

Introduction

In 2001, the student affairs units in the *Division of Student and Campus Life began a journey toward changing the University of Vermont's (UVM's) climate to be more inclusive and affirming of those from underrepresented and diverse backgrounds.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint a specific beginning for this process, 2001 marks an important milestone. It was then that a series of departmental leadership meetings were launched by the Dean of Students Office to reveal the multicultural vision for the Division. Using data and personal stories, departments were presented with compelling evidence for a renewed commitment to creating a more inclusive and affirming multicultural climate within the Division and at UVM. The expectations were clear -- all departments supervised by the Dean of Students Office must work toward fulfilling this vision. Though the Division did not know all that this effort would entail, a few visionaries immediately began to institute changes in the Division's recruitment and hiring practices, training initiatives, organizational policies and processes, and publications.

By 2005, participating departments had engaged in many hours of group training and created and implemented their first *Strategic Plans for Advancing Climate*. As departmental leadership teams presented their goals, the need for assessment and accountability became clear. Out of this clarity, the idea of conducting departmental audits was developed. In Spring 2006, the Division's Multicultural Competencies Evaluation Team (MCET) was created. Using the book, *Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs* by Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004), MCET members adopted the components of a multiculturally affirming organization. These components became the MCET's evaluation framework.

Both the preparation for the 2006 MCET meetings and the final report provided departments with: positive results, areas for improvement, and models of success. Subsequent meetings with the Dean of Students Office facilitated the creation of new plans and innovation throughout the Division, as well as a revised diversity training series for the Division. MCET 2006 also provided process recommendations, which helped to set the plan for MCET 2008.

While the criteria and process used by MCET 2008 were similar to what was done in 2006, there were a number of changes:

- To be more inclusive in this evaluation process, MCET 2008 requested that departmental meetings include up to 10 representatives from each participating unit and that these representatives reflect a range of positions and roles.
- The Dean of Students Office was evaluated along with the other student affairs units.
- Departments were invited to conduct environmental assessments of their spaces.

- Incorporation of an open forum, prior to MCET departmental meetings, to answer questions about the MCET process.
- The Multicultural Competencies in Student Affairs Organizations Questionnaire – Preliminary 1 (MSCAO-P1) was administered to staff throughout the Division.

Following the departmental meetings with MCET representatives, MCET crafted a report for each department to provide feedback on each criterion, as well as to share themes and best practices across the Division. This divisional summary and accompanying departmental reports represent the hard work of many staff. Though it shows both areas of excellence and improvement, its existence is a testimony to the participating units' sustained commitment and dedication to the pursuit of a multiculturally competent institution.

* Please note: this report uses the term “Division” to refer to the departments/units that participated in the MCET review. These departments/units were the: Dean of Students Office, Academic Support Programs, Career Services, Center for Health & Wellbeing, Center for Student Ethics & Standards, Residential Life, Student & Community Relations, Student Life, and University Dining Services.

Vision and Mission of the Multicultural Competencies Evaluation Team

Vision

To foster a Division of Student and Campus Life where students and staff thrive socially, intellectually, and personally and where their identities are valued, respected and honored.

Goal

To assess how each department/unit actively develops and promotes multicultural awareness, knowledge and skills toward the goals of fostering and affirming a just climate for all students and staff.

Components of a Multiculturally Affirming Organization

Pope, Reynolds and Mueller (2004) identified components of a multiculturally affirming organization that were adapted by MCET 2006 and 2008. The adapted criteria are:

1. Comprehensive and inclusive definition of the term *multicultural*
2. Mission statement is inclusive
3. Leadership and advocacy for multiculturalism
4. Multicultural competency reflected in policy, procedures, and practices
5. Recruitment and retention of diverse staff
6. Multiculturally competent attitudes, knowledge and skills are significantly factored in staff training and evaluation
7. Scholarly and community activities
8. Departmental programs and services
9. Environment
10. Assessment
11. Structures and systems (*note – this category was added to the MCET assessment and not a part of the MCET assessment)

Familiarity with these criteria is critical to understanding the findings of the MCET.

Reference

Pope, R. L., Reynolds, A. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2004) *Multicultural competence in student affairs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Acknowledgement

The departments participating in the MCET process should be proud of the progress they have made since the 2006 MCET evaluation. It is clear that the majority of staff in the Division is infusing their multicultural mission into their day-to-day work, and the results are inspiring. From the time of the MCET's open forum and through all of the departmental meetings, staff members were engaged, thoughtful and articulate. In preparation for the discussions with the MCET, nearly all had spent time reading the criteria, reflecting on them, and organizing their responses so as to share as much as possible in the time allotted.

