The Changing Face of Higher Education: Does a Language of Inclusion Matter

Lorraine M. Henderson, Ph.D.

Recruitment and retention efforts across the Mid-Atlantic States are being driven to change. At private, historically white, four-year liberal arts colleges these efforts are shifting with the change in regional demographics. The research on growing heterogeneity on the U.S. residential campus has, primarily, focused on the curriculum used to educate students for living and working in the 21st Century. A qualitative study conducted in 2011 explored the published messages used by these types of institutions in search of evidence of leadership commitment to building a multicultural campus. It asked “how does an emerging multicultural identity get articulated to the community by the leadership of these institutions” and “how are diversity efforts supported by the plans, priorities, structures, and resources?” The themes that emerged regarding the public rhetoric used by some of these institutions provides the basis for this slice of findings from within the larger study. Messages of inclusion and language consistent across and deep within some organizations aligned with improved rates of enrollment and retention of non-traditional students. Rhetoric differentiating the highly diversity-competent institutions from those less effective at attracting and retaining a wider range of students provides implications for practice as these types of institutions respond internally to the external forces for change.

INTRODUCTION

American colleges and universities have seen dramatic shifts in the environments in which they operate in recent decades (Fugazzotto, 2009; Keller, 2008). Higher education institutions (HEIs) face new competition from the growth of for-profits. Economics affect budgets and the

Lorraine M. Henderson, Ph.D., Nazareth College, Rochester, NY
numbers of students who can afford higher education. Technology and globalization impact the makeup of the student body engaged in higher education (College Board, 2005). These external forces pressure institutional cultures to change within.

At the same time that the pool of applicants becomes shallower for institutions in the Middle Atlantic States, the span of choices for students widen (Marginson, 2006). Adding diversity to the campus by attracting more non-traditional students to the college experience is one approach used to address these challenges. Non-traditional students are defined as the ethnic minorities not historically attracted to smaller, regional, private colleges (e.g. Blacks and Hispanics), the first-generation college bound, adults over 25 years of age who have yet to complete a college degree, and those marginalized previously by their socio-economic status (Aleman & Salkever, 2003). The residential institutions that rely heavily on enrollments to meet their annual operating budgets need to respond more nimbly to the challenges in order to survive (Drucker, 1997; Zemsky, 2009).

Misra and McMahon (2006) proposed that students who feel they are welcomed as members of a campus community are more likely to perform at higher levels, and with this success, to stay until graduation. In this way, external forces place pressure not only on recruitment of diverse candidates, but also on internal cultures to shift in order to retain those students. Adult students who do not reside on campus have support needs as do the financially stressed and academically unprepared (Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993). The college campuses that “communicate experiences” of an inviting, supportive community to be found within will benefit from the demographic shifts taking place outside their walls. (Guarasci & Cornwell, 1997, p.19)

**Background of the Study**

Over a two-decade time frame, the National Center for Educational Statistics report continuing demographic shifts in the number of colleges serving growing percentages of ethnic students (NCES, 2007). Literature on
access to higher education has focused on the challenge to institutions to retain students when he/she self-identify as part of a minority group (Gelber, 2007). The research focused on the classroom experience has found that curriculum shifts to meet the needs of these students can help with retention (Hurtado, Dey, Gurin & Gurin, 2003; Kuh, 2001). The institutional role in retention perspective and the campus-wide experience for all students, however, has primarily been ignored.

**Historical Perspective on Diversity**
External forces increasingly shape adjustments in thinking in organizations as leaders face an uncertain future (Bourgeois, 1980; Menard, 2010). Hurtado (2007) warned that institutional shifts are necessary if effective and meaningful change is to occur on campuses as their climate diversifies with perspectives and needs of a more heterogeneous student body. The classic concern driving research on diversity in higher education prior to the beginning of the 21st Century focused on access and the classroom experience. Diversity was defined by race and gender (Gelber, 2007; Nidiffer, 1999). As Gurin (1999) suggested, however, HEIs undergoing transformation to reflect the changing demographics of society needed to focus on more than shifts to their curriculum.

