

A Critical Interpretation of Policies for Minority Students in Washington State

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Presented is a critical ethnographic analysis of minority culture-based policies and programs on six university campuses in Washington state and how their existence contributes to the retention and success of students of color and to increased racial and ideological separatism. Conclusions are based on interviews with 60 educators intimately involved with programs and policies that attempt to support or reinforce the culture and heritage of specific ethnic minority student groups.

The value of providing environments on college campuses sensitive to and supportive of diversity continues to be called into question as the competition for educational access increases and occupational options decrease. Arguments rage as to whether minority culture-based policies and programs lead to increased retention for students of color or only contribute to racial and ideological separatism (Duster, 1991; Steele, 1992; Berube & Nelson, 1995). Advanced during the 1960s and 1970s to provide transitional safe havens for African American and Latino students coming to predominantly white campuses, these policies and programs have come under increasing attack as the nation moves toward a more conservative agenda. Also, increasingly as students of color refuse to select race as their most significant identity, they perceive the "benefits" of merging with, rather than standing separate from, others (Zack, 1993; Funderburg, 1994). On the positive side, these apparent "benefits" spring from the desire to be respected and acknowledged first as an individual rather than a member of a group; on a more disturbing level they reflect an attempt to flee the societal assumptions that continue to see difference as deficient. For the present policy analysis, I have identified "minority-culture based programs" as those purposeful actions on or near a campus that address the needs of students who accept minority culture identification. At the time of this study, minority students were officially defined in Washington state as African American, Asian American, Native American, or Hispanic. I use the term Latino in place of Hispanic except when in quotation. Black and African American are used interchangeably.

In an effort to understand the complexity of

diversity policy making in higher education, I embarked on a critical ethnography study of the six public 4-year campuses in Washington state, seeking an interpretive analysis from the perspective of 60 administrators, faculty members, and professional staff of the ways in which their campuses have attempted to recruit and accommodate students of color. Implications for academic advising are addressed.

The Local Context

Diversity programming began on a national scale as a result of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the 1973 Adams decision that called for equality of higher education beyond desegregation (Thomas & McPartland, 1984). This translated into a mandate to increase the access and retention of minorities at all levels of higher education. Much of what is written about the policy and programming that occurred after desegregation pertains to the South or Midwest where separate systems of education had been intact for some time (Allen, 1988; Thomas, 1981). The situation in Washington state was somewhat different (Furman & Sagor, 1992). In the northwestern states movement toward equality of access was slower. The largest gain in recent years has been for Asian/Pacific Islanders who comprise 9.2% of the students attending 4-year public institutions in Washington. The percentages of participation for other visible ethnic groups have remained relatively constant over the past 10 years with Latinos at 2.7%, African Americans at 2.4%, Native Americans at 1.3%, and nonresident aliens at 2.6% (HECB, 1993).

In 1975 the State of Washington included in its Planning and Policy Recommendations for Postsecondary Education a section advocating educational programs that "accommodate the changing patterns of thought and investigation so that newly perceived problems can be effectively addressed" (Council for Postsecondary Education, 1975, p. 155). While the terms "minority" or "students of color" are not mentioned, there is an allusion to the importance of increased cultural understanding. Over the subsequent 10 years colleges and universities across the state developed programs to not only

attract students of color to their campuses but also to retain, educate, and graduate them (Madison, 1993; Brewer, 1990). While approximately 15% of the state's population is identified as representing one of the four categorical ethnic minority groups, the majority of these individuals are concentrated in the urban area of Seattle/Tacoma which is home to only one of the six 4-year public institutions of higher education, the University of Washington (UW). The other five schools lie as near as 50 miles or as far as 300 miles away from this cosmopolitan hub; three of the campuses are isolated from the west side by a large mountain range.

Research Design

Marcus and Fischer view the task of ethnographic cultural critique as a means "to discover the variety of modes of accommodation and resistance by individuals and groups to their shared social order" (1986, p. 132-133). In attending to the responses of the 60 informants in this study note Rosaldo's warning: "All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others" (1989, p. 8). Such research is respectful of contradictions and confusion. The methodology is derived from an approach to institutional research developed by Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton (1972) in their work, "Evaluation as Illumination: A New Approach to the Study of Innovatory Programs" and is based on the recognition that valid social interpretation of events requires the networking of various individuals involved in the process. Tierney, drawing on Geertz (1973), refers to this process "as a web where individuals both spin and are caught by the web's gossamer" (1992, p. 41). In this study those attempting to do some untangling of the web are Directors of Minority Affairs, administrators of Ethnic Studies and Equal Opportunity Programs, admission officers, counselors, Vice Provosts or Vice Presidents for Student Affairs, and other staff and faculty members who were intimately involved in the policy decisions concerning diversity on their respective campuses.

