

2000 AAHE RESEARCH FORUM

Diversity and Learning

A Research Agenda

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

This year, the AAHE Research Forum took up difficult dialogues to create a research agenda that will bring insight to issues of diversity and learning. How does diversity in learning affect the definition and certification of competence? How can educational institutions foster deep and durable learning by diverse learners in light of new technologies? These questions lead to new tasks when diversity within and across world cultures are potential barriers to membership in a global learning community. The AAHE Research Forum is convened annually to involve individuals committed to research and scholarship in higher education. What questions should shape our scholarship? Participants worked in small groups to create a research agenda—given their own issues and settings—via the conference themes.

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What is the Purpose of the Research Forum? Involvement and critique from educators in dialogue with researchers is a critical element for achieving clarity about what research will benefit educational policy and practice. The AAHE Research Forum is convened annually to involve individuals committed to research and scholarship in higher education. The Forum stimulates educators' involvement in creating a research agenda that speaks to current educational concerns. Each year's agenda is developed around the conference theme. Thus, educators and researchers can continually rely on the Forum agenda as an up-to-date source of common research questions that flow from the year's most central educational issues. The Forum enables educators to provide leadership and support for those researchers who share educators' interests, who speak clearly to educators about their findings, and who actively respond to educators' most pressing questions.

Since 1985, the AAHE Research Forum has provided leadership from educators for bridging the gap between research and practice, and has enabled educators and researchers to define the kinds of contexts that need to be reshaped within colleges and universities for research findings to benefit students.

Why AAHE? AAHE has traditionally brought together a wide range of interested educators, and has been successful in defining current issues that stimulate a broad spectrum of higher education constituencies. A recent survey shows the AAHE annual conference to be the most stimulating meeting of its kind. There are other forums at which research results are presented and discussed, but many of them are not regularly attended by or directed toward higher education administrators and faculty. AAHE membership has the desire and potential to stimulate research among its members, and to engage the research community in continual dialogue about research questions and findings that directly relate to educational practices for governance, for teaching and learning, and for student development.

What is the Forum Process and Product?

1. **The Invitational Pre-Conference Session.** Educators (selected from conference experts) generate research questions on topics that emerge as central to the conference theme through a specially designed group process. Experts on each topic serve as group leaders and synthesizers. Each topic group reviews the current issues around their topic and discusses with those who currently, or are likely to, research the year's agenda. Questions are synthesized in each group, and session leaders edit and prepare them for distribution at the All Conference session.
2. **The All Conference Forum and Panel.** Forum leaders bring the questions generated in the pre-conference session to the attention of the conference membership and involve the larger audience in discussion of issues and research questions in their own settings. Forum leaders also elicit discussion of research questions by a panel comprised of experts on the year's conference theme. The 2000 theme was *Diversity and Learning*. The panelists were *Clifford Adelman*, Senior Research Analyst, U.S. Department of Education and *Marcia Mentkowski*, Professor of Psychology and Director of Educational Research and Evaluation, Alverno College. Group discussions on each topic follow the panel and allow for more focused critique and discussion of the pre-conference questions.
3. **The Research Agenda and Its Dissemination.** Following the session, Forum leaders edit and integrate questions from topic group syntheses and individual work sheets for a final agenda. Thus, AAHE's annual research agenda is a timely, collaborative product of

interactive, on-the-spot discussion. It is another way of knowing about the professional interests of a wide range of educators. The research agenda is a product of a process that captures and articulates the informal conversation that occurs at AAHE meetings about what should be researched. Conference presenters generate research questions on emerging topics in higher education, elicit questions from their colleagues, and then synthesize all questions. Dissemination and discussion of the agenda with researchers follows.

