

Needs Assessment of Diversity Resources
at the
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Prepared by:
Paula Knudson, Dean of Student
Development & Academic Services
AJ Clauss, Graduate Student

Spring 2007

Needs Assessment of Diversity Resources

Executive Summary

Purpose:

The purpose of the qualitative assessment was to enhance the understanding of who/what each office/committee serves, the needs of their constituents, and other information that will lead to a better understanding of diversity resources at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. The study was designed to identify diversity efforts on campus, as well as opportunities to enhance our efforts.

Methodology:

In the spring of 2007, an email invitation was sent to 37 members of the faculty, staff, and administration at UW-La Crosse, who have roles or interests in promoting diversity across campus. AJ Clauss conducted 23 interviews, for an overall response and participation rate of 62%. The interviews were comprised of nine questions (see attached).

The sample was comprised of 7 faculty, 13 staff, and 3 administrators, of those 9 were men, 13 were women, and 1 transgender person. The sample self-identified their race/ethnicity/nation of origin; 15 identified as White/Caucasian, 3 identified as Mexican-American/Hispanic, 4 identified as African-American, and 1 identified as Mexican-American/African-American.

Process of Data Analysis

First, I familiarized myself with the data. After reading and re-reading the collected data, common themes began to emerge. The analysis of the interviews produced nine themes.

Themes:

1. What are the needs of our constituents?

The data revealed that 17% of responses expressed frustration with not being able to readily identify the needs of their constituents. Numerous people had difficulty generalizing individual needs onto a broader constituency. They perceive their work as meeting individual needs and not necessarily a group that consists of changing individuals.

2. Our Constituents Need a Welcoming Environment

The data also showed how the participants viewed the environment on campus, in relation to their constituents needs. It revealed that of the 23 responses, 30% concluded that their constituents need to feel respected, supported, and welcomed in their

environment. They also expressed frustration with their ability to change or influence the environment. They believe they are doing their part, but that it is not bought into by the larger community.

3. What are the diversity goals of campus?

Another theme that emerged from the data is the confusion surrounding diversity goals of the campus. 35% of the participants were unable to identify the diversity goals of UW-L. They expressed concerns related to broader campus awareness of the goals, while some were unaware of existing plans, such as Plan 2008. They also expressed concerns for the direction of our diversity efforts with changing leadership, as well as a need for accountability.

4. What is diversity?

Responses expressed by 43% of the participants identified their struggle with how UW-L defines diversity on campus. The breadth of the definition is so wide-ranging and generalized that efforts become diluted.

5. Lack of Monetary and Human Resources

One of the major themes that emerged from the data is the overwhelming concern for the lack of resources. 70% of the participants discussed the lack of monetary resources available on campus for funding diversity initiatives. They also expressed a sense of futility with their efforts and feel that their efforts are unappreciated while also being asked to do more.

6. Lack of Assessment of Diversity Initiatives

Respondents were clamoring for a systematic way to assess diversity and progress toward identified goals. 43% of participants reported concerns with the lack of assessment occurring and the lack of availability of tools or a resource person for assessment on campus. On the other hand, 13% stated that it is unrealistic to assess diversity due to the nature of the topic, goals, and dependent on individual perceptions. Will assessment genuinely get to the heart of what we want to do?

7. Need to Come Together as a Collective

Another major theme that emerged was the vast need for people to come together to discuss what is being done across campus within the diversity resources. 52% of the participants expressed the need to come together and discuss diversity issues on campus. The researcher's interpretation of these comments is that the need goes beyond simply getting people together for dialogue, but rather a need for clear direction, communication, collaboration, and accountability once a direction is determined.

8. Administrative Support

Participants (43%) discussed their frustrations with the historical lack of support from leadership on campus in relation to diversity initiatives. On the other hand, 61% of the participants view the new administration [Chancellor Gow and Dean Paula] as an opportunity for change on campus around diversity initiatives. Support was generally defined by having a physical presence at events, emotional support for efforts, and resources.

9. Fragmentation/Lack of Focus on Collaboration

Responses (43%) suggested that our diversity efforts seem to be fragmented. Departments and people operate as individual silos and do not see opportunities to collaborate or share a common vision. This results in hard working people doing good things, yet operating in isolation and does not encourage collaboration.

Reflections:

After concluding the research and analysis, several additional needs and opportunities were surmised by the researcher.

