

ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE: Conducting a Climate Assessment

Introduction

All universities engage in research and teaching, but the nation's more than 100 land-grant colleges and universities, have a third critical mission-extension. "Extension" means "reaching out," and along with teaching and research land-grant institutions "extend" their resources, solving public needs with college or university resources through non-formal, non-credit programs. Extension acknowledged the need to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the principles contained in Extension's Emphasis on Diversity and recognized that merely creating a diverse work force and diverse audiences does not necessarily create multicultural organizations.

Although this project and accompanying materials focuses on the Change Agent States for Diversity Project and the Change Agents States for Engagement Project, issues related to climate affect the Cooperative Extension System in all 50 states. Hence the issues raised and the findings shared in this project may have implications for all states, including those that are not currently a part of CASD/CASE.

CASD – The Initial Project

The Change Agent States for Diversity (CASD) project represents a catalytic step in leading change within the Land Grant University System. In December 1998, the National Sub-Committee on Extension Diversity (SED) developed this visionary project in which eight states were selected to participate in a pilot effort focusing on diversity. In October 1999, representatives from the eight states and selected members of the SED began working together to develop and implement a plan of action to address diversity in their organizations and institutions. The Assessment Subcommittee of the CASD was charged with developing plans, related tools, and an implementation strategy for the eight states individually, and the CASD as a whole, to use in determining the organizations' status and climate as it relates to diversity. The committee determined that the first step in this process was an internal assessment of the current climate at each location.

Beginning in the fall 2000 semester, CASD contracted with an outside consultant¹ to identify challenges confronting the CASD community with respect to underrepresented groups through an internal assessment. The assessment was a proactive initiative by CASD cooperating members to review the climate for underrepresented groups in their respective organizations.

CASE – The Next Steps

In June 2004, seven new states were selected to participate in Change Agent States for Engagement (CASE), under the umbrella of the national Extension Diversity Task Force. These included the following states:

Western Region: Idaho, New Mexico, Washington
North Central Region: South Dakota
Eastern Region: Delaware
Southern Region: Louisiana, Mississippi

The CASE Project states are the next generation of 'change agent states,' building on the best practices for diversity management initiated by the Change Agent States for Diversity-CASD states -- AZ, CO, MO, NC, ND, NY, PA. Together the 14 states will work to model effective strategies and sustainable efforts to make diversity and pluralism a reality in the Land Grant University and CSREES System.

Following the template created by CASD, CASE states contracted with the same consultant to identify challenges confronting the CASE community with respect to underrepresented groups through an internal assessment. The assessment was a proactive initiative by CASE cooperating members to review the climate for underrepresented groups in their respective organizations. The internal assessment will help to lay the groundwork for future initiatives.

Because of the inherent complexity of the topic of diversity, it is crucial to examine the multiple dimensions of diversity in organizational cultures. The conceptual model used as the foundation for this assessment of organizational climate was developed by Smith (1999) and modified by Rankin (2002).² The survey questions were informed

¹ Rankin & Associates Consulting was contracted as the outside consultant for this project.

² See Appendix A for a more detailed description of the Transformational Tapestry© model.

by the work of Rankin (2003)³. Various constituent groups from each of the seven states reviewed the drafts of the survey. The final survey contained thirty-two questions and an additional space for respondents to provide commentary. The survey was designed to have respondents provide information about their personal experiences, their perceptions of the organizational climate, and their perceptions of organizational actions including administrative policies and academic initiatives regarding diversity issues and concerns within the extension.

Part I of the attached power point presentation provides information on the process followed in creating, implementing, and interpreting the climate assessment. Part II reviews the aggregate results of the CASD project. Each state also received a state-wide report with the results specifically broken out just for their state. The CASE project is currently on-going and the aggregate report should be available in the fall of 2005. For further information on the CASD or CASE climate projects or if you are interested in conducting an assessment in your state, please contact:

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³ Rankin (2005, in progress) is a national study examining the campus climate for underrepresented groups.

Appendix A

Maximizing Equity on Campus: A Transformational Model©

The transformational tapestry model, which takes into account five main aspects of campus culture (access and retention, research and scholarship, inter-group and intra-group relations, curriculum and pedagogy, and university service), is designed to assist the campus community in maximizing equity through the use of specific assessment and intervention strategies.

Conceptual Framework

The foundations of the transformational tapestry model of campus climate were informed by Smith et al's (1999) meta-analysis of research on diversity in higher education. In their review of the literature on the impact of campus diversity initiatives on college students, Smith and her colleagues provide a context for examining campus diversity. The authors identified four dimensions of campus diversity, each of which overlaps and intersects with the others.

