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Everyday Practices of Social Justice: Examples and Suggestions for Administrators and Practitioners in Higher Education

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Given that there is a general need for college students to learn about social justice and equity issues, and since college is a developmentally meaningful time for students, it is important for colleges and universities to adopt practices and provide opportunities that address power and inequality issues. This paper provides examples of social justice programs and practices in four areas (administrative, academic, co-curricular, and assessment) at a mid-size Midwestern institution, discusses how these practices are important and valuable to challenging power, and how they can be replicated or adapted at other institutions. This paper also discusses how these programs and practices are important for encouraging awareness and challenging power and provides important lessons learned from social justice work in higher education.

Keywords: Social Justice | Higher Education | Diversity | Practice

The concept of “social justice” has received mounting attention in policy, protest, practice, and research across higher education in recent years (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008; Frazer, 2009; Wilson, 2015). The term has many connotations and uses, ranging from an ambiguous and ideological notion, to a trendy buzzword, to a transcendental societal and educational practice (Frazer, 2009). Frazer (2009) asserted:

Social justice work addresses inequality and oppression in all its nuances, including but not limited to, racism and xenophobia, classism and economic discrimination, sexism and misogyny, homophobia and heterosexism, religious and political persecution, the abuse of civil liberties, and ableism. (p. 7)

Within the context of higher education, practices that promote social justice are those that help students critically reflect on and understand issues of sociopolitical diversity (Ross, 2014). There are many opportunities within the university experience that help not only students, but also faculty, staff, and administrators to reflect on and understand social justice issues. Because practices that promote and address social justice can be found both in and out of the classroom, we conceptualize social justice using Brennan and Naidoo’s

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(2008) framing: Social justice is the attempt to answer the question “How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?” (p. 287).

Social justice issues are particularly important in higher education because there is societal need for diversity education and global understanding. In fact, the general public and college students themselves expect universities to provide students with a diverse education (Price & Gascoigne, 2006). This expectation has grown following recent protests and advocacy movements that have occurred on- and off-college campuses.

It is important for colleges and universities to adopt practices and provide opportunities that address power and inequality issues, especially since college is a developmentally meaningful time for students (Astin, 1999; Baxter Magolda, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to (a) provide examples of social justice programs and practices in four functional areas (administrative, academic, co-curricular, and assessment) at a mid-size Midwestern institution; (b) discuss how these programs and practices can be replicated or adapted at other institutions; (c) discuss how these practices are important to encouraging awareness and challenging power among students; and (d) provide important lessons learned from social justice work in higher education.

Commitment to Social Justice Work

Before moving forward with a discussion of examples of social justice practices in higher education, it is important to disclose pertinent information about the authors of this paper in order to help the reader understand the reasons we are committed to social justice work. One author is a high-ranking administrator who oversees the Office of Multicultural Affairs at our institution and has an extensive background in social justice advocacy work and diversity issues. Another author is a student affairs administrator who has experience with social justice programming and staff training at various levels and across multiple institutions. A third author is a faculty member with experience in student affairs and assessment in higher education and whose research focuses on diversity as a concept and student learning outcome. Our collective personal experiences inspire us to engage in social justice work as our civic responsibility and our professional positions and expertise give us the capacity through which we can implement and participate in social justice programs and practices on our campus. Moreover, we are all currently employed at a land-grant institution, whose mission is rooted in the idea of inclusivity and expanding access to higher education (APLU, 2012).

Examples of Everyday Practices of Social Justice Work in Higher Education

Many universities, especially those based in the American model, follow a threefold mission of teaching, research, and service (Rhoads, Li, & Ilano, 2014). While these three areas are typically referenced in faculty work, they are also included in work across all levels and divisions of an institution. In that spirit, this paper outlines programs and practices in four areas of everyday practice for a mid-size Midwestern university—administrative, academic, co-curricular, and assessment—and discusses how these programs and practices can be replicated or adapted at other institutions.