Every campus had significant representation of faculty members or administrators of color in the positions mentioned above. Approximately 70% of the informants were people of color. Most had been a part of academia for over 15 years and gave an historical perspective for the evolution of minority affairs in the state. A more specific profile of the informants would expose their personal identities. Eight to 12 respondents were interviewed at each campus. The criteria for selection included a) their

degree of involvement with minority student affairs, b) their institutional position as an advocate or advisor for minority students, and c) their reputation as a spokesperson on the issue of minorities in higher education. The content of the interviews pertained to each individual's approach to, and involvement in, minority programming, the nature of minority culture-based policies and programs on his or her campus, and how each assessed the progress of his or her institution in relation to access and success for students of color. The six campuses included Eastern Washington University, Western Washington University, The Evergreen State College, Washington State University, Central Washington University, and the University of Washington. The researched progressed over a year, 1989-1990, requiring several visits to each institution to conduct face-to-face, in-depth interviews. In addition to interviews, descriptive site profiles were developed based on observations, public documents, and institutional literature produced by and about the universities.

Minority Culture-based Programming

The reality that first-generation college students, particularly if they are students of color, are struggling to make sense of their collegiate experience is well documented (Allen, 1981; Marashio, 1982; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Edgewater, 1981; Astin, 1982). The extent to which minority culture-based policies and programs assist in their success—as well as their survival—is yet to be demonstrated.

The perceived importance of minority culture-based programs in Washington state varied greatly depending on the institution, its geographic location, and the respondents' experiences with minority affairs within their institutions. While a great deal of lip service was paid to a desire to increase the number of students of color on these college campuses, there was little understanding or interest in how to promote minority enrollment and retention. The link between specific programming geared toward the needs of students of color and retention was nebulous. Exceptions did exist. One top level administrator at a major research university spoke passionately, "There's no doubt in my mind that if you don't have minority culture-based programming, you won't have good retention. Ethnic specific programming is necessary simply because cultures differ in their response." An admissions counselor was equally emphatic in his perception,

Yes, minority culture-based programs are definitely necessary. If students grow up in a

mixed environment or within their own ethnic group, then go on to higher education, culture shock is inevitable. Adjusting to college life itself is hard enough but then to also be expected to educate yourself about others, and educate them about you, compounds the problem.

An outside consultant who was invited to one of the rural institutions to evaluate their programming arrangement recommended the continuation of separate ethnic programming. He justified his decision on the perception that these educational programs provided a "place for each minority group to establish relationships and understand their emotional or spiritual needs." Providing a safe place in Washington state may have more significance than in other parts of the country because large numbers of Native Americans live in the Northwest and white identity organizations have a visible presence in the eastern part of the state. The director of one of the ethnic programs addressed the need for a safe environment when explaining: "Parents are willing to send their children here, despite the campus's proximity to the Aryan Nation, because they know that there are programs here which will monitor their child's work as well as provide personal support."

Nevertheless, support for institutional strategies designed to support or reinforce the culture and heritage of specific ethnic minority groups was not unqualified. The lack of interest in, if not opposition to, minority culture-based policies and programs centered on student profile. Several informants claimed that the type of student who attends one of the five rural colleges in the state is more conservative and attend because they do not want to be with other minorities; they want to blend into the community. One faculty member put it this way, "Those students who do come here know that they are coming to a white school and do not have expectations. They don't need or want cultural reinforcement. For a variety of reasons, they might not fit in with the west side [of the state, the Seattle/Tacoma area]."

People of color who lived through the 1960s see this negation of culture as leaving students without any ethnic identity. A counselor acknowledging the changes in attitude between the youth of today and those of 20 years ago remarked, "The younger students say that minority culture-based programs are separatist; they don't want to be different. Why should they? They have no ethnic identity."

Students who were between 20 and 30 years old did not share this negativity of nonethnic identity. Those from mixed marriages resented having to identify with one parent over the other or single out

one aspect of their heritage. A young graduate of mixed parentage who was now serving as a minority recruiter unequivocally denied the need for minority culture-based programs.

