

**WELLESLEY COLLEGE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INITIATIVE
FOR STUDENTS
STRATEGIC VISION AND DIRECTIONS - APRIL 2010
RECOMMENDATIONS**

BACKGROUND

In October 2009, Wellesley College began the Initiative for Diversity and Inclusion for Students and, as part of the initiative, established the Core Committee. The committee was composed of students, staff, and faculty members and included the following members.

- *Students* - Karin Firoza '10, Jungwoo Lee '10, Marlie Philiossaint '10, Monet Spells '10.
- *Staff* - Mared Alicea-Westort, Director of Multicultural Programs and Services and Advisor to Latina Students; Robin Cook-Nobles, Director of Stone Counseling Center; Shontae Praileau, Interim Director of Harambee House and Advisor to Students of African Descent; Roberta Schotka, Director of Programs at the Pforzheimer Learning and Teaching Center; Karen Shih, Director of Multicultural Programs and Services and Advisor to Students of Asian Descent; Jessica Sprague, Resident Director
- *Faculty* - Robin Akert, Professor of Psychology; Elena Creef, Associate Professor – Women and Gender Studies

The Core Committee was charged with developing and recommending a vision and strategic directions for enhancing Wellesley's commitment to serving and developing an increasingly diverse student body.

PROCESS

To develop these recommendations, the Core Committee was provided with a range of information and data about the current state of diversity and inclusion at Wellesley. Information included:

- Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) Campus Climate Surveys;
- An External Review of Multi-cultural Services conducted in the

winter/spring of 2007 by a team of external reviewers from peer institutions;

- Summaries of other campus surveys, e.g., First Year Students', Sophomore, Enrolled Student, LGBT, and Senior Exit Surveys;
- Senior exit interviews;
- Detailed summaries from 17 focus groups held on campus between November-December 2009 that included over 200 students, staff members, and faculty members.

STRATEGIC VISION

Concepts and skills related to diversity and inclusion are central to and highly integrated into students' curricular and co-curricular life in ways that support each student to maximize her potential. Wellesley will become stronger and more vibrant as an inclusive community. Wellesley recognizes that students' connection to the larger community and their individual identity development are equally important. Wellesley will strengthen the structures and incentives that encourage students to actively contribute to and shape the campus as an inclusive community.

DEFINITIONS

Diversity is defined as those dimensions of social identity that matter and are important to any member of the Wellesley community. For the purposes of this work, the dimensions of identity could include race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, religion, physical and mental abilities, political beliefs, age, and socio-economic background. Recognizing that the community members are multi-dimensional beings, all dimensions of their identities and the intersections of the same are equally valued at Wellesley. Diversity of experience, talent, and scholarly interests are also valued for enhancing the learning community on campus.

Inclusion is defined as the sense of mattering and belonging that is experienced by each student at Wellesley. Inclusion is demonstrated through actions that are taken by students, faculty, staff, and alumnae to develop and foster an inclusive,

equitable, and diverse community on campus. Social identity groups are thought to have equal status as contributors to and beneficiaries of the Wellesley culture and each individual enters the community on equal footing.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

The core committee identified eight key areas for consideration, which include: dialogue; collaboration; faculty and staff engagement in diversity; student success; availability of physical space; leadership and institutional support; education; and resources. The consultants condensed these specific areas into four broad groupings, as follows:

Student Success – When accepted, incoming First Year students represent the best of their respective graduating classes: already ambitious, successful, intelligent, disciplined, and hard working. Over their four years at Wellesley, curricular and co-curricular experiences should enable these students to soar, achieving increasing levels of academic excellence and personal preparedness. Whether a matter of individual capacity, pedagogy, or support, all members of the community will work to ensure that Wellesley students reach their full potential.

Desired Outcomes:

1. The definition of student success is broadened to encompass not only academic excellence and leadership roles but also interpersonal relationships, individual fulfillment, and overall satisfaction with their college experience.
2. Faculty continue to explore and adopt a variety of teaching methodologies that support student's diverse learning styles and modes of expression.
3. Greater balance is achieved by emphasizing quality over quantity in student experiences outside the classroom.
4. The College inventively utilizes available resources or secures new ones with incentives for innovation and measures for accountability.
5. Students develop skills to balance their academics and their co-curricular activities.
6. All students have a positive college experience regardless of their race, ethnicity, 1st-generation status, financial resources, and varied backgrounds.