- It became apparent that UW-L diversity resources are clearly divided between faculty and staff. The faculty members discussed resources that are sponsored or limited? by the faculty. Whereas, staff conversed about the resources overseen or sponsored by staff members. There was limited crossover between the two groups.
- Furthermore, the collaboration that occurs at UW-L between the diversity resources can be viewed as surface level. Many times, the collaboration described was “sharing monetary resources.” It was not presented as “a sharing of knowledge and mutual learning between two or more people working together toward a common goal typically creative in nature.’ The collaboration was communicated as, “to cooperate reasonably, as with an enemy occupation force in one’s country.” Diversity advocates are often fighting for the same limited resources. On the other hand, there are clearly examples of shared resources for a common cause, yet collaboration equates to “sponsored by...”.
- Finally, an overarching theme that emerged was the lack of “seeing the big picture.” This theme relates directly to the surface level collaboration. It is difficult to see the big picture, when people are in a constant struggle to stay afloat. This relates with the history of budget cuts that have occurred thought the years. These cuts have left their imprint on the decentralization of offices and committees from one another.

Recommendations:

I believe this assessment is a step in uncovering the issues occurring within diversity resources occurring on campus.

1. Due to timing, students were not included in this assessment, yet they are clearly a key constituent in our diversity efforts. A study should be conducted analyzing student needs and perceptions of what direction to go. Dr. Margarita Refugia Olivas from the College of Liberal Studies has recently written a grant to fund a qualitative study that would explore and document the experiences of students of color on this campus.

2. A retreat with many of the stakeholders involved in this study scheduled for May 22. This provides an opportunity to collaboratively articulate a vision, define diversity, and develop an action plan to move the campus toward this vision. These should then be broadly shared with the campus community for dialogue. Once this has sufficiently occurred, then departments and individuals should identify how they will contribute to the vision and be held accountable to their defined plans.
3. If the campus truly wants to make this a priority, then support needs to be provided. This means a clear statement of support for the identified vision, a presence at events, and resources. It takes a whole University to create a campus that embraces diversity.
4. The University needs to consider whether efforts will focus on all diversity areas equally or whether there should be a prioritization of which areas of diversity to focus on first.
5. The University and all members of the community need to incorporate the vision into their routine dialogue and efforts. This means that routine messages from administration should identify successes and needs to promote diversity. It also means that actions, strategic plans, and evaluation processes be aligned to reinforce this message and vision.
6. The University must also recognize the dedication of individuals and offices to the diversity initiatives. Recognition is needed to rebuild the commitment to diversity and to welcome the potential of a new diverse community onto campus.
7. The structural organization of diversity efforts should be evaluated. This should include a review of pros and cons of aligning all efforts under one umbrella versus the current arrangement that disperses diversity efforts across the institution.
8. Finally, the University is at a point of leadership transition. Many people are optimistic about the possibilities. Not to diminish the optimism, but people need to understand that a vision is not reached over night or by some magic that an individual(s) bring to diversity efforts. People need to be patient and persistent. Cultural change takes time and community investment.

Spring 2007

***Purpose:** My name is AJ Clauss. I am second year, graduate student in the College Student Development and Administration program. This semester I am working with Dr. Paula Knudson, to assess diversity needs and opportunities on the UW-L campus. I will ask you the following questions, in order, to discover your view on the diversity resources at UW-L. You can choose to keep your identity confidential.*

My intention is to enhance the understanding of who/what each office/committee serves, what are the needs of their constituents, and other information that will lead to a better understanding of diversity at UW-L. When all interviews are completed, compiled, and analyzed, I will be sharing my findings with all the participants and members of administration. If you have any further questions, comments, or concerns feel free to contact me at clauss.abbi@students.uwlax.edu or 785-8874. You may also contact Dr. Knudson at knudson.paul@uwlax.edu or 785-8150. Thank you for your participation.

Interview Questions

1. Who do you consider your primary customer? Secondary customer? What diversity-related goals and objectives does your office/committee support at this time?
2. What are the needs and wants of your constituents?
3. How are you and your operation meeting the needs of your constituents? How is the university meeting their needs?
4. How is your office/committee collaborating with other resources to meet the needs of your constituents? What are some opportunities for collaboration between resources, in order, to be more effective in meeting the needs of your constituents?
5. Getting back to your constituents needs, how do you know if you are meeting their needs?
6. How do you see your goals working/fitting into the diversity goals of the campus?
7. What particular impediments and opportunities do you face in terms of meeting or developing diversity goals in your office/committee?
8. If you were Chancellor for a day, what do you see as the critical issues surrounding diversity and how should we address these issues?
9. Do you have any other thoughts surround this topic? Anything else I should know?

I'll be sharing the outcomes as the needs assessment is completed. Thank you very much for your time and efforts!