As we discuss everyday practices of social justice through the examples that follow, we again remind the reader of how we operationalize social throughout this paper: Social justice is the attempt to answer the question “How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?” (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008, p. 287). While the examples provided here are comprehensive in terms of functional area on a particular campus, they are not exhaustive. These examples are relatively simple but meaningful and purposeful practices that, taken together or in-part, provide a snapshot of everyday practices of social justice work that make an impact on our campus. Though our campus is certainly not perfect, the following examples address issues of power and oppression through chances for open dialogue, promote a welcoming environment, create institutional structures that advocate for equality and attempt to provide a safe and inclusive environment, and give various stakeholders in higher education—especially students—opportunities for social justice education and advocacy.

Institutional Profile

The following examples were drawn from a large, American Midwestern land-grant university with a student body of over 25,000. Approximately 83% of students are undergraduates, 16% are graduate students, and 1% are students in a professional school. In Fall 2016, approximately 67% of students were considered in-state, compared with 26% from other states and 7% from countries outside the United States. The student population was 51% male and 49% female, and 27% of the student body was of minority status. In terms of ethnicity, approximately 66% of students identified as White, while 5% identified as African American, 4% as Native American, 6% as Hispanic, 2% as Asian, <1% as Pacific Islander, 8% as multiracial, and 8% identified as unknown or of another (not listed) ethnicity. The institution offers over 200 undergraduate and graduate degree programs, with the average undergraduate program requiring 120 hours of coursework.

The university employs over 1600 faculty and over 4200 staff. Of the faculty, approximately 17% are tenured. In 2014, 76% identified as White, 2% as Black, 2% as Native American, 3% as Hispanic, 9% as Asian American, 7% as international, and <1% as multiracial. The faculty population is approximately 61% male and 39% female. Of the staff, approximately 50% of the classified staff were of minority status by either ethnicity or gender (or both), while 30% of the non-classified staff held minority status. There are approximately 130 senior administrators (i.e., faculty/staff holding the title of president, vice-president, associate/assistant vice president, dean, associate/assistant dean, or director); of those, 54% were of minority status by either ethnicity or gender (or both).

Administrative Programs and Practices

Campus administrators can play a vital role in addressing the importance of social justice issues. However, administrators have often been accused of paying “lip service” to social justice issues (Wingfield, 2016) instead of engaging in practices that demonstrate the institutional value placed on addressing issues of equity, inclusion, and respect. In this section, we will highlight three practices/programs that are part of everyday social justice work with/by administration on our campus.

Formal University Diversity Statement

Several years ago, stakeholders created a formal university diversity statement in response to a series of recommendations for strengthening the university's commitment to diversity and inclusion. The statement is as follows:

[This University] is a land-grant institution committed to excellence in diversity and inclusion. We strive to maintain a welcoming and inclusive environment that appreciates and values all members of the University community. We define diversity as engagement in meaningful actions, behaviors, and conversations that reflect a commitment to recognizing, understanding, and respecting the differences among students, faculty, staff, and visitors throughout the [University] system. We do not condone acts, behavior, language, or symbols that represent or reflect intolerance or discrimination. [This University] is dedicated to cultivating and enriching the competitive advantages that diversity and inclusion provides all members of the University community. We identify diversity as a quality of life issue, as well as an important economic driver for the prosperity and well-being of the state, nation, and world.

While such a statement may seem simple and even elementary, its purpose is to demonstrate an institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion at all levels of the university and for all stakeholders. It is an institutionally agreed-upon description for what is meant by “diversity,” which is clearly tied to social justice practices through phrases such as “engagement in meaningful actions, behaviors, and conversations that reflect a commitment to recognizing, understanding, and respecting the differences among students, faculty, staff, and visitors.” We believe that the formal diversity statement is critical because it takes a stance on intolerance and discrimination and conveys the importance of diversity and inclusivity in our community and world. It is a key part of creating and cultivating an inclusive community that fulfills the land-grant mission, fosters the holistic endeavors of our university, and provides an environment where all members can excel.