Before presenting these findings it is crucial to acknowledge the hard work of the Division's participating departments. The Division of Student and Campus Life is making a difference, vigorously pursuing an affirming campus climate with limited resources and support, and few national role models. Aided by Pope, Reynolds and Mueller's framework and UVM's strategic goals, this process sets high standards for becoming a more multicultural organization. Embarking on a journey with no standard roadmap has required a commitment to experimentation, openness to feedback and adjustment. Even with these challenges, our progress is real. The Division's efforts and positive results have begun to gain the attention of other UVM units, as well as nationally. While we are proud of our progress, the staff of the Division remains focused on what more can be done. As this assessment articulates what the MCET believes are areas for continued improvement, we are greatly encouraged by what has been accomplished and what we can learn from each other. The members of the MCET also want to acknowledge that neither our process nor this report are perfect, but represent a strong attempt to learn from one another and offer honest feedback.

BEST PRACTICES ACROSS THE DIVISION

Departments throughout the Division are engaged in many innovative and effective programs, practices, and procedures focused on creating an inclusive and welcoming community for all. The MCET heard about some of them, yet we acknowledge that there are many efforts that have gone unmentioned in this report. The following list includes programs that MCET members believe are particularly innovative and useful to our colleagues throughout the Division should therefore be highlighted.

Assessment

Academic Support Program's **Student Leadership Board** has become an assessment team. Using various resources, they have put together a template for assessing a department's physical space, and have conducted evaluations and provided reports to departments, complete with recommendations for improvements. In 2008, this program was in its pilot year and it holds great promise for student leadership development, divisional improvement, and institutional advocacy.

Professional Development

In Student Life, the staff implemented a professional development program they call **Risk Buddies**. Conceived as a way to provide each other with both the support and challenge they needed to move past insight and into advocacy, consistent pairs meet once a month to share what they have tracked, what they have done, and how to support one another through becoming more aware and effective advocates. Grounded in a shared commitment, mutual respect, and the recognition that everyone has room for growth, this professional development program is an exciting innovation.

Recruitment and Retention

In terms of recruitment and retention efforts, the **Affirmative Hiring Presentation** from the Dean of Students Office is well known in the Division and around the University for broadening the way we think about and approach recruitment and hiring.

Many SCL departments have made great progress in integrating multicultural competencies into their search processes. Residential Life provides an example of a best practice in their **Comprehensive Recruitment System**. Practices such as: integrating multicultural competency into their position descriptions and recruitment materials, year-round networking efforts, questions asked during interviews, and the diversity presentations required from candidates make Residential Life's model a good resource for departments seeking new ideas and innovative approaches.

With more than 200 student staff in Academic Support Programs (ASP), this department has taken a **comprehensive and proactive approach** to recruiting students from underrepresented communities. Additionally, they have tapped into not only what is regarded as traditional student affairs venues, but across the university by reaching out to the Diversity and Equity Unit's ALANA Student Center and the faculty. After careful recruitment, great effort is expended by

ASP to retain these student staff through high quality training and supervision. As a result of their success, ASP has been able to capitalize on the positive experiences they create for student staff, which has made subsequent recruitment efforts fruitful.

Leadership and Advocacy

There is a great deal of leadership and advocacy being demonstrated in the Division, but nowhere more than from the **sustained commitment** of the Dean of Students Office. From the beginning of this process they have set the bar for multicultural competency expectations and training, mission statement, recruitment and retention, and policies and procedures. They have done this by: being role models; sharing expertise; providing encouragement and accountability; and communicating our mission, story and outcomes to institutional leaders and peers. While they would argue there is a great deal more to do, their ethic of working collaboratively, willingness to learn from mistakes, and committing resources and energy to this process are setting the stage for powerful changes and growth throughout the Division, the institution, and beyond.

Multicultural Mission

Infusing multiculturalism into all aspects of their work and “**living the mission,**” staff members in Student Life are creating culture change. Examples of “living the mission” are manifested in numerous ways, including: The Davis Center artwork, creative use of the flagpole, the Student Programming Board, TREK, ALANA Gear, The Next Step, identity month programming, and many other efforts for building community and understanding. The leadership these staff members exhibit on Presidential Commissions and in shaping institutional events (e.g., UVM Convocation 2007) are spreading their commitment beyond the Division. And their advising work with individual students has been transformative for many. They are inspiring and thoughtful in questioning the status quo through many avenues.

Career Services has created a **Wheel of Inclusion**, which is a visual manifestation of the range of identities to which they focus their attention and energy. In addition to identities such as race, socio-economic class, gender identity, sexual/affectional orientation, national origin, and ability, the Wheel of Inclusion also has blank spaces. These blank spaces acknowledge that there may be other ways in which people identify themselves beyond the 11 categories presented in the Wheel. The Wheel of Inclusion is also the place where the department’s mission and diversity statements appear. The Wheel is posted broadly throughout Career Services (e.g., in individual offices and the reception area) as a constant reminder and affirmation of this department’s multicultural mission.