The heterogeneous campus environment grabbed the attention of education and social science researchers as advocating for a new kind of learning space for students emerged as an area of interest (ACE, 2000; Astin, 1993; Millem, 1999; Sedlacek, 1987; Sheets, 2008). This collection of literature harkened back to Dewey’s (1916) doctrine on the liberating power of higher education in a democracy. It established an educational value to diversity on campuses for all students (Astin, 1993; Banks, 1997; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Chang, 2001). Students attending a racially diverse campus were found to be exposed to new ideas, new roles and new relationships (Brunner, 2005; Cortes, 1991). Students asked to engage in more complex thinking were seen to be better prepared for a pluralistic society and workforce (Hurtado, 2007; Kuh, 1993).

These findings encouraged enrollment managers and other practitioners within HEIs to engage in efforts to diversify their student bodies
(Barbaso & Cabral-Cardosa, 2007; Brickson, 2000, Lueddeke, 1999). The research, however, continued to focus on the student experience and not the social constructs that impact the entire campus community. With Birnbaum’s (1992) book on *How Academic Leadership Works*, the view of research on diversity began to include leadership’s role in establishing the campus culture. However, the research in the field remained isolated from institutional change theory applied to other settings.

**Cultural Development in Higher Education**

Leadership messages that clearly set diversity as a priority and communicate this priority through public calls to action contribute to a diversity-competent institution (Michaels, 2007). Diversity competence as part of an institution’s identity fits within the theoretical framework established by Edgar Schein’s (1985) definition of organizational culture as:

> a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 9)

With this definition in mind, a study of higher education’s institutional culture would require observation, analysis, and interpretation of patterns of shared basic assumptions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Dyer, 1985; Kuh & Whitt, 1988). How these manifest from within internal groups as they socially construct reality (e.g. administrators, Marketing and Communication officers, presidents, boards of trustees, and faculty governance) might inform studies of HEIs.

Research supported by change theory has linked the role that shared institutional goals have had on collective thinking. In change theory, leadership commitment and action is essential for transformation to occur (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Michael & Mirvis, 1977). Externally-focused cultures have been linked to building collective thinking in support of that transformation, within (Schein, 1990; Tierney, 1988). For a college or university to move in response
Does a Language of Inclusion Matter

to external forces, access to new sources for learning on how to change must be found (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2006).

Weick (1979) recognized university cultures as complex systems with ambiguous goals. Bergquist, 1992, recognized different types of institutional cultures within higher education. How these smaller, regional, private liberal arts colleges might respond to demographic forces, given their historically internally-focused cultures and complex governance structures, has begun to benefit from change theory (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2008). A call for massive paradigm shifts in leadership thinking, organizational climate, and in action shaped by priorities provides another frame of reference for research in higher education.

Leadership's Role in Cultural Change

By overlaying change and leadership theory to research on the structures of higher education, HEI leaders might learn from cultural change in other industries (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Davis, 1982; Smircich, 1983a). By examining what the leadership publicly and collectively shares as its beliefs and understandings, researchers have identified some commonly held sets of ideals that drive organizational commitment (Dutton & Dukerich, 1994). By interpreting, therefore, the shared assumptions that “create enduring patterns of social facts”, made publicly available by the leadership of the institution, content analysis may be used to discern the identity being defined within (MacLean, 2008, p. 5). Kuh brought the concept of leadership influence on culture and applied it to the context of higher education by defining it as:

collective, mutually shaped patterns of history, mission, physical settings, norms, traditions, practices and beliefs that influence the behavior of individuals and groups and provides a frame of reference within which to interpret meaning of events and actions on and off campus. (Kuh & Whitt, 1988 as cited by Kuh, 2001, p.663)

The history of an institution of higher education, including the purpose for which it was founded and the aspirations of that establishing body have
been found to leave a lasting impact on the culture (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Kuh, 2001). Making a new organizational identity, therefore, requires adaptation of the existing culture and clear messages that fit with the history, as well as the new beliefs being established or shared (Horowitz, 1987; Lueddeke, 1999). Specifically, when diversity commitment is articulated it must fit, then, with the institutional philosophy.

Assessment of how “faculty, students, and administrators…understand the mission…and its relevance for multicultural community (building)” has been researched in higher education (Aleman & Salkever, 2003, p.564). “Construction of a culturally pluralistic environment” influenced by faculty, programming and socio-historical context has been included in change research (Thompson, 2008, p.2). “One of the primary reasons institutions of higher education exist…” can be understood only by “…examining institutional properties expressed in mission, philosophy and artifacts to determine how they work together to influence the behaviors” of the actors within according to Kuh (1993, p.661). As explanations of purpose, messages communicated widely across a campus may indicate intentions and provide consistency in a sea of change. In this way, leadership’s choice of language during change may indeed matter.