Nowadays not many students come in with a strong sense that they are a single minority. Most aren't going to take the time or energy to do cultural things like draw pictures of Spanish bullfighters. So it's racist to separate people out into clubs which emphasizes differences not similarities.

Several respondents feared the potential stigma that could be attached to association with programs for specific minority groups. While they thought: "it was nice to have a home base for minorities, but they should not be separated out; they need to be mainstreamed, otherwise they will feel stigmatized." An African American faculty member verified this reality in sharing with me a comment he overheard by one of his students. "Yes, I'm Black and I want them to receive their due, but I'm looking at the world; I want to fit in, not stick out."

Native American groups also questioned the role of minority culture-based programs that emphasized American Indian culture. A Native staff person explained, "[American] Indian programming at the university is suspect; credentials are suspect. We believe that education should be community-based with our own people teaching. My people are being changed." According to one of the directors of the Indian Education Program the problem lies with misunderstanding and misinformation. Many of the tribal elders felt that Native cultural values and issues had no place in a school setting, rather they should be imparted by the individual tribe. Non-Native faculty members and administrators saw the situation quite differently:

In some ways minority culture-based programming is more important with Native Americans than with other groups. The dynamics of who they are and where they are going are different from all other minority groups. They have a sense that they are a 'people' not a minority. At Christmas break they go home. Parents have expectations. The clash is phenomenal. We need to work with students on reentry. Native American faculty are saying that they want the young to return to the reservation but the young don't want to go.

This apparent generational and ideological gap

between 50- to 60-year-old faculty members and administrators who were working with 18- to 25-year-old students repeated itself in almost every conversation. Some informants expressed dismay and disappointment at students' unwillingness to support traditional values of their people or to identify with one particular ethnic group. The use of minority culture-based programs as a tool to enhance recruitment and retention therefore proved perplexing as the informants grappled with varying student needs. One Latino faculty member elaborated,

Assimilation is not the only answer, but it must remain an option for those who chose it. Accommodation is a better way of looking at the issue. You understand that you have a mother culture but you can be totally successful in the majority culture and feel comfortable.

Two other faculty members of color from different campuses came to their own conclusions. One African American male administrator after discussing the dangers, isolation, and pain he experienced during the 1970s on predominantly white campuses reflected with bemused detachment,

Minorities need to learn to survive in the white world if they hope to go on into business or higher education. If they can survive here [a large rural campus], they will be so far ahead of others. My boss calls this place 'the bootcamp to the world.'

An older Latino faculty member was not so matter-of-fact in sharing his perception. Reflecting on his own forced assimilation to a different rural university at a time when the issue of multiculturalism was seldom discussed, he painfully suggested,

There is no minority culture group who doesn't feel like they are rejecting their culture, or are accused of rejecting it. There are feelings of regret, and the perception hurts the most when values are questioned. We are shaped by our experience.

Implications for Academic Advising

Institutions of higher education must be clear about how policies and programs are related to specific goals. College campuses should be places where students can focus on learning rather than just

tifying their identities, where they can take risks, stretch boundaries, and try new ideas. The opposite has happened on many predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Students of color spend excessive amount of time adjusting their self-images, accommodating or posturing to fit the situation. Research by Lunneborg and Lunneborg (1985) allows us to rethink the orientation of PWIs to provide university environments that provide a free exchange of diverse perspectives. Lunneborg and Lunneborg found that the concerns and recommendations of minority students, while needing the attention of the administration and faculty, were consistently referred to student affairs staff who were relatively powerless in the transformation of the classroom and campus climate. Rendon (1989) similarly found students' demands lying beyond the purview of student affairs in the areas of increased financial aid, curriculum transformation, and the hiring of faculty members willing to work with students from diverse backgrounds.

