

# A New Direction for Diversity Directors

By Elena Yee

Ten years ago when I first entered into the work of diversity at a small liberal arts Christian college in California or also known as a PWI (predominately White institution), I knew that two things needed to change: the name of the office and the focus of the programs and outreach. I felt that the descriptor “multicultural” was fraught with the stereotype that the office was only for students of color, i.e. “Multicultural” students. In fact, the office *was* geared towards this group of students, which was absolutely appropriate for when it was created in the 1990s. Another change was to be more inclusive and find ways to frame diversity so that White students may get involved for their own cultural competence as well as for citizenship and social justice. Year after year students of color has told me that the best way to support them was to educate White students to understand and value their culture as well as leverage their privilege for justice and equity.

Recently I was reading the latest version of the [CAS](#) (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education) Self-Assessment guide for Multicultural Student Programs and Services (MSPS). It stated, “...Although underserved populations (Black/Latino) continue to be a special group to nurture and provide support services for retention and graduation rate improvement, the rapidly changing racial demographics of Asian American, multiracial, and international students have a great impact on previously dominant White institutions and great a need for intercultural dialogue programs and services to foster an inclusive campus. Given the changing demographics, limiting MSPS to historically underrepresented and oppressed groups risks the prospect of marginalization and isolation of those very groups. Involving all students (including White students) in diversity education programs is vital in community building and creating a welcoming, integrated climate. As a consequence, more multicultural offices have changed their names to signal the evolving changes to the title of Intercultural Offices.”

It is good to know that I, as well as others, were, and are, on the right track in being more inclusive and changing office names. Yet despite these changes, progress in the work of diversity has had its fits and starts. When hard times come too often, MSPS will get the short shaft when it comes to resources in staffing and budgets or even eliminated altogether.

What should we do to assure that our offices are seen as a vital part of the college’s mission? Here are five recommendations that have worked for me so far:

1. Clearly state how your office meets the mission of your institution. Most if not all colleges and universities have wording in their mission statement about educating students to be world citizens, to be deep thinkers, etc. Find that wording and weave it into your office’s mission, vision and goals.
2. Re-evaluate your programs and services to see if they can be more inclusive in its outreach and student leadership. In my office, the peer mentor program, which was started exclusively for students of color and international students, has broadened to include mentors and mentees of all backgrounds and identities. We make clear our commitment and goals for intercultural friendships and communication. This change was, in fact, requested by students of color who felt that we need to model to our campus what it means to be intentional and committed to diverse interaction and cultivating these relationships.
3. Seek out opportunities to serve on committees in Academic Affairs and other departments to increase your added value. I often volunteer to be on search committees for other Student Affairs offices. In my previous workplace, I was granted the opportunity to be part of faculty searches. It is worth asking the provost or academic dean if you could offer to be part of such searches as a means for an institution to meet its own goals for diverse faculty.
4. Hire staff that is underrepresented in your office. I hired a graduate assistant who is White and male yet has a physical disability that he openly talks about with students and colleagues. His presence,

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especially as one who is White and male, has been profound for the office as students see us work together for diversity programming.

5. Plan service-learning opportunities that dovetail service and social justice. This past January we launched an MLK Day of Service which included a strong educational element to teach students about MLK's Beloved Community. We watched a film about the Freedom Riders and how college students have the power to exact change in our society.

I am sure that much of this is not new to many of you especially those who have worked for years in the field of diversity. My hope is that this may be a reminder of how our offices are and should be changing for the greater good of our work and our students.

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