The creation of the statement itself was an exercise in discerning the praxis of the institutional culture with regard to social justice issues on our campus. It involved a collaborative process amongst many stakeholders at the university, including administrators such as the president, provost, vice-presidents, and deans. The process of creating the statement also made it clear that the word “diversity” on this campus is a term that encompasses inclusivity and equity, an important distinction in a higher education climate where the term “diversity” is deemed to be insufficient if it does not recognize social justice issues (Hillman, 2016). The process of creating a formal statement on diversity, equity, and inclusion helped to reshape the culture of the institution. It is used as a guide in hiring, recruitment, and admissions practices and also serves as a lens for processing and addressing behavior on our campus. Finally, the statement serves as a standard and vision for creating and/or endorsing educational and co-curricular programs for the campus.

“Difficult Dialogues” and “Critical Conversations” Programs

The second everyday administrative practice of social justice on our campus includes two important programs that are sponsored in-part by campus administrators--*Difficult Dialogues* and *Critical Conversations*. These programs were created to help instructors and others on campus engage in continued conversations about complex and difficult issues. Our instructors and students, like others in higher education (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ross, 2014), have encountered these conversations inside and outside of the classroom. These programs help address both the need to have these important discussions as well as the need to adequately prepare those who may be facilitating them.

The *Difficult Dialogues* program is led by a team of faculty and administrators with the purpose of providing an avenue for discussions on difficult topics and assisting participants with identifying techniques to discuss diversity- and social justice-related issues. Participants discuss complex and “hot-button” topics, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and social class, in attempt to understand others, promote pluralism, and enhance inclusion and social justice efforts. The goal of *Difficult Dialogues* is to (a) connect faculty, staff, administrators, and students with strategies for engaging in dialogue on difficult subjects in a safe environment; (b) manage conflict; and (c) encourage learning through discussion and perspective-taking. Past programs included “Difficult Issues Demand Difficult Dialogues”, “White Privilege: How It Undermines Our Best Efforts to Diversify and Be Inclusive”, and “Difficult Conversations in the Classroom.”

Critical Conversations is another programming initiative hosted by our philosophy department, ethics department, and the diversity division. The program invites guest speakers to hold forums where they discuss issues related to race, religion, gender, politics, and current events. Past programs include “The N Word: Who Has Access?”, “When Anger is Essential as Fire: On Political Change and What We Can Learn from Black Feminist Thought”, and “Whose Land Is This? Native Americans and Colonialism.” Both the *Difficult Dialogues* and *Critical Conversations* series are programs in which university administrators are involved in promoting discussions about social justice issues, helping university stakeholders think critically on those issues, and developing strategies for further conversation and action. Additionally, these programs are an ongoing opportunity for community dialogue on important issues.

Creation of the Division of Institutional Diversity

The third example of administrative practice that promotes social justice on our campus was the creation of the Division of Institutional Diversity. The Division was created to strengthen the university’s commitment to supporting and advancing diversity issues on campus. The Division serves as the campus leader for diversity-related programs and initiatives. The Division includes the office of the vice president, office of multicultural affairs, office of equal opportunity, diversity academic support and TRiO department, and a large National Science Foundation grant aimed at helping increase access for minority students in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Additionally, the Division provides training for Title IX, implements initiatives for faculty recruitment,

provides support services and scholarship funds for students from underserved populations (including women and LGBTQ students), and creates and supports programs that highlight equity issues.

Although the university created a Division designated for diversity and inclusion efforts, the Division is in no way solely responsible for all diversity matters. The Division also works collaboratively and alongside the Division of International Studies and Outreach, the Division of Student Affairs, the Office of International Students and Scholars, and the Center for Sovereign Nations to provide support and advocacy for students, faculty, and staff from all backgrounds, experiences, and institutions of society. Together these administrative areas provide support and guidance to over 200 multicultural student organizations that exist on campus, including the African American Student Association, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Queers and Allies group, Multicultural Greek Council, the Native American Student Association, the Minority Women's Association, the Hispanic Student Association, and the Muslim Student Association. Further, in addition to assisting with advising student groups, the Division supports a diversity advisory board, made up of faculty, staff, and students, that provides advisement to university administrators (including the university president) and stakeholders on issues regarding diversity.