**STUDY DESIGN AND FINDINGS**

External driving forces are calling for shifts in internal organizational strategies and structures (Keller, 2008; Porter, 1996). Because of the shift in demographics, alone, HEIs are challenged to identify how to build a sense of community as homogeneity disappears (Marginson, 2006). By obtaining information from singular institutions within a common context, comparisons across cases, faced with similar challenges, could be explored. According to Michael’s (2007) 14-point framework for creation of a “highly diversity-competent” institution, a shift in power structures, social structures, and in processes must occur on college campuses to both attract and retain a multicultural, multi-faceted student and faculty body.
In this mid-Atlantic state a total of 30 colleges were found to be situated within the political, social, economic and cultural context of the private liberal arts institution (per Carnegie classification). Twenty-five colleges, in total, reside outside of any major metropolitan area (where diversity might not be as easily accessed). Within these 25, an exploratory cross-case design sought to examine how the organizational and physical structures were responding to the shifting demographics (Henderson, 2011). Developing a narrative to fill a gap in the knowledge base of HEI leadership, challenged by an increasingly dynamic external environment, was the study’s purpose.

**Design in Phases**

This study’s design began with a quantitative ranking of the 25 institutions within the state that were classified as liberal arts colleges serving a primarily regional population. The minority growth of Black and Hispanic students and the numbers of White students, as a percent of total enrollment, were compared. These percentages were then contrasted with national averages for student enrollment at private institutions over the last five years. The national growth in Black and Hispanic enrollment was found to be 22 percent (NCES, 2007). In contrast, nationally, the White student population as a proportion of total undergraduates was under 70 percent (US Census Bureau, 2008). This information provided a benchmark for comparing campuses, one to the other, in this state.

The quantitative phase began, therefore, expecting to find a 70/30 breakdown between White and minority populations. When the delta in growth of Black and Hispanic graduation rates did not align with the national average for enrollment of these ethnic populations, other indicators were added to the demographic profile for successful enrollment and retention. Non-traditional student growth was expanded to include numbers of adults in undergraduate programs and the percentage of those qualifying for federal loans due to economic need.

To ensure these institutions were, indeed, challenged by increased diversity, these additional dimensions to the student body provided
a clearer picture of change in demographics. The growth in attracting students from diverse populations could then be compared to the retention rates at these colleges. With campus demographic changes, would students find fit at these institutions, and thus, stay?

Colleges viewed to be expanding diversity by attracting greater percentages of non-traditional students were ranked highest in diversity competence if they were also maintaining or improving retention rates. Those colleges expanding non-traditional students and seeing retention rates fall were ranked as less diversity competent. Those whose demographic profiles showed growth in White student populations, whether or not retention was changing, were ranked as least diversity focused or less competent in shifting with societal demographic changes.

Top ranked institutions were decreasing overall percentages of White students with small improvements in retention rates (or limited negative impact given the overall shift in non-traditional student growth). In comparison at the lower end of competency, these campuses experienced a growth in the numbers of White students over the past five years even as state demographics of white students graduating from high school had declined. Additionally, these campuses attracted minority populations well below the national average (at less than twenty percent of the total student body). Growth in the adult or socio-economically challenged populations for these bottom five did not appear significant enough to challenge the makeup of the campus culture. In selecting which institutions within the context to examine in more detail, the top five and bottom five were used to provide an appropriate survey size for comparison (Cooper, 2007).

The second phase of the study focused on case-by-case content analysis of the highly diversity-competent institutions’ public messaging as compared to the messages shared across and within the institutions in the bottom five. This phase was designed to answer the research question “how does an emerging multicultural identity get articulated to the community by leadership of these institutions?” The emphasis of the third phase of the study was on identification of any common elements in the structures of the institutions (power, social, and physical structures) that
# TABLE 1. Indications of Highly-Competent sites by Non-traditional Student Growth/Retention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>−23%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>19% (↑)</td>
<td>−1%</td>
<td>−3% (68%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>−17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>&lt;1% (↓)</td>
<td>+4%</td>
<td>+2% (86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>−35%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27% (↑)</td>
<td>+8%</td>
<td>−0% (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>−12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6% (↓)</td>
<td>−2%</td>
<td>+1 (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>−7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8% (↓)</td>
<td>+10%</td>
<td>+1 (91%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


# TABLE 2. Indications of Lowest-Competency in Non-traditional Student Growth or Success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#21</td>
<td>1% (no ∆)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
<td>+6%</td>
<td>−2% (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#22</td>
<td>14% (−1)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>−1%</td>
<td>−1% (82%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#23</td>
<td>13% (−3)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>−2% (84%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#24</td>
<td>5% (−5)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>+9%</td>
<td>−2%</td>
<td>−5% (86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#25</td>
<td>8% (−3)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>+23%</td>
<td>−0%</td>
<td>+3% (86%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics and IPEDS Data Center, 2010.
might inform leadership actions in structuring to create a multicultural campus (AAC&U, 2008).