4. **Dissemination.** The agenda is disseminated to all contributors; participants are credited. Advisors to the Research Forum process and other associations/groups in higher education also receive the agenda. The history and rationale for the American Association for Higher Education Research Forum are described in M. Mentkowski and A. W. Chickering, Linking Educators and Researchers in Setting a Research Agenda for Undergraduate Education, *The Review of Higher Education*, 1987, 11(2), 137–160. The 1987 agenda, “*The Classroom Researcher’s Research Agenda*;” the 1988 agenda, “*A Research Agenda in Support of Our Highest Calling*;” the 1989 agenda, “*Improving the Odds for Student Achievement: A Research Agenda*;” the 1990 agenda, “*The Future of the Professoriate: A Look in the Mirror*;” the 1991 agenda, “*Achieving the Promise in Diversity: A Research Agenda to Inform the Issues*;” the 1992 agenda, “*Reclaiming the Public Trust: A Research Agenda to Explore the Validity of the Criticisms*;” the 1993 agenda, “*Reinventing Community: A Research Agenda to Create Common Purposes, Build Commitment, and Sustain Improvement*;” the 1994 agenda, “*A Research Agenda for Envisioning the 21st Century Academic Workplace Through Responsive Academic Citizenship*;” the 1995 agenda, “*The Engaged Campus: A Research Agenda to Serve Society’s Needs*;” the 1996 agenda, “*Crossing Boundaries: A Research Agenda Toward Productive Learning and Community Renewal*;” the 1997 agenda, “*Learning, Teaching, and Technology: A Research Agenda for the Way We Work*;” the 1998 agenda, “*Taking Learning Seriously: A Research Agenda for Learning*;” and the 1999 agenda, “*Organizing for Learning: A Research Agenda*” are available from Marcia Mentkowski, Office of Educational Research and Evaluation, Alverno College, 3401 South 39th Street, P.O. Box 343922, Milwaukee, WI 53215.

2000 Research Forum Leaders

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FOREWORD

The work of the research forum is to create a research agenda based on the themes of the conference, which this year were: ensuring access, supporting student success, creating inclusive curriculum and pedagogies, and building a diverse faculty and staff. Questions developed by participants ranged from the global—what do we mean by diversity—to practical—how do students see our efforts to create a more inclusive curriculum—to philosophical—how does diversity help strengthen democracy—to important—how do we implement rather than just research? Together, however, they respond to the difficult educational issue with which we are grappling—how do we do justice to the diversity of our college student population in our policies and practices, for student recruitment, faculty and staff hiring, curriculum reform, and pedagogy?

ENSURING ACCESS

With the demographics of America's K–12 population changing, what are the characteristics of tomorrow's college students going to be? How can the K–12 system work successfully with the higher education system to prepare students for college? What new admissions policies do we need, and how do we draw on the experience of states and communities which have grappled with this issue over the past few years? What sort of research do we need on student characteristics, credentials, and success to help us educate a diverse citizenship of the future? What sort of research on student characteristics, credentials, and success will help us persuade policy-makers to change their objections to current admissions policies?

On Admissions Policies and Procedures

If affirmative action type programs are no longer available, how can higher education maintain and enhance diversity in its student bodies and classes? What rationales can be developed as alternatives to traditional admissions policies? Can they satisfy accrediting agencies and state governments?

In the post-Affirmative Action era, how can access be ensured in higher education without segregating institutional sectors by race and class? Will federal and state governments remain committed to financial aid policies and programs that assure access?

Does it make sense to continue to base admissions on traditional criteria (e.g. SAT or ACT scores and high school grades)?

What are the determinants of choice for students in their college selection process? How can this information be utilized more effectively?

How equitable is access not only to resources for K–16 transitions, but also to knowledge required for successful transitions (such as courses necessary for college admission)?

Merit, Access, and Success

What is the relationship of the concept of merit to issues of access and diversity? Can the public be educated on issues of merit as they affect access and diversity?

Can access be used as an all-inclusive concept to enhance learning effectiveness?

Is it possible that the terms we use to describe our students (e.g., at-risk, disadvantaged, etc.) are based on deficits rather than strengths? How do these labels affect students' perceptions of self and faculty/administrators perspectives of them?

How can we define success? Does success mean graduation from college? Getting a job? Or are there broader definitions of success?

What role do "gatekeepers" have in blocking access to the academy?

Who are the “insiders/gatekeepers” who are vested in keeping things as they are (less/not more diverse)? How do we get those in positions of power to recognize diversity as “adding” rather than “taking away?”

How will the digital communities of learning affect issues of access that are different from that associated with brick and mortar institutions?

How can we make fields truly receptive to all students?

On Institutional Responsibilities

What will be the mechanism for holding higher education institutions accountable for access and diversity in the future?

According to the Universal Change Principle, learning must precede change. How do we bring about appropriate learning in order to make change happen? What kinds of learning experiences would result in a willingness and ability for effective action?

How can campus sponsorship of accessibility and diversity issues be strengthened at every level of the hierarchy of an institution? How can we develop strong sponsorship across the entire campus?