Leadership Development – In support of the College’s mission, Wellesley will work with students to develop the knowledge, experiences, and skills necessary to lead and “make a difference” in a world that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Students will learn how to bring people together with different histories, cultural legacies, and values in a manner that recognizes and addresses the tensions stemming from differences in social identities. Faculty, staff, and alumnae will be invited to contribute to student leadership development programs in ways that leverage their particular expertise, experience and interests. Their participation will enable students to develop leadership philosophies and styles within a pluralistic framework while reinforcing the core values of the Wellesley legacy and community.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Multicultural competency should be the cornerstone of all student leadership training programs.
2. Students develop verbal and nonverbal communication skills in interaction with those who are culturally different from themselves.
3. Students successfully use inductive and deductive reasoning to understand diverse perspectives, to resolve conflicts that occur between individuals and groups, and to work in culturally diverse groups toward a common goal.
4. Leadership development will more explicitly integrate students’ multiple identities and their intersections.

Affirmation and Collaboration – By 2014, Wellesley College will effectively balance the needs for a more vibrant and inclusive sense of community, affirming social identities and building stronger connections across differences; learn from the inherent tensions between differences and commonalities; and support both safe cultural spaces and open integrated spaces (both psychological as well as physical). The College will be seen as a more resourceful, progressive, vibrant, and interconnected community. Student organizations, with faculty and staff as advisors, allies, and supporters, will collaborate to advance collective learning through multicultural research, programming, and educational awareness. Students will feel more validated, included, and affirmed as individuals and members of the larger College community.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Faculty and staff demonstrate intercultural competency in their teaching, advising, and work in general so that all students feel respected and validated.
2. The college embraces a curriculum that reflects the diversity of perspectives, histories, and experiences of our students, the United States, and the world at large.
3. The college supports all students from historically marginalized groups by providing effective multicultural advising and resources.
4. All students appreciate their individual strengths and characteristics and understand aspects of their social identity that lead to self-acceptance as well as empathy and appreciation for others.
5. The college reconfigures or designs new space so that cultural and intercultural programming and collaborative work can be supported and facilitated.

Diversity and Inclusion Education – Wellesley will sponsor educational programs that better prepare faculty, staff, and students to engage with one another around issues of diversity and inclusion. Educational programs' goals and methodologies will be aligned with the college's core mission and tailored to the differing needs and interests of faculty, students, and staff. A cornerstone of these efforts will be developing campus-wide capacity for structured dialogues with a focus on conversing about difficult topics as well as developing effective dialogue skills. Community members will have the ability to effectively engage one another to learn about and address issues related to identity and culture – an essential competency for participating in multicultural settings both at Wellesley and beyond.

Desired Outcomes:

1. The College provides infrastructure and resources that provide opportunities for students to find commonality through an exploration of multiple identities and cross-group collaborations.
2. Members of the Wellesley community develop skills for addressing and changing attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate bias, discrimination, and other obstacles to equity.

3. Faculty, staff, and students demonstrate effective dialogue skills while participating in and benefiting from dialogues relative to issues that historically stand to divide, rather than unite, members of a diverse and multi-faceted community.

FOLLOW UP

In keeping with the issues raised by the recent (2009) NEASC accreditation visit and the planned re-visit in 2014, the core committee requests that senior staff develop a plan and a timeline with specific benchmarks that will allow the recommendations in this report to be acted upon. We recognize the need and benefit for an ongoing, transparent process of dialogue, planning, and evaluation that is inclusive of all constituencies of the college, and we further suggest that oversight for the initiatives outlined in this report be shared between senior staff and the college's Diversity Coalition Committee.

APPENDIX

In reviewing the information and data about the current state, the following topics represent strengths and challenges that the Core Committee has contemplated as it developed a *vision, definitions, and strategic directions* for diversity and inclusion at Wellesley.

Strengths

- The Wellesley student body is significantly diverse. College admissions staff has been effective at recruiting students who come from a wide range of backgrounds including and beyond different racial and ethnic identities. Students bring a wide range of experiences.
- The diversity of the Wellesley student body is reported to be one of the main reasons that students choose to attend Wellesley; a majority of seniors reported that their ability to relate to people of different races/nationalities and religions has been greatly enhanced by Wellesley education.
- The multicultural services and programs provided by members of Cultural Advising Network are critical sources of support for students from the most historically marginalized groups and an essential part of their Wellesley experience.
- Cultural organizations are able to provide safe space, comfort zones, and advocacy for minority students, and their programming offers educational opportunities for the entire campus. Students involved in cultural organizations greatly appreciate the support their respective organizations provide, and many of these students are heavily invested in creating positive change for their organizations and groups.
- The well-attended Workshops for Students of Color provide opportunities for students and cultural groups to come together to interact and support each other.
- The Multifaith Council/Multifaith Living and Learning Community with the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life is considered an on-campus model for inclusion and for connecting and facilitating dialogue and programming across different religious groups. The Multifaith Center

provides a multipurpose space to promote cross-cultural interaction and connection.