Adaptation and Replication

These administrative practices and programs incorporate social justice work into everyday university practices and can be adapted and replicated at other institutions relatively easily. Some of these administrative practices are fairly simple, such as creating a clear diversity and/or equity statement. The process of incorporating this statement is an important undertaking in discussing values and determining acceptable behaviors, processes, and programs. It is also a valuable process that engages members of the campus community at all levels. Institutions that have or create such a statement should also ensure that the statement is widely disseminated (e.g., at events and gatherings such as new faculty orientation, new student orientation, and student organization meetings) and incorporated into practice through the alignment of hiring and recruiting procedures and with student and faculty development opportunities. Furthermore, supporting administrative divisions dedicated to equity and social justice issues encourages active administrative involvement in educational and developmental programs for faculty and students as an important way not only to provide important learning opportunities, but also a way for administrators to do more than give “lip service” to social justice issues. Everyday practices like sponsoring programs, attending programs, engaging in discussion, and dedicating staff to supporting and advocating for equity and inclusion are important ways to address issues of power and social justice across the campus community.

Academic Programs and Practices

Addressing social justice and diversity issues in the classroom is another important everyday practice in higher education. College students are expected to learn about diversity issues in their academic programs (Day & Glick, 2000), and preparing students

for being active participants in a diverse, global society has been incorporated into the college curricula (Deardorff, 2011). In this section, we highlight three practices at our institution that help facilitate social justice awareness in academic programs.

Diversity and International Course Designations

The practice of incorporating diversity issues into the campus curricula is not new and many campuses are experiencing a renewed push toward intentionally educating students on issues of justice, equity, discrimination, and inclusion (New, 2016). At our institution, students are required to take one course that focuses on an “international” (“I”) dimension and one course that focuses on a “diversity” (“D”) dimension during their undergraduate career. “I” and “D” course designations are mutually exclusive, meaning that one course cannot count for both credits. “I” courses were first added to the undergraduate curriculum in 1981 and focus on understanding people, cultures, and contemporary issues outside the United States. In “I” courses, students learn about how contemporary international cultures relate to complex, modern world systems. “I” courses became a curriculum requirement as a part of our university’s land-grant mission and because of our institution’s unique ties to international development - a past university president led President Harry S Truman’s Point Four program, now known as the US Agency for International Development (USAID, 2016; Truman Library, 1999).

“D” courses were added to the undergraduate curriculum in 2007 as a way to provide students with educational opportunities to learn about diversity issues. This course requirement also provided a tangible way to demonstrate the university’s commitment to diversity to students, staff, faculty, and other stakeholders including accrediting bodies. “D” courses emphasize one or more socially-constructed groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation). In “D” courses, students critically analyze the distribution of political, economic, and/or cultural benefits and opportunities afforded (or not) to these groups. To obtain the “I” or “D” designation for a course, academic departments must request the designation to be added to the course by filling out a form. The form is reviewed by a council of faculty and a representative from the Division of Institutional Diversity to ensure it meets content and writing criteria. The designation is approved for three years, after which time the course must be reviewed again prior to renewal. There are currently over 200 courses that carry the “I” and “D” designations.

The “Provost’s General Education Initiative” Series

The *Provost’s General Education Initiative: Focus on General Education* (Provost’s Series) is a workshop series for faculty and course instructors (including graduate students) who teach general education courses on our campus. At our institution, “diversity” is a general education learning outcome (see Assessment Practices section below for more details). As such, the Provost’s Series focuses on helping develop instructors’ expertise in teaching and assessing this general education outcome and creating assignments that are useful for eliciting critical thinking about diversity and equity issues.