What base of information is critical to successfully address campus policy issues about accessibility and diversity?

How do we assess and subsequently address attitudes and beliefs of senior level administrators (presidents, provosts, deans, etc.) when those attitudes pose threats or barriers to achieving access? How do we change institutional cultures?

How can we create pressure on the powers-that-be (presidents, provosts, deans, etc.) from without (agencies like AAHE, AAC&U, foundations) and from within to change the culture?

What is the purpose of this research: for more data, for tenure, or for action, for change? (need more action/implementation)

How can the diversity richness in the 12th grade be transitioned to the first year of college? What are the appropriate mechanisms of transition?

Is assuring access sufficient? How can effective retention be assured? How can “momentum to succeed” be assured?

Why not study “successful” students (e.g., why do students succeed?) versus “failures” (e.g., why aren’t we retaining students)?

What is the definition of diversity? Does it include dimensions beyond gender and ethnicity?

What are indicators of inclusive pedagogies? How do we measure this? What are the outcomes? Is it enough to look at learning outcomes?

What climates best create a community for the various peoples who make up higher education (faculty, students, staff)?

How do we identify institutions that are or are not receptive to minority participants? Why and using what criteria

On National and State Issues

What will be the societal impact of lack of accessibility? Can models be developed for impact and cost to society of non-accessibility?

What will be the real effects from the 10% (e.g. in Texas) and 20% (e.g., in Florida) type rules on access for underrepresented groups of students?

What is the impact of Hope scholarships and programs (e.g., Colorado Initiative) on accessibility and diversity?

Are programs that target K–12 student effective? If programs are working, why? What elements are effective and how can we reproduce/modify them for use at different types of institutions?

How can all students be assured of equitable access to technology, especially to the internet?

Can research-based rationales be developed for the importance of institutional and classroom diversity in higher education?

How can we encourage AAHE and other associations and agencies to keep diversity issues “front and center” on the higher education agenda?

How do we work across institutions?

SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

Every student needs support to achieve his or her educational goals. The growing challenge to higher education institutions is to determine the kinds of support, provided in what ways, are needed for our increasingly diverse college students. Given the changing demographics of college students—greater racial/ethnic diversity, range of ages and life situations, levels of academic preparedness, blending of work and college—can there be uniform measures of success? How might success be measured in teaching, curricular development, and institutional effectiveness?

Given the increasing variety of learners, at-risk may need redefinition. What does at-risk mean in the light of widely diverse students and changing educational environments? Who are the students at risk, and what are the factors contributing to their being at-risk? What approaches to remediation can help academically underprepared students succeed? How might advising functions be expanded or enhanced to support students' progress, growth and development?

For many students, attending college is among other major life commitments and tasks. Retention needs to be included in revisiting our perspectives on and assumptions about success. What retention and support strategies work to keep students engaged in higher education? How might these strategies vary depending on a given student profile? What other players, e.g., workplace, might be involved in retention efforts? What innovations might be adapted from nontraditional institutions to better support students in their learning process and achievement of educational goals?

On the Whole Student

How do we define “at risk?” Is a new definition needed to refocus our attention?

How can we support success for the student in a holistic sense? How do we include the whole student—in school and out?

What can we do to directly develop the learner from the inside out, including moral and physiological development? How do we measure that and become accountable for it?

What programs are most important in improving retention rates? Do first-year courses improve retention?

What type of student success interventions work? And how, is success being defined? Does student success necessarily mean student retention?

How do we retain students past the sophomore year?

Given that students often attend more than one college, how do we assure the grounding themes of a college education?

How do we get to know more about our diverse student population?

How can we validly assess students from diverse groups?

How can we develop a learner? How can we measure the impact of higher education later in life? To what extent does how we educate students make a difference five or ten years out of college? With changing demographics, how do we assure lasting learning?

How can a college level the playing field for students who have been underprepared so that “cultures of success” define positive growth for all students?

Who defines success? Given the tensions between the range of stakeholders (institutions, students, parents, employers, legislatures) how can variable levels of success be defined and addressed? Are there fundamental skills and knowledge that cut across these tensions between stakeholders? If so, how can they be acknowledged and identified?

On Student Perspectives on Success

How do we define success? How do we support student success if we are not certain that we really know and understand what students mean by success? What learning experiences are students looking for? Are we using only our definition?

