002). This growth is demonstrated in a variety of capacities, including openness to diverse perspectives—a key element of multicultural consciousness. Thus, students exposed to a variety of cultures and diverse ways of thinking through intentional learning environments both inside and outside the classroom have the potential for the most significant growth in the area of multicultural consciousness.

### Examples of Collaboration

Academic affairs and student affairs professionals can collaborate in a variety of ways to develop students' multicultural consciousness. In addition to the value of collaboration itself, one of the most effective ways to impact learning in this area is to link classroom learning with co-curricular activities. The following list is not exhaustive but offers a few specific examples of how student affairs can partner with academic affairs to focus on multicultural consciousness both inside and outside the classroom.

#### First-Year Experience Programs

First-year experience programs take a variety of forms, from first-year seminar courses to live-on requirements associated with co-curricular expectations. Recognizing that the first year is pivotal for connecting students with the institution and for student retention (Astin, 1993; Tinto 1996), academic affairs and student affairs personnel should collaborate to create a first-year experience that links curricular and co-curricular experiences. Such programs often focus on connecting students with peers, faculty, staff, and resources on campus. These programs are also an opportunity to focus on multicultural consciousness, particularly students' developing *awareness of self*.

Developmentally, many traditional-aged, first-year students are dualistic in their thinking; thinking in mutually exclusive ways usually represented as right and wrong (Perry 1968/1999). Through students' college experiences, their capacity for knowing increases as they advance from a dualistic understanding of the world to multiplistic ways of knowing; realizing things are not always absolute and the importance of context (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Kegan, 1994; Perry 1968/1999). These shifts in understanding are achieved when individuals encounter experiences where they question their knowledge, beliefs and the systems currently in place (Kegan, 1994).



As part of a first-year program or seminar, faculty and student affairs professionals can facilitate such a shift by engaging students in discussions of their values, beliefs and biases about race, gender, sexual orientation, and other areas of multiculturalism both inside and outside of the classroom.

Common readings are often part of first-year experiences and provide a vehicle for academic affairs and student affairs practitioners to engage students in discussing complex issues. Moreover, thoughtfully selected readings that present multicultural situations may foster multiplistic thinking and encourage students to reflect on their own beliefs, values, and emotional responses to diverse populations. Specifically, this is a way for faculty to partner with student affairs practitioners who work in various cultural centers. Student affairs professionals from these areas have expertise in engaging students around specific social identities. They can facilitate classroom discussions around race, gender, and sexual orientation at a systemic level and an individual-student level. As such, student affairs professionals should also approach faculty to offer their expertise. Furthermore, student affairs should invite academic affairs to participate in out-of-classroom activities within first-year experiences such as orientation or new student welcome. Academic and student affairs partnerships in first-year experiences not only aid in acclimating students to institutions but they also foster a seamless learning environment, which encourages students to reflect and apply classroom learning to life experiences (Nesheim et al., 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Campuses wishing to establish or enhance their first-year experience program will find abundant resources available to aid them in developing effective collaborations (University of South Carolina, n.d.)

## Living-Learning Programs

Living-learning programs offer opportunities for students to live and study together on the basis of similar interests. These programs, which are housed in different offices depending on the campus, offer opportunities for various areas of student affairs to collaborate with each other as well as with academic programs. In many of these programs, students take courses as a cohort and engage in specified co-curricular opportunities together. Such programs require collaboration between academic and student affairs to integrate these elements into a cohesive learning experience for students. Collaborative living-learning programs can reinforce academic learning outside the formal classroom thus contributing to optimal learning environments. Additionally, living-learning programs have the potential to significantly impact students' *knowledge of difference* through shared academic experiences and shared living spaces.

Although living-learning programs are organized differently at various institutions, such programs are generally characterized by complementary academic and co-curricular components and by their potential to help students connect in-classroom learning with experiential co-curricular experiences (Kodama & Takesue, 2011). Such environments foster active, collaborative learning as well as faculty-student engagement. Students thereby feel more academically and socially connected with the university, which enhances learning outcomes, increases student satisfaction with the college experience, and ultimately improves the likelihood of persistence and degree completion (Astin, 1999; Kodama & Takesue, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1996). In this way, living-learning programs have the ability to significantly influence student learning, providing an ideal context in which to focus on developing students' multicultural consciousness.