- For most students, Wellesley orientation is effective in welcoming first year students. Let Me Speak is a powerful program that introduces new students to the diverse Wellesley community. The Big Sister program works well for most. Additionally, the welcoming events hosted by cultural advisors and student organizations provide an opportunity for new students to connect with student organizations.
- The residential structure supports inclusion, and the Tanner and Ruhlman Conferences showcase diversity.
- Stipends and grants from the Center for Work and Service provide opportunities for interested students to participate in social justice initiatives off campus and service-learning in marginalized communities.
- Many faculty and staff members are committed to supporting students of diverse characteristics and backgrounds.

Challenges

- Insufficient administrative support for Native American students and GLBTQ students is an area of concern for students and staff. Students in these communities feel marginalized.
- Many students believe that Wellesley's curriculum is not culturally diverse; students from historically marginalized groups feel that their history and experience are being ignored.
- Students believe they carry the burden of addressing issues related to diversity and inclusion, and they struggle to find an adequate balance between their academics and co-curricular activities. Students believe they hold the primary responsibility for developing and sustaining the organizations that support students from historically underrepresented groups.
- The number of student organizations, combined with limited venues for communication, makes it difficult to coordinate major events. Students and staff participating in recent focus groups consistently expressed the

- opinion that there are missed opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and synergy among cultural programs. This situation creates demands on the time of students, faculty of color, cultural advisors, and administrative staff.
- Students encounter assumptions, expectations, and stereotypes about their visible and invisible identities. Some students express distress about choosing which culture to identify with. They also experience “pressure” to associate predominantly with members of their own identity group.
 - Students want to develop their leadership capacity to engage in conversation on a variety of subjects, from social justice to identity issues. Student leaders are not provided with systematic, consistent, and non-crisis oriented venues to resolve conflicts based on issues of identity, social justice, and inclusion. Participants describe few proactive, planned interactions and dialogues across student groups and among all students at Wellesley. Currently, dialogue occurs primarily in reaction to an explosive event on campus, making conflict resolution difficult.
 - The connections among students need to be strengthened as well as their connection to a core Wellesley community. The current structure has not provided adequate resources, training, and incentives for students to address their questions about worldviews, power and oppression, multiple identities and their intersections as a way to build community among all students.
 - Wellesley has historically narrowly measured student achievement, defining success primarily in terms of the GPA. The External Advisors have broadened the conversation with the Core Committee to include discussion of academic achievement in the larger context of how Wellesley measures success.
 - There is a need for improved coordination and collaboration among class deans, faculty advisors, and cultural advisors to better support students in making good choices when balancing high academic performance and co-curricular leadership.
 - The institutional structure to support diversity initiatives has relied largely on informal arrangements and coordination among administrators, faculty, staff members, and students in response to

specific concerns. The current structures do not effectively facilitate staff-to-staff and staff-to-faculty collaborations in support of all students' success.

- The offices of cultural advisors are under-resourced. Without adequate support, the burden of programming falls on the students and the cultural advisors are all too often left with little time to plan and facilitate the more challenging dialogues and workshops that focus on critical areas of cross-cultural communication and understanding for all students.
- Cultural organizations compete for resources. This competition contributes to an underlying sense of tension and perceptions of inequity between student groups.
- Although many students express appreciation of Wellesley's financial aid, there are still many students who experienced a lack of sensitivity towards issues of socio-economic diversity.
- Many students and staff believe that the lack of a designated multicultural space contributes to the fragmentation of Wellesley's diverse community. They believe such a space would promote intercultural dialogues and connections.
- Wellesley faculty and staff are not as diverse as the student population, resulting in a lack of role models for students.
- Faculty provide different levels of awareness and support. Students experience some faculty as unaware, uninterested, or ineffective in understanding how a student's background and experience on campus may be affecting her academic performance.
- Staff, faculty, and students have differing levels of interest and ability in engaging in difficult cross-cultural dialogues.
- There is an absence of an articulated vision and strategy for connecting and integrating students' co-curricular and curricular experience with the diversity on campus.