By maintaining a focus on one type of institution with a common culture or tradition, evidence of how to attract and retain increased levels of previously under-represented students was sought. Through a case-by-case analysis followed by a cross-case comparison, a narrative with use of a common language began to emerge. The non-existence of the findings at the other end of the institutional ranking (the less diversity competent HEIs) would be considered verification of evidence that might emerge. With this design in place, content analysis began.

**Qualitative Analysis of Web Content**

Since this study included descriptive and explorative phases, it benefited from both individual case analysis and cross-case comparisons (Smircich & Morgan, 1980). By extracting information from catalogs, annual reports, articles, and other public documents, the viewpoints of the varied stakeholders (trustees, presidents, department chairs, and governance bodies) could be examined. These publicly displayed messages were assumed to have undergone scrutiny by constituency groups, as well as the Marketing and Communications Offices of these campuses. As such, observations evolving from the cross-case exploration could inform conclusions about the shared leadership commitment to the outside forces calling for change across the context (Glenn, 2010; Donoghue, 2010).

Ethnographic content analysis (Burke, 1969; Farrell, 1976; McMillan, 2000) encourages accounts to emerge from reading of texts to categorize and give meaning to situations and settings. This requires the researcher to conduct a close reading of relatively small amounts of textual matter, and then interpret those texts as a narrative that emerges. This requires acknowledging the culturally conditioned understandings brought to bear by the analyst. For the purpose of collecting these ideas and messages, and allowing for a close reading across multiple web-pages and documents, more than 200 document summaries were created. These developed from the examination of individual website pages, website maps, links,
Does a Language of Inclusion Matter

archived documents, and strategic messaging found in organizational-level statements (e.g. Board Resolutions, Missions, Visions).

These statements were seen as the priorities for communication by leaders, to their publics, in order to set the tone for the internal environment found within (Thomas, 1990). The descriptive phase of this conventional ethnography, therefore, sought to answer the questions:

1. How does the college or university define diversity?
2. How is leadership commitment to diversity articulated to the public?

Adding to the narrative taking shape from this case by case analysis, a cross-case analysis of factors related to diversity-competence and institutional readiness for change was explored. A meta-matrix was constructed to compare the physical and social structures, and collaborative relationships identified at these top five institutions (Institutions 1 to 5) against those found at the lower end (Institutions 21 to 25).

The cross-case comparison benefitted from a partially pre-conceived checklist and effects matrix by examining six of the 14-points of Michael’s (2007) theory of diversity-competence, including:

1. “...reflect their commitment to diversity in their mission statement…”
2. “...embrace comprehensive diversity definitions…”
3. “...have leaders with a deep commitment to diversity, embracing it as a value and vision that permeates institutional culture…”
4. “...provides an organizational structure that maximizes institutional effectiveness…”
5. Reflects the wider society “...with “people from many races, religions, economic, and political backgrounds, as well as genders and cultural lifestyles”, and
6. “...prepare graduates for functioning in a growingly diverse world…” (Michael, 2007, p.1)
This checklist (i.e., commitment, definition, structures, connections and purpose) and the evolving matrix allowed the researcher to display common themes and verify conclusions by searching in reverse for alternative explanations. The themes supported by content, frequency, consistency, centrality and reach of leadership messages, along with identified plans for action, were seen as answering the final research question:

3. What common elements (in power, social and physical structures) across colleges appear to be sustaining retention rates as diversity increases?

Elements from within these documents were categorized by how they served the first two dimensions of the theory on diversity competence; adding to the multicultural identity of the institution and demonstrating leadership commitment to growing diversity at the institution. The messaging on identity was measured through the frequency by which diversity language could be found across the pages of the website. The depth of messaging (i.e., how far down in the site map of the institution one had to search to find reference to a multicultural identity) also informed the development of the document maps.