The transformational tapestry model of campus climate differs from Smith's four dimensions of campus diversity in that it not only provides a framework for viewing campus culture, but also presents systematic guidelines for *assessing* campus culture and for *implementing interventions* designed to transform a campus culture into one that maximizes equity. The model's assessment and transformational intervention components were developed based on previous research (Beckhard, 1989; Drucker, 1993; Hurtado, 1999; Rankin, 1994, 1998) and recent investigations examining the climate for diversity on 22 college campuses (Rankin, 2003) where transformational strategies have been or are in the process of being implemented.

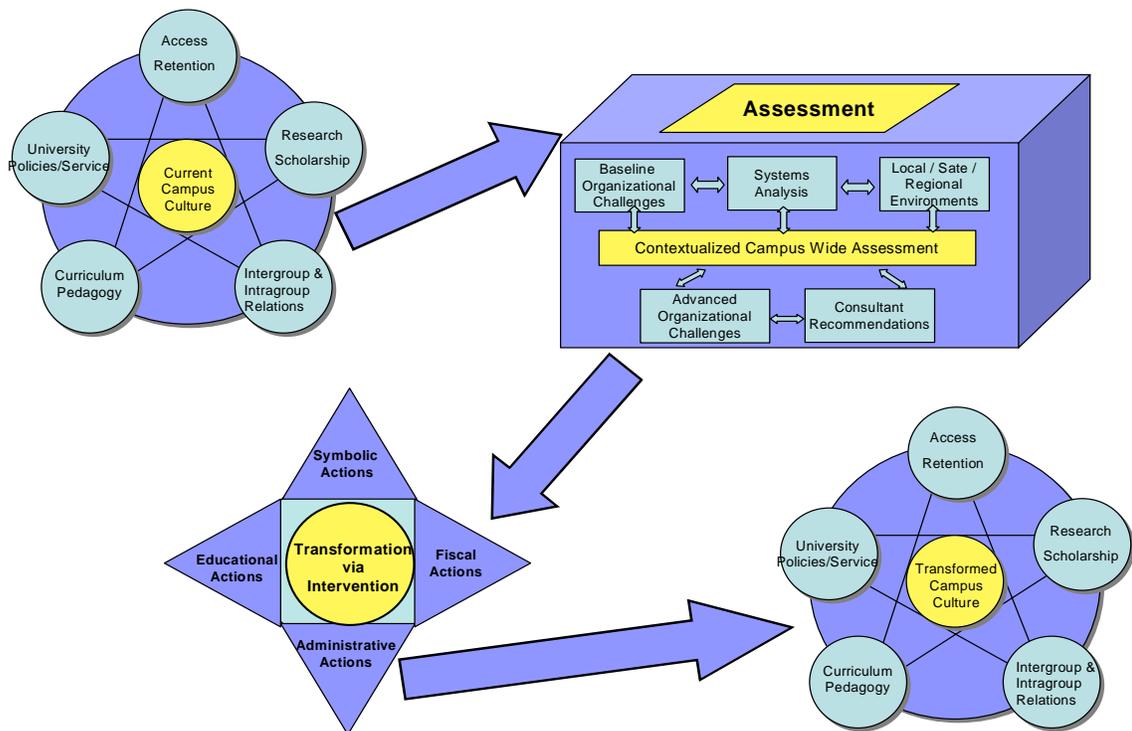
The Transformational Tapestry Model

The first phase of the transformational tapestry model of campus culture (see Figure 1) for maximizing equity on a particular university campus proposes that an institution conduct an internal assessment of the campus culture for under-represented/under-served populations⁴. The first component of the internal assessment utilizes focus groups and individual interviews to examine baseline institutional challenges. These along with a systems analysis (e.g. mission, structure, current policies, etc.), and review of the local, regional, and state environments inform the second component of the internal assessment, the construction of a campus-wide survey of the climate for diversity. A quantitative analysis of the survey data and a qualitative analysis of

⁴ The researcher works collaboratively with a social equity advisory team consisting of representation from the various constituent groups on campus throughout the process.

respondent's comments are reviewed and shared with the campus community and the social equity team.

Figure 1
Transformational Tapestry
Model for Maximizing Equity on Campus



The third component of the internal assessment calls for the reconvening of the focus groups to identify advanced organizational challenges. These along with researcher recommendations provide the foundation for developing transformational interventions.

Following the comprehensive internal assessment, phase two of the model is initiated. The social equity team with feedback from the campus creates a strategic plan for maximizing equity with immediate, short-term (two-year), and long-term (5-year) actions. The model's transformational intervention strategies include symbolic actions, educational actions, administrative actions, and fiscal actions. The overarching strategic plan identifies well-defined

goals, specific intervention actions, person(s) responsible for carrying out the actions, participants involved in the action, time-frames, costs, outcomes, and assessment/accountability.

For additional information on the Transformational Tapestry and more detailed reviews of focus group selection and protocols, the survey instrument, the processes involved in coordinating the institutional assessments, a summary of the results of data gathered at the institutions, and recommendations provided to and feedback from participating institutions please contact:

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