For example, students in an engineering and computer science living-learning community could learn about the gender and racial inequities within these fields as part of a course. Recognizing the vast underrepresentation of women and minorities in these fields provides a springboard to discussing the sociopolitical contexts impacting race, gender, and other social identities. Student affairs practitioners could provide a speaker or program in the residence hall reiterating these concepts and reinforcing learning. Such learning opportunities advance students' knowledge and understanding of diverse groups, values, and contexts. Additional resources for researching and implementing living-learning programs are available through the Association of College and University Housing Officers - International (ACUHO-I, n.d).

### **Service-Learning Courses**

Service-learning courses on college campuses have grown exponentially since the mid-1990s (Eyler & Giles, 1999; University of Southern California, n.d.). Service-learning combines community service with academic courses in intentional ways, focusing student learning and development while also benefiting the community. In addition, students participate in a variety of reflection exercises that help them examine critical issues, connect their service to the coursework, develop civic skills and values, and make meaning of their experiences (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kodama & Takesue, 2011). Service-learning experiences provide some of the richest opportunities to enhance student learning in all three areas of multicultural consciousness as they often challenge student's critical thinking and worldviews (Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, service-learning courses can influence students' *interpersonal disposition* through classroom and experiential learning.

Service-learning offers opportunities for engagement across all functional areas of student affairs. From the disability resource center to housing, from leadership and service to

career services, service-learning can bridge academic affairs and student affairs to create collaborative opportunities with a substantial and lasting impact on student learning. Student affairs practitioners have connections with the community, often through functional areas, that would aid faculty in identifying and securing community partnerships. Service-learning courses send students into the community to engage in real-life, practical service with diverse individuals and populations in need. In such settings, students inevitably interact with individuals who are different from themselves in terms of race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, education, disability, or other forms of diversity. Student affairs practitioners have expertise in understanding students and can utilize this knowledge to provide reflective and group processing experiences based on students' development. Practitioners can help faculty craft classroom and co-curricular experiences that challenge and support students while understanding their readiness to engage with these complex topics (Sanford, 1996). Furthermore, this is an opportunity for student affairs professionals within various units to reach out to faculty to incorporate co-curricular experiences into academic courses.

For example, a practitioner working in career services could reach out to business faculty to create a service-learning experience working with a local agency to help provide community members with skills such as interviewing, writing, or budgeting. These courses provide students' experiences to apply practically what they are learning and also reflect upon the opportunities and disparities within society. Student affairs practitioners can cultivate these partnerships within the community, and both faculty and practitioners can prepare students in the classroom for these service-learning experiences.

To enhance student learning and development in the area of interpersonal disposition, both academic affairs and student affairs personnel must be intentional in creating connections

between coursework and community service, carefully incorporating reflection exercises to help students understand differences between individuals and groups and also reflect on their willingness to engage with diverse others. Service-learning courses may increase students' openness to and exploration of diverse ideas, perspectives, and understandings (Milem et al., 2005). Campuses desiring to implement effective service-learning collaborations can utilize Campus Compact as a valuable service-learning resource (Campus Compact, n.d.). Although each of these examples focuses on an individual dimension of multicultural consciousness, any or all of the three could be the focal point of a student affairs/academic affairs collaboration. Furthermore, student affairs practitioners should initiate these partnerships with faculty or academic programs, suggesting these collaborations or others, in order to engage student learning and development around the dimensions of multicultural consciousness.

### Conclusion

As noted in this article's epigraph, "People collaborate when the job they face is too big, is too urgent, or requires too much knowledge for one person or group to do alone" (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998, p. 1). Developing college students' multicultural consciousness is a job too large, too pressing, and too vital for a single individual or entity on a college campus to pursue alone. The role of collaboration between academic and student affairs in positively impacting student learning is well established in the research literature (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; ACPA, 1996; Keeling, 2006; Kodama & Takesue, 2011). Collaborations between academic affairs and student affairs are not only beneficial, but imperative. Whether through first-year experience programs, living-learning communities, service-learning courses, or a variety of other collaborative possibilities, impacting students' *awareness of self, knowledge of difference, and interpersonal disposition* is crucial to enhancing multicultural consciousness

through curricular and co-curricular experiences. Such collaborative efforts are uniquely capable of positively impacting student learning and development in numerous areas, and the expansion of multicultural consciousness represents just one outcome that results from successful partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs.

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