Ease of access was determined by time spent finding information. If a searcher does not find what he/she is looking for within two mouse clicks from the home page, the search most likely will be ceased (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). This standard was applied to conclude the priority placed on diversity within the messages of the institution to its publics. Rhetoric aimed at shaping public perception (e.g. a website map maintained by a Marketing, Communications, or Public Relations office) would have greater priority if easier to find. Therefore, the closer to the top of the site (Home page), the easier to access and the more important the message to the sender.

It was only after extensive individual document analysis that identification of common themes emerged from the top five institutions. Verification came through comparison to what could be found by examining
public messages of the least diverse institutions. As the language of these messages were examined and compared, a civic life of a community, connected to the values of these institutions, emerged (Hon & Brunner, 2002). It is this narrative of a community and its priorities that would inform the study’s conclusions.

**Emerging Rhetoric**

Each institution provides the public with a home page with tabs to finding other key information. These links, and links to supporting documents, inform the reader of institutional priorities and provide rhetoric on institutional identity. What is shared with the public (beyond the admissions process) are links to the history, vision, mission, and both strategic and operational plans of each institution. The documents that had implications across departments, functions or groups were searched for consistency in messaging on diversity. Where information was shared from the top of the sitemap across departmental and into program or faculty and staff pages, *depth* of messaging was noted. How often the theme was mentioned provided a count for *frequency* of messaging. Sources and the count of different sources provided both the span and reach of the theme of diversity. This was seen as adding to the *centrality* and *consistency* of the impact that diversity had across departments, programs, centers and levels of the organization.

As the research moved from tab to tab and link to link, evidence of a given message’s importance emerged through the ease of access, frequency of appearance, and consistency of language across an institution’s publicly shared documents. The architecture of information sharing provided the research with data, as well. The priorities as one traversed across web pages and further into the depths of the website provided insights into the importance placed on the messaging of diversity and how it connected for others to concepts of civic engagement, cultural identity, and campus as part of a wider community. Links between current ideas and plans for the futures, as well as purposes of the past, permeated these institutions’ messages.
The findings from studies shaped by the theoretical foundations of transformational change and transformational thinking must be linked to action and outcomes (Bensimon, 1995; Birnbaum, 1992; Bridges, 1990; Neumann & Neumann, 1999). The emerging themes in messaging within these five institutions established diversity as a priority within the context of a changing society and a need for a competitive advantage. This external focus to internal messages was found at the top of the diversity-competent institution’s websites and was articulated as themes across institutional roles (academic, educational, economic, and societal).

At the top of these institutions’ websites were found mission statements, statements of values, strategic plans, and Board Resolutions connecting the role of diversity to their roles as HEIs. These connections were expressed as:

“...striv(ing) to achieve a caring, diverse community....empowers individuals to improve themselves and the world around them...and respects other traditions.” (Institution #4, 1994, *Statement of Values*)

**Table 3.** Meta-matrix of Common Factors at Highly Diversity-Competent Institutions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inst.</th>
<th>Multicultural Identity</th>
<th>Leadership Commitment</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Centrality</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Depth</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Centrality</td>
<td>Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Home+2</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>History, Vision, Purpose, catalog and webpages</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>HomeTabs+1</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Mission, Plan, Resolution, sites</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>About+2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Plan, Archives</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Catalog/Rpts</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Plan, webpgs, Statements</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>HomeTabs+1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Heritage, pdfs, Plans, Web sites, pgs</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The duty to build a community like that of society at-large and to benefit all students’ development was affirmed by Board Resolutions and linked to the roles of faculty, centers, offices, and student groups across the campus. For example, at one center, the campus was considered an “integral part of the social and cultural fabric of the surrounding city” (Institution 2, n.d., Center for Community Engagement). Offices were commissioned to “implement…a campus community that reflects the diverse society in which we live” (Institution 2, 2008, Resolution of the Board). Institution #3’s Center for Multicultural Education and Diversity values “a pluralistic perspective and promotes equity and appreciation for human diversity among its students, faculty, administrators and staff”. These messages of leadership commitment were deeply embedded in the content of the websites and documents and written as connections to the history of the institutions.