The workshop series is led by faculty and administrators with expertise in teaching “D” courses and/or facilitating discussions about social justice, equity, and inclusion. These

workshops help instructors build confidence in addressing critical issues in the classroom, promoting interactive and respectful dialogue, and improving assignment instructions and focus. Participants receive materials and resources, such as texts and articles, that help facilitate learning the workshop content. Participants also receive a small stipend for completing the series. In addition to providing hands-on training to enhance and improve course content and experiences, the Provost's Series is another example of administrative support for diversity and equity issues.

Academic Centers and Programs of Study

The final academic practice for social justice that we will highlight is the creation of academic centers on campus that focus on research, teaching, and general knowledge of a particular subject. Such centers serve as the academic home for interdisciplinary programs of study and may also provide support for particular groups of students. On our campus, just as on many others, there are centers for many subject areas. Some of the academic centers specifically focus on minority groups, as well as issues of social justice for these groups. Furthermore, some centers provide support for students belonging to a particular group, access to education for these students, and resources that aid in facilitating student retention and graduation. Examples of such centers on our campus include the (a) Center for American Indian Studies, home to the minor in American Indian Studies that focuses on American Indian law, culture, history, and language; (b) the Center for Africana Studies, home to the minor in Africana studies, which focuses on social, political, economic, religious, and cultural developments related to the African Diaspora; (c) the Center for Sovereign Nations, which promotes understanding, respect, and exercise of tribal sovereignty in the state and country; and (d) the Gender and Women's Studies minor, which focuses on courses in theories of gender, the cultural construction of masculinity, and the intersections of race, class, nationality, and sexuality.

These centers help highlight academic programs that specifically focus on social justice issues. Their existence in the fabric of the university structure and academic course offerings emphasize the importance of knowledge and research on social justice issues as a matter of academic discipline and study.

Adaptation and Replication

While academic programs and practices will no doubt vary from institution to institution, there are many ways in which social justice issues can be promoted and discussed in the academic curriculum. Other institutions can adapt or replicate the examples here by providing courses on social justice issues, even if those courses are not a required part of the academic curriculum. These courses are important for introducing "diverse perspectives on issues, helping students begin to see from multiple cultural perspectives, using students' diverse backgrounds within a course, and requiring students to have either a local cultural immersion or an education abroad experience (possibly through research, service learning, or internship, in addition to study) related to their major" (Deardorff, 2011, p. 69).

For land-grant institutions or institutions whose mission specifically includes social justice and diversity, it may be worthwhile to explore how to create a required course(s) for students on diversity and social justice issues. While creating such a requirement may be a significant administrative endeavor, the impact on student learning is significant and academic departments may benefit from having more students take their courses who would not otherwise. Furthermore, providing training for the faculty and instructors who teach these courses helps improve the classroom environment and learning experience for students and provides an opportunity for critical dialogue and peer-to-peer training.

Finally, the creation of academic centers can be a useful way to highlight particular issues and areas of academic study and research related to social justice. While our institution has multiple centers, it is also a large institution with widespread resources and a plethora of academic departments and disciplines from which to draw faculty expertise and interest. Other institutions may seek to create only one or two centers, focusing on the most relevant social justice issues and disciplines for which they have faculty support and student interest. Creating centers that focus on institution-specific issues or expertise is also a way to replicate this important academic practice. For example, many of the academic centers on our campus focus on issues and groups that are important to our region and state. Other institutions have the opportunity to also create centers that provide an academic home to programs that are reflective of other regional needs, interests, and group representations.

Co-Curricular Programs and Practices.

A hallmark of student affairs as a profession is “a consistent and persistent emphasis on and commitment to the development of the whole person” (Nuss, 1996, p. 23). As such, student affairs services and programs (often termed “co-curricular”) complement the academic goals of the university by providing students with needed resources, such as (a) career, counseling, and health services; (b) housing and residential life; (c) dining services; and (d) leadership opportunities. Student affairs also provides developmentally appropriate programming to enhance learning and personal development.