It is imperative that programs and policies are flexible enough to adapt to the evolving needs of the current student population rather than serving an external agenda. For example, certain student service positions and programs have been developed to deal with particular needs or populations. If these needs no longer exist, resources must be reallocated. On the other hand, areas exist that are relevant to overall student needs, for example, ongoing curriculum transformation. A strong academic program emphasizing cultural diversity is essential for all students in all institutions of higher education. When these two arenas are conflated, as they have been on many of the campuses under study, confusion ensues. Ethnic studies programs are prime examples of confused agendas. Are these programs solely for ethnic students because they provide support and assistance in navigating higher education or are they academic programs open to all students by emphasizing an interdisciplinary understanding of ethnic groups? What happens to such programs when, on the one hand, few students of color participate in them either because they think they do not need assistance or because they do not want to identify with ethnic programs or when white students who might be interested in issues of ethnicity fail to enroll in the programs because they believe that the programs are not designed for them? Black or Native American studies are valuable academic programs, they should not be used primarily as recruitment tools for students of color.

This research highlights the complications hidden in mandated policies and programs on diversity at college campuses. What can be perceived by some

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Author's Note

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Using Quality Function Deployment to Improve Academic Advising Processes

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Quality Function Deployment (QFD), a set of concepts and tools often used in manufacturing engineering to link consumer needs with product design, can be used to improve academic advising systems and processes. QFD promotes a structured and logical examination of students' advising needs and a rigorous examination of the relationship of these needs to the design of advising systems, processes, methods, and tools. Because its conceptual base is radically different from the disciplines underpinning advising theory, QFD can offer advising leadership useful insights and avenues for advising improvement.

Advising college students requires insights from many disciplines. Typically, professional advisors draw on knowledge from social science disciplines such as psychology and sociology or related applied professional fields in education or counseling (Creamer & Creamer). However, academic leadership responsible for improving advising processes might also draw on conceptual principles developed in statistics and engineering and applied in business, especially concepts from Quality Function Deployment (QFD) which link consumer needs and product engineering design. QFD was applied to academic advising in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in a project to improve the advising system to better meet students' needs.

This adaptation of QFD to academic advising is an extremely rudimentary approach compared to the level of detail and sophistication employed in some manufacturing QFD applications. Yet the principles are identical. QFD imposes a conceptual rigor that links an assessment of consumer needs to the design of academic advising tools and methods. The principles of QFD may be helpful to academic advisors, even though QFD disciplinary roots and language may be somewhat foreign to those trained in the humanities, education, psychology, or related disciplines.

Principles of Quality Function Deployment

QFD is one subset of the management concepts and tools known collectively as Total Quality

Management (TQM) which evolved from methods of statistical quality control. Developed by Mitsubishi and Toyota corporations, QFD is a method of product design that has been used successfully by manufacturing businesses in both Japan and the United States. Akao (1990, p. 3) defines QFD as "... a method for developing a design quality aimed at satisfying the consumer and then translating the consumer's demands into design targets and major quality assurance points to be used throughout the production stage." American corporations such as Ford, General Motors, and AT&T use QFD to design products that respond to multiple and complex customer demands. For example, Hauser and Clausing (1988) describe an application of QFD to an automobile door design, a process that includes dozens of different customer needs and engineering design characteristics. The design team uses various techniques to discover and rank consumer needs. For example, consumers need non-leaking car doors that are easy to open and close. The team determines the engineering characteristics of the door that influence consumer needs, for example, door weight and thickness of the door seal insulation strip. The team then determines the impact of dozens of these engineering characteristics on the consumer needs, searching for those with greatest impact on the most important needs. For example, the door's weight has by far the greatest impact on the ease of opening and closing. Interaction among the engineering characteristics must also be considered. For example, thicker insulation improves the water seal but makes the door harder to close. These considerations lead to a final design of the product, and the manufacturing system is then planned so that the product will have the attributes that will best meet consumer needs.

This conceptual paradigm from manufacturing engineering can be applied to academic advising by viewing advising as a product that can be engineered to meet particular consumer needs. The student is viewed as a consumer with particular expressed and latent advising needs. The student advising product is the result of a manufacturing system composed of many different processes, such as advising for next semester's classes, constructing a 4-year academic plan, and selecting a major or career. As with any