The value of diversity and the liberal arts tradition and future were connected within these documents. What is meant by diversity must be clear in dimension and scope (Levine, 1991). By expanding the meaning beyond the dimensions of ethnicity and gender, phrases found at these top five institutions included synonyms such as ‘multicultural’, ‘pluralistic’, and ‘inclusive’ along with outcomes calling for ‘variety’, ‘equity’, and ‘justice’. Where ‘diversity’ was connected to ‘equity’, ‘inclusive-ness’ was tied to ‘justice’, and ‘multicultural’ was shared in the same context as ‘pluralism’. Institutions used these terms consistently to differentiate themselves from their competition. A pluralistic orientation for students, staff, faculty and the surrounding community was presented as a bridge between the past and the future, and between the inside and outside of campus.

Embedded in Institution #1s History was the message that it remains “fortunate…to be located in (a city) known for its rich diversity and many ethnic heritages”, while a multicultural identity was defined as a “process rather than an event”. These principles and connections were founded upon an interest “beyond tolerance of difference to…one of inclusive excellence” (according to the Commission on IERCP at Institution #2). The synonyms for diversity were observed as linking past to
future in the documents of Institution #5 connecting a “legacy of service and striving for excellence” to “inspire and enrich the academic life of the College” (Heritage, n.d.).

At Institution #1, the Home page linked to the President’s messages on “address(ing) the issues of today…to meet the challenges of the future”. The ease of access to the President’s message provided for sensemaking during a changing time (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). An identity that celebrated “students of all faiths, cultures, and backgrounds” in its purpose of education was linked to the story of the founder. At Institution #5, a “legacy of service” was expressed throughout a number of different schools within the college as they addressed their own missions in terms of “creating a culturally competent environment”. It was also easy to access information connecting heritage and purpose with a link off the home page to documents advocating for the “interests of first-generation, racial/ethnic, or otherwise underrepresented student(s) in the area of personal, social and cultural development”.

To aid in access to diversity messages, students were provided stories about inclusiveness and the value placed on diversity from not only Heritage or History or About pages but also from tabs on Student Life and Diversity at… as a celebration of “diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and contributions” provide links to offices on campus and to information beyond campus (Institution #5, Diversity & Inclusion, n.d.). These sources, easy to find and consistent in messaging, provide the reader with a sense of inclusiveness that reached with portals beyond the campus to a college experience not limited by the walls of the institution. These sources added to the emerging narrative of these five institutions.

By addressing the development of intellectual capacities within “a diverse learning community that fosters integrity, inter-dependence, and mutual respect”, at Institution #4, efforts were put into “curriculum integration and participation in the larger community”. The academic values of the institution included the promotion of “critical thinking… ethical decision making, and active citizenship in a diverse, just society”. Factor #1 of Michael’s (2007) theory was affirmed by the study. The role that a multicultural identity played in connecting the institution to its past and
Does a Language of Inclusion Matter

preparing students for the future was well articulated and the rhetoric was consistent and easy to find. Questions #1 and #2 of the study were answered. Commitment to diversity for the development of a pluralistic orientation for ALL students as they prepare to serve roles in the wider community was seen as evidence of a multicultural identity being articulated here.

In comparison, the picture provided of an inclusive campus to prospective students and the wider community at the lowest of the DCIs was not as frequently, consistently or deeply expressed. Their diversity definitions were narrower, commitment harder to find, and thread less binding across areas of the college.

To verify what themes emerged from the cross-case analysis, it was necessary to search for the same language within the institutions found to be less ‘diversity competent’ (because of their growing White student population or growing diversity that had not been successfully retained). A search at the lower end of diversity-competence uncovered goals for diversity tied to enrollment and service offerings to “accommodate the physically challenged” or activities to “embrace equality of worth” in the committees and offices of these institutions. (Institution #21, n.d., COED & Admissions) The mission to “welcome diverse and talented students” appeared to be in place later in the history of these institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Inst 1</th>
<th>Inst 2</th>
<th>Inst 3</th>
<th>Inst 4</th>
<th>Inst 5</th>
<th>Inst 21</th>
<th>Inst 22</th>
<th>Inst 23</th>
<th>Inst 24</th>
<th>Inst 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freq.</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth</td>
<td>Home +2</td>
<td>Home Tabs +2</td>
<td>About +1</td>
<td>Home +Rpts</td>
<td>Home Tabs +1</td>
<td>Home Tabs +1</td>
<td>Home down +1</td>
<td>About +1</td>
<td>Catalog +1</td>
<td>About +1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consist.</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Frequency and consistency of the rhetoric on diversity found within websites of these institutions are located by depth from the top webpage of the site as an indication of how easily messages can be found.
and be driven by the need to develop “ethical contributors to an increasingly diverse, global, and technologically complex society”. (Institution #22, 2008, Mission) A “Diverse Learning Community”… was driven by an “intellectual and religious tradition….” to “…promote a more just society” at Institution #23. (n.d., Mission)