Co-curricular programs have been found to help contribute to students’ academic, civic, and personal outcomes, including understanding people from different backgrounds, engaging in reflective dialogue about diversity issues, and developing a sense of connection with people previously thought to be different than themselves (Keen & Hall, 2009). On our campus, programming about social justice issues tends to fall into one of two categories—*reactive*, where programs occur in direct response to a current event or hot-topic issue, or *continuing/proactive*, where programs that focus on social justice issues are planned well in-advance and occur throughout the year. We will highlight one of each of these programs below.

“Tunnel of Oppression” program

Each spring, our campus presents a program called *Tunnel of Oppression*. On our campus, the Tunnel of Oppression is an example of a continuing/proactive co-curricular program that helps bring awareness to social justice issues on campus and in society at large. Tunnel

of Oppression began at Western Illinois University in 1994 and has been presented countless times all over the United States (Stoyell, 2016). Loosely inspired by the *Museum of Tolerance* in Los Angeles, CA, the Tunnel of Oppression (or the Tunnel) is presented in several different ways depending on the university (Stoyell, 2016). The Tunnel has been presented as a series of rooms providing oppressive audio, video, and text, as an actual tunnel where participants crawl through and have racial slurs shouted at them, and as a series of vignettes where participants are able to walk in someone else's shoes. The Tunnel uses scenes from personal examples as well as drawing from local and national media and has evolved nationally over the years in order to shed light on the most relevant topics (Barrett-Fox, 2007).

At our institution, the Tunnel is presented through theatrical vignettes written by students and staff and performed by students. The Tunnel captures the emotions of recent social justice issues from around the country and presents the content from the viewpoint of the marginalized group. The Tunnel is an initiative that we use not only to raise awareness of societal issues but also to expose students to issues that affect their peers and communities. Participants are faced with up-close—and in many cases, personal—scenarios that often elicit an emotional reaction. In our most recent production of the Tunnel, student performers covered stories and experiences related to sexual identity, Black Lives Matter, eating disorders, mental health, and domestic violence. The evening included an opening video as a pre-activity, which set the tone for the evening, as well as performances from artists (e.g., singing relevant songs and reading poems/speeches) between vignettes. Campus counselors attended the event to help students process their thoughts and feelings after the production.

This format has been very well received on our campus, and the success of the program has led to a series of conversations surrounding the performances that have helped program organizers process the content and plan future events. The Tunnel has faced scrutiny nationally for its lack of engagement and debriefing as some presentations of the Tunnel send participants away without properly processing the experience (Barrett-Fox, 2007). On our campus, the next presentation of the Tunnel will purposefully include time for audience dialogue and conversation about the content presented at the conclusion of the performances. Allowing time for this type of processing and dialogue is in-line with suggestions that such programs include a pre-activity reflection exercise to inform participants about what will be experienced and a post reflective exercise to express thoughts and feelings (Lechuga, Clerc, & Howell, 2009).

Black Lives Matter Panel

In the summer of 2016, the Office of Multicultural Affairs organized a panel in response to the tragic deaths of Alton Sterling (Hauslohner & Cusick, 2016), Philando Castile (NPR, 2016), and five Dallas police officers (NBC-DFW, 2016). An example of a “reactive” co-curricular program, the panel was created in direct response to current events with the goal of providing the campus community with an opportunity to learn about and process the events. The program included a panel made up of representatives from the campus and city community, including one student, two faculty members, two community ministers, and one campus police officer. It was moderated by a campus administrator and campus

counselors were available to talk with program attendees. The panel was diverse in terms of panel members' personal characteristics, experiences, and education/training. The campus and city communities were invited to attend and over 200 attendees were present, including many students, faculty, and staff, the city manager, the city mayor, members of the community and campus police departments.

The goals of the program were to better understand the events that happened in early July 2016, discuss the implications of the Black Lives Matter (2016) movement in our community, talk about what responsibility our campus and community have in ensuring similar events do not happen in our own community, dialogue about ourselves as stakeholders and advocates, and provide opportunities for community members to share experiences and ask questions. Additionally, in the fall of 2016, the office organized a second panel of current undergraduate and graduate students with a student moderator. The goals of the second program were consistent with the initial program but focused on the issues from a student perspective.