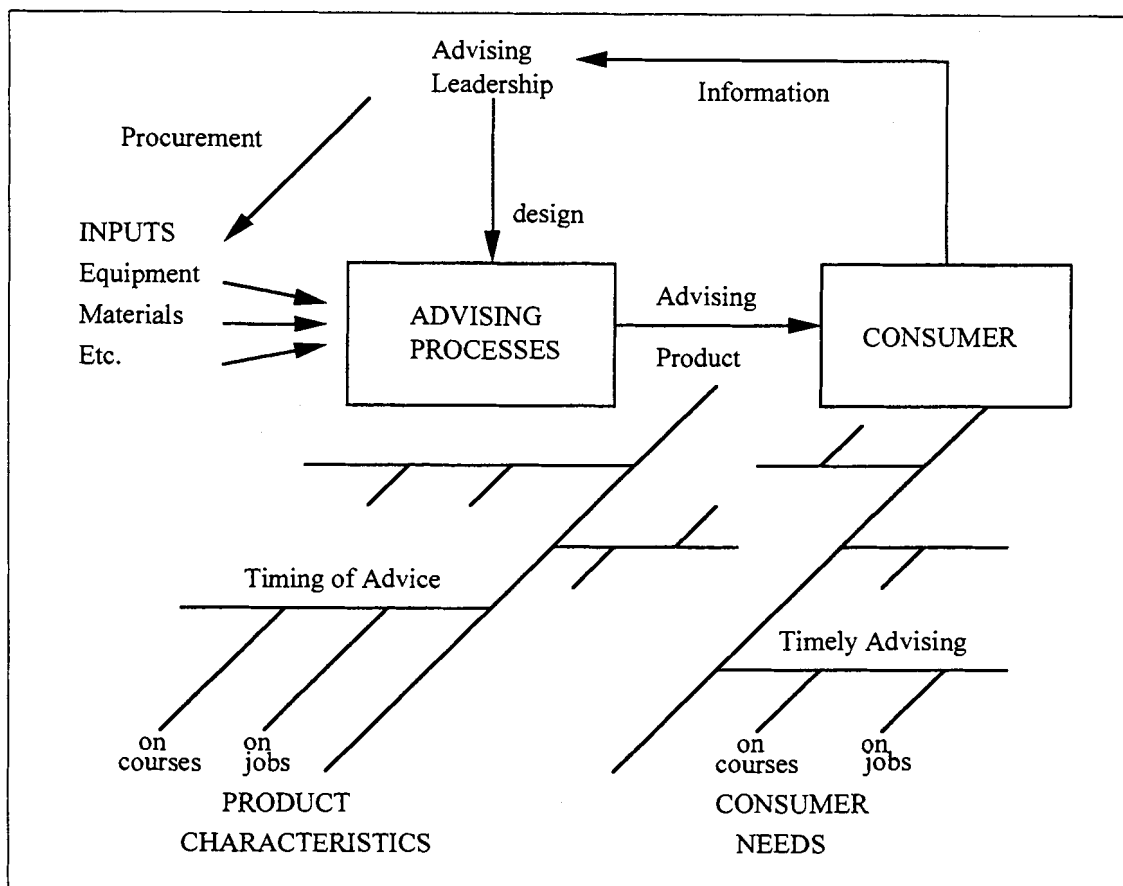


Figure 1 Manufacturing systems for advising

manufactured product, improvement in the advising product depends on changes in the system that produces advising. System improvement is possible only through changing the particular processes that produce advising for students, by changing the inputs into processes of advising manufacturing, or by changing the manner in which the processes are organized or linked together. Improvement of the academic advising system is the job of the advising leadership (those in formal advising leadership positions). The function of advising leadership is to get the system right by designing processes, securing inputs, and monitoring consumer feedback to ensure high quality and to identify improvements.

The manufacturing system for advising is depicted in Figure 1. The center box represents the collection of processes comprising the academic advising system. Each process relates to particular inputs, represented on the left of Figure 1. Some inputs may be external to the advising system, such as the structure of degree requirements. Other inputs may be used by advisors in their daily work, such as a form a student completes to add a course late in

the semester or the computer uses to access student information. The advising processes produce results that have particular characteristics, depicted by the fishbone under the "advising product" heading. For example, the advising product has particular temporal characteristics, such as the availability of advisors at different times in the semester. Meanwhile, the consumer (student) has certain advising needs, depicted by the fishbone under the "consumer" box at the right of Figure 1. For example, the student may have a very high need for certain types of advising at particular times in the semester which may or may not coincide with the timing of advising availability. The degree of correspondence between the product characteristics and the consumer needs determines the consumer's view of product quality. The feedback loop in Figure 1 depicts the information flow from consumer to leadership in the organization—information that can be used to modify the manufacturing process to produce a product better suited to consumer needs.

The TQM principles of customer focus, process management, and systems analysis are applied in a