The language of diversity could not be found deeper than at the mission statement level. It was not found in the curriculum or in the centers for support or as engagement to the wider community. The leaders’ messages, used strategically with the public to invite collaboration, broaden engagement, and communicate inclusiveness, were not found at the lowest DCIs. With the choice of words giving meaning to circumstances and communicating knowledge of the campus to the wider, or prospective, community, the language agreed upon to be useful might indicate a ‘truth’ of these institution’s thinking (Burke, 1969; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

According to the literature summarized by Michael (2007), defining diversity is important and “ought to stem from higher education philosophy…based on the role higher education is expected to play in our civilization”. (¶ 5) These guiding principles were found expressed in the traditional mission or vision statement at the top five institutions to serve a changing society. Equally, leadership commitment to diversity could be found at all of the least diversity-competent institutions, however, not as extensively or consistently (e.g., sources and numbers of mentioned synonyms counted in the single digits).

**HISTORY**

**Validation and Limitations**

Van Der Werf and Sabatier (2009) found that a large segment of the non-traditional student population of the College of 2020 share in common characteristics, including: minority status, economic disadvantage when it comes to accessing and staying in higher education, a first-generation student in their family, and mediocre academic preparation for college. Messages of support and understanding to attract and to provide a sense of the community to these groups could be an important
element of success in retention of non-traditional students, and thus diversifying a campus.

The institutions that had demonstrated an increase in attracting non-traditional students to their campuses from Phase One of the study were using messages, beyond the *Admissions* and *About* pages, to suggest a commitment to diversity. From Phase Two content analysis, these messages linked academic, societal, and economic roles of the institutions. This might be seen to validate what Hanna (1998) called for in HEI transformation and what Michael (2007) theorized was needed for diversity competence.

The study’s conclusions might serve to validate previous research, however, must be considered within the limitations of context (one type of institution), location (one state), and theory applied (three selected variables of Michael’s 14-point framework). The study’s assumptions, therefore, apply within this framework, the defined context of this area’s regional medium-sized liberal arts colleges, to the current leadership of those highly ranked and least ranked DCIs, and for the messages expressed at the time of the study (Henderson, 2011).

The evolving understanding from the reading of documents does not claim a link between the arguments posed by the public rhetoric and the enrollment and retention results. A correlation cannot be made between the words chosen and the effectiveness of statements. Interviews of leaders to seek an understanding of their intended meaning are reserved for a follow-up study. Interviews with 18-year olds on the influence of these messages would be left for a future study. This study defers judgment on the rhetorical *effects* on the audience to another study’s design.

It is within this design, this context, with limited span of theoretical variables of diversity competence, that this study focused on messages and identified common language use. The role that rhetoric played was checked only for *what* language was used to convey a message about the commitment of leadership and the campus community to prospective students and faculty regarding the environment to be found within. The verification of those findings was conducted by searching at the other end of the ranked institutions for similar language and consistency.
Within these limitations, differences were found that led to a conclusion that language matters.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Influenced by social constructionist theory, this study examined the rhetoric of the public documents that might be used to paint a particular picture of the social experience, within, for participants and prospects of these colleges. The documents were explored for indications of power structures, social connections, and physical layouts of campuses that were indications of leadership commitment to building a multicultural campus within the liberal arts tradition. What emerged regarding the rhetoric used was a broader definition of diversity, a deeper purpose to the multicultural experience, and an extended impact (into the future and across the community).

The assumption of language as *socially constructed* placed special meaning attached to the words selected and reviewed by this study. In this way, the use of language in these documents, written for public view, was rhetorical in its attempt to construct a worldview and picture of a local campus that might persuade prospective students, current campus members and the community, at large, to share in the identity being pictured within the text. How leadership attitudes impact the setting and prioritization of institutional goals can be traced through the examination of easily accessible, consistently shared, publically available messages.

For overcoming external forces that challenge the execution of these messages, diversity that carries with it a common understanding, both in meaning and in value, establishes common ground. This common ground from which to work shapes priorities that drive focus. This focus of energies may have had an impact on the yields in enrollment and retention as these highly diversity competent institutions provide a sense of community to the campus, as a whole.