Adaptation and Replication

These examples of co-curricular programs can be easily replicated and adapted by both student affairs professionals and students at other institutions. Both reactive and continuing/proactive programs serve an important role in social justice work on college campuses. They provide opportunities to address issues of power and inequality as well as to discuss how systemic change and current events apply to a particular campus at a given point in time. In adapting these co-curricular programs (or in creating new programs), higher education practitioners should take care to provide encountered situations for participants (such as being deliberately presented with an issue as in the Tunnel of Oppression; Lechuga et al., 2009) as well as opportunities for the campus and community to process social justice issues as they arise (such as in the Black Lives Matter panel).

Student affairs professionals should remember that programs can be changed to be more impactful and relevant for students. For example, although our institution has presented the Tunnel of Oppression for years, it was only recently that the format of the program was changed completely, which resulted in a much better experience for students who participated in the event and allowed for assessment of student learning and student reflection on what was presented during the program. Finally, higher education professionals should take care to include students in the planning of these events, so they are shared partners in the co-curricular learning experience (Lechuga et al., 2009).

Assessment Practices.

Assessment of student learning is a common activity on college campuses (McArthur, 2016). The data gained from assessment is critical for accreditation, accountability, program improvement, and decision making. On our campus, one of the critical assessment activities that occurs at the university level is the assessment of general education learning outcomes. As mentioned previously, "diversity" is a general education outcome at our institution, which is in line with the assertion that issues of diversity are at the forefront of topics that must be addressed within student learning outcomes for today's college students

(Deardorff, 2011). The diversity learner goal means that students are purposefully challenged to grow in their understanding of people, beliefs, and societies through their academic coursework, especially through the “I” and “D” courses described previously. As with all general education outcomes, our institution assesses students’ achievement of these goals on an annual basis. Traditionally, this assessment process involves the review of “artifacts”, or student papers written for class. Papers written in general education courses are collected through a central institutional process and they are assessed using a rubric that outlines the levels of student achievement of the given general education outcome.

In March 2014, our university made revisions to the assessment process for the diversity general education outcome because faculty and administrators were not convinced that the rubric method adequately captured what students were learning with regard to diversity issues. Those that reviewed the assessment findings for several years did not feel that the data captured what they had seen anecdotally—that students *were* in fact learning about diversity and social justice issues. The faculty and staff involved with assessment felt that the traditional approach to collecting data (scoring student papers using a rubric) was potentially not adequate because the papers were subject to social desirability issues and did not always capture students’ individual thoughts, reflections, and experiences with diversity issues. Thus, the assessment process was revised to include a multidimensional approach to assessing diversity as a general education outcome. Our institution now uses three approaches for diversity assessment: (a) the standard practice of collecting written artifacts and having them assessed by faculty raters using rubrics; (b) administering the Global Perspectives Inventory, which assesses how students think about their own cultures as well as how they relate to individuals whose cultures, experiences, and values are different from their own, to first year students and seniors (GPI, 2015); and (c) inviting a small sample of students ($n \leq 25$) to participate in a qualitative assessment process using the Photovoice technique, which allows participants to document their experiences and voice using photography and promotes critical dialogue on important issues through discussing the photographs.

These assessment methods allow for the collection of data in a more holistic manner, and even allow for data collection about learning outcomes while simultaneously supporting and encouraging dialogue on social justice issues and students’ personal experiences. The data obtained from these assessment methods has given our institution a much more complete overview of what students are (and are not) learning both inside and outside of the classroom regarding diversity and social justice issues. These assessment processes also supplied us with data that showed us strengths and areas for improvement regarding our institution’s approaches to teaching students about these issues, and provided us with evidence that students are indeed learning about diversity and social justice as a result of their academic and co-curricular experiences (recall that insufficient evidence for this was one reason our assessment approach was changed in the first place).