Structures and Systems

In Career Services, the richness of the collective identities and experiences of the staff is honored and celebrated through their **Departmental Resume**. Similar to the format of a traditional resume, their departmental resume presents the department’s collective set of: identities, interests, skills, education, professional experiences, community involvements, and activities. This document serves as a reminder of the diverse experiences and identities within the

department, and as a tool that facilitates the development of cohesion, affinity, and awareness among the staff.

Residential Life has developed a comprehensive **Strategic Plan for Inclusion** based on *Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs* (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004). To carry out their strategic plan, five diversity committees have been established. These committees include: Recruitment and Selection, Advocacy through Policy Review, Diversity and Social Justice Education and Training, Staff Development and Recognition, and Evaluation and Assessment. Comprised of staff within the department, these committees each have a mission, strategic goals, and assessment process. Through the Strategic Plan for Inclusion, there is depth and breadth to how the goal of creating a multiculturally competent organization is infused throughout the structure, systems, and culture of this department.

Programs and Services

The Center for Student Ethics and Standards has developed two outstanding programs for students. **Project Discovery** serves as an alternative to suspension in which there are two curricula tracks (one for men and the other for women). An exploration of gender identity and socialization is a core component of this program. For example, men in the program explore the construction of masculinity and male privilege, which helps them address their experiences of behavioral misconduct. The **Intergroup Dialogue** program is a course offered by CSES that allows students to engage and talk across difference, and to challenge their own sense of privilege and oppression within the college setting. Collectively, both of these programs are innovative in how the exploration of identity is central to the curricula of these programs, as well as how identity impacts the way these students experience and move in the world.

The Center for Health and Wellbeing has been particularly innovative in creating and marketing programs and services that sensitively and inclusively address **sexuality and gender issues**. Examples include programs that provide information and insights: on violence targeting women, safer sex practices, and eating disorders. There are also services and programs such as: a gay men's support group, group conversations on race, and Men's Outreach. These programs serve to create a climate of frankness, accurate information, and open dialogue on particularly sensitive topics that are highly relevant to UVM students.

CHALLENGES AND THEMES ACROSS THE DIVISION

In addition to the many successes across the Division, MCET members also heard about a number of challenges. Themes that were noted across the division are presented below.

Assessment

Nearly every department in the Division indicated that assessment was a challenge. Assessment difficulties were not solely confined to assessing the outcomes of departmental efforts by demographic group. Some departments are still unable to measure satisfaction, and in some cases, are not yet able to determine how many students with underrepresented identities are being served. Several departments also noted challenges with having a sufficient response rate to reliably interpret and use the data gathered, as well as having the tools to conduct assessment.

Training

The SCL Diversity Series was discussed repeatedly and several issues emerged. First, graduate assistants, who have dual roles of being both students and staff, are not included in the Division's diversity training series and some reported being frustrated and feeling marginalized because of this exclusion. Departments have a difficult time helping graduate assistants learn the terms and experience the kind of challenge provided to other staff in the Division. Second, with full-day trainings held multiple times per academic year and constraints with staff coverage, some units have a very difficult time sending staff from all staff groupings/levels to the series. Third, questions arose about how to segment staff for training session though there was no consensus on the best structure for doing so.

Environment

It will be no surprise to Division staff that environment is an issue for every department. The most commonly mentioned concern was the physical environment. For example, people who use wheelchairs cannot visit the Dean of Students office (which is on the 2nd floor of a building with no elevator), and that is only one of many buildings with access problems. Staff spoke of stairs, snow removal issues, broken "handicapped" door openers, and other issues with physical structures that keep members of our community isolated. Staff members are perhaps most frustrated about those issues, which they (and perhaps the university) have neither the power nor the resources to easily change.

There are, however some issues that have been addressed. Many departments utilize practices to make their services and programs more accessible and welcoming. Examples include: inviting participants to request accommodations on materials for every event; tagging websites for accessibility; attending to the messages conveyed by artwork, photos, graphics and web pages; and considering translating key materials into languages and formats understood by newcomers to our country or English language learners.

Multicultural Expectations

In the course of these conversations, MCET members began to consider how important regular self-reflection is to this process of cultural change. We have many staff who are passionate

about uncovering the dynamics of oppression. We are making good progress and engaging in questions that help us to be more competent educators and staff. As we progress, it will be important to consider how we can continue to pursue our goal of becoming a more multiculturally competent campus without becoming fundamentalists or one dimensional in this effort. Though expectations for performance are critical, accommodating many perspectives within our pursuit of social justice will require considerable open and thoughtful reflection.

Structures and Systems

MCET found that across the Division, “time on task” mattered. In other words, MCET observed that departments who spent more time engaging with the work of multicultural competence and diversity tended to have developed the most innovative approaches to achieving these goals. Additionally, MCET found that departments who had clear structures for engaging in multicultural work were more easily able to integrate their multicultural competence goals throughout their organizational systems. Some of the ways this integration was manifested was through: monthly staff meetings, supervision meetings, and well developed recruitment and retention activities.