A common language and shared goals are two examples of connections found to overcome walls of resistance or exclusion (Kanter, 2001). The wider definition of diversity addressed by these five highest DCI
college campuses provided a sense of the value of differences of all kinds. Beyond a commitment to growing faculty, staff and student ethnicity on campus, these institutions reached into the wider community in order to offer interactions with people from different experiences and thinking for the benefit of all. The idea of community at these institutions was found to be commonly based upon a value of active involvement of different perspectives and experiences to enrich individuals. Perspectives were shared and reciprocated across the barriers to access. Purpose was expressed as striving for a diverse community that would mirror the wider society busting through the barrier between on and off campus. Built within the campus was a shared commitment to the free exchange of ideas and civility in interactions with those who think differently breaking through the siloes of internal structures.

The less diversity competent institutions addressed expanding enrollment from non-traditional student populations, but under a narrower definition of diversity and with a focus on the equity of access. The connection to diversity was with gaining from the academic talent of ethnic students and appeared to be embedded in the missions of these institutions more recently. The themes of diversity of gender, race, and ethnicity were encouraged, but also accommodated. Diversity was supported by programs for affinity groups (e.g. ASIA or ElProgresso groups for ethnicity, RADICAL for disability, WAGE for gender equality, Upward Bound for at-risk, under-performing students). The messages regarding the institutional commitment to diversity were not as easily and readily found nor were they expressed at the deeper dimensions of diversity. The rhetoric created a different narrative around higher education for reasons of assimilation and ‘equity’.

Language serves a social and power role in communities. The higher ranked HEIs in the study provided a narrative of connections. The present institutional priorities appeared to serve constituencies of the future. Current commitments flowed from the founders of the past. Common language provided for cross-dialogue leading to collaboration. Within the context of their roles as members of an educational institution, these leaders spoke not like a business with clients, bottom lines, and management
of human capital. They did recognize a need to be responsive to external forces. Their language was reflective of a purpose envisioned by their founder(s) decades before. The success of these institutions in attracting and sustaining enrollments from a growing non-traditional population may have been impacted by a cohesive and consistent sense of self over time.

The implication from this common understanding might be an efficiency facilitated by language that is common, understood, and thus, bonding. Study of how this clarity of priorities through language could have removed barrier to redistribution of power, creativity in decision making, and timing needed to build coalitions (as indicated by other factors of Michael’s, 2007, theory of diversity competence) is left to other studies. An agreed-upon identity of inclusion and its core importance to the future of these highly DCIs provided continuity during change.
REFERENCES


Does a Language of Inclusion Matter


Henderson, L. (2011) Structuring to support the creation of a multicultural campus: A cross-case study of Liberal Arts colleges in a Mid-Atlantic state. (Ph.D., Capella University, College of Business and Technology). 240. Proquest (UMI No. 1249067685).


Does a Language of Inclusion Matter


Thompson, C.M. (2008) This is what we are about: A case study examining diversity efforts and third space interactions at a southern liberal arts college. (Ph.D., University of South Carolina, College of Education). 296. Retrieved from Proquest (UMI No. 1688427411).


Dr. Henderson has enjoyed a diverse career, primarily as an Organizational Development professional working as an internal and external consultant with Fortune 500s, small businesses and not-for-profit institutions. She earned a B.B.A. in Finance, an M.S. in Management and a Ph.D. in Organization and Management. She teaches in the areas of marketing, e-commerce, organization behavior, leadership and organization development & change at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. She serves as the Program Director for both the MS in Management and MS in Human Resource Management at Nazareth College. She continues to enjoy helping clients design and develop business start-ups. She serves internally on committees for Nazareth addressing issues for the College of 2020 including leadership & governance, adult learner success, online course delivery, and re-defining intellectual property. As part of the Rochester community, she serves as a member of the board of the Small Business Council of Greater Rochester, the Chair for their educational bootcamps, and a planning member for their annual Headliner speaker event. She recently completed a two-year commitment to the Rochester Area Colleges Continuing Education group (RACCE) as the Secretary/Treasurer, and a seven-year commitment to the Pittsford Alliance for Substance-free Youth as a Steering Committee member and the Grant Evaluator. Her passion for students also brought her to serve for nine years as a parent advocate on a Committee for Students with Disabilities.