Assessment is a process that focuses on collecting data and making changes based on the information gained from that data. In that sense, an important part of adapting and replicating assessment practices includes reviewing current processes and determining what (if any) changes are needed to obtain accurate and useful data on the outcome being assessed. We encourage anyone in higher education who is interested in assessment in general or on social justice/diversity outcomes specifically to think “outside the box” on

ways in which to collect data that is useful, holistic, and interactive. Incorporating multiple methods of assessment, including qualitative and quantitative measures, is an important part of assessing student learning outcomes related to diversity and social justice issues, especially since assessment and measurement on this topic can be difficult (but is critical). Furthermore, as institutions consider how they might undertake assessment of student learning on social justice and diversity issues, it is important to remember that assessment itself can be a practice in social justice work. Adopting assessment practices that are inclusive and equitable creates a process that is “both more just for those who participate and fosters greater social justice through the ways in which [our] students go on to live and work in society” (McArthur, 2016, p. 980).

Conclusion

Every strategy listed above can be used to help organize the campus community around social justice issues and address power and inequality issues on campus. While these efforts are not perfect, they are a genuine attempt to create a more inclusive, safe, and accessible educational environment and experience. Furthermore, these programs and practices cover all functional areas within the university. They create a structure and system throughout the university that brings awareness to issues of social justice, promotes discussion and critical thinking on these topics, and provides resources to all stakeholders. They help educate and connect the entire university body—faculty, students, staff, administrators, and even the community—to important issues of justice and equity. The larger the institution, the easier it is for stakeholders to be unaware of one another and unaware of the efforts undertaken to educate, reflect, discuss, and collect data on important issues. However, the examples provided above demonstrate how each area of an institution of higher learning can make a contribution to social justice awareness through every day practices.

We would like to end this essay with a few pieces of advice for the higher education social justice community. Through our work in the various programs and practices outlined in this paper, we have learned some important lessons that are applicable for anyone engaging in social justice work in higher education. As we work to create new programs and practices and adapt or replicate current ones, these insights may prove helpful for praxis:

- You will not do everything right all the time; be willing to make mistakes and accept when others do too. Also, make your (and others’) mistakes into learning opportunities when appropriate.
- Provide a space for students to be able to talk about social justice issues safely and openly, and provide training for leaders to competently lead open dialogue.
- Provide opportunities for students to explore their own privilege, but understand that some members of the community are not always ready for the conversation.
- Help those who do not have a voice to find their voice; if they cannot find it, be the voice for them. Advocacy is an important part of social justice work.
- Take responsibility. In higher education, social justice is everyone’s responsibility. You can find help and ideas for promoting social justice issues anywhere (e.g., students, staff, faculty, administration, community members).

Social justice practice and education is a complex narrative (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008), and the strategies and programs outlined in this work attempt to promote positive change and address the culture change needed to create relationships between all stakeholders at the university (e.g., students, staff, faculty, administration, community members). Brennan and Naidoo (2008) suggest social justice work should impact not only those who show up and participate in programs, but also the greater student body, faculty, and administrators. As detailed above, this can be achieved through (a) administrative practices that promote the discussion of values and support active administrative involvement in educational and developmental programs for faculty and students; (b) academic programs and practices that address curriculum requirements, training for instructors, and the creation of centers and programs of study; (c) co-curricular programs and practices that provide an outlet to address contemporary social issues and opportunities for students to be involved in the education of their peers (Lechuga et al., 2009); and (d) assessment practices that allow stakeholders and decision-makers to have a better understanding of what students are learning as a result of the programs and practices that are in place.

Administrators and practitioners in higher education should give thought to what programs and practices promote (or hinder) social justice work on their campuses. Because, social justice is an everyday practice of a community of higher education, it is vital that we continue to pursue ways of collecting evidence that these programs and practices are effective, be aware of trends in social justice education, regularly consult scholarly work on this topic, and be open to make changes to programs and practices when they are needed.

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