How do we understand the students’ ability to participate in the institution? Is there a difference between commuters and residents?

What do the students, parents, and other stakeholders hope to achieve through a focus on diversity?

To what extent do students see success as connected only with employability?

CREATING INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGIES

We want our graduates to have developed intellectual, personal, and civic capacities to function and contribute effectively in modern life. This part of the research agenda asks the tough questions of how are these capacities affected by what students learn and how they learn in college?

What is taught in the curriculum that explicitly prepares students for the challenges of modern life? How are life events incorporated as part of the subject matter? What teaching strategies are used to help students connect the lessons of the subject matter with their own understandings, attitudes and behaviors? How can a climate be created that fosters wondering rather than conclusion, valuing/appreciating rather than judgment, and inclusion rather than exclusion?

We may well need to frame our research questions differently and use more innovative methods of inquiry to answer them. What evidence can be garnered in the form of models and research findings that help us as an educational community better understand the impact of what we teach and how we teach on the ultimate value that students derive from their education?

On the Meaning of Diversity

What is included in, or what do we mean by diversity? Aside from race and ethnicity, do we include multiple intelligences, disability, developmental stage?

Can students develop capacities for understanding diversity from one area of diversity, like sexual orientation, that translate to other forms of diversity, like race or gender?

Is there a difference between valuing diversity and living it; and if so, how do you measure that?

How can our curriculum and pedagogy prepare our students to function successfully in a diverse world?

To what extent does dissonance about diversity enhance learning?

How does diversity alter the way we see and develop “democracy” in the U.S., in that democracy had not been defined culturally before?

On Learning In and Out of the Classroom

What are the most exciting, innovative approaches to diversity in curriculum and pedagogy? Should diversity be established through specific courses or embedded throughout the curriculum?

What has worked and what has not worked in curricula and pedagogies addressed to diversity? How do we know when we’ve done it right? How do we measure success?

How can we assess learning in ways that measure more than the acquisition of context but also encompass changes in behavior, attitudes, and skills across difference?

If 30% of students don't buy textbook, in what ways can pedagogies that enhance learning about diversity be altered to compensate for this?

How can service learning be brought into the initiatives to make a campus curriculum more diverse?

What do we know about technology to enhance the uses and importance of diversity?

What is the impact of using Theatre of the Oppressed techniques in diversity training?

On Teaching and Learning Styles

What kind of pedagogies will meet the different learning styles and needs of students?

How conceptualize curriculum?

What are different approaches to implementing diversity curricula? Which programs have been successful, which have failed, and why? How are these programs being designed/implemented; who is included in the process? What are the effects of doing this in academic affairs vs. combining academic and student affairs, going beyond the classroom? How do these efforts link to other academic and student affairs collaboration?

How are students experiencing these pedagogies/curricula? What do they believe they're getting (vs. what do faculty think students are getting)?

What are the pedagogies that pull in multiple teaching/learning styles (rather than this style for this group, that style for that group, etc.); how do we provide all students with multiple avenues for learning?

On Faculty Development

How can faculty development be made a normal part of the transition to diverse curricula and pedagogies?

Does a campuswide initiative to enhance diversity make individual effort at curriculum change in a particular department more likely to succeed?

What are faculty attitudes re: importance of creating inclusive pedagogies/curricula? How are faculty attitudes changed? What leadership methods work? What do faculty say they need in order to do this? How do faculty work together toward these goals?

Just hiring women or Native-Americans doesn't necessarily mean there will be difference in the classroom experience, so what kind of faculty skill development works best? How can department chairs and deans also be trained?

What are outcomes—both short and especially long-term—of Preparing Future Faculty programs?

How do balance the tensions between motivating and paralyzing a faculty as they think about and deal with creating inclusive curricula and pedagogies?

On Research and Policy

How can researchers explore diversity within groups as opposed to seeing groups or categories as homogenized or essentialized?

What are the indicators of an “inclusive pedagogy and curriculum? How do different disciplines address these issues and what are outcomes in different disciplines? How do these play out in different institutional context?

How can we develop outcome measures for inclusive curricula and pedagogies? What should the outcomes be? What are measures of success? What are general outcomes for all students and what are they for specific groups of students? What are the results of diversifying curricula or pedagogy on students? Faculty? Departments? Institutions?

Not all diversity courses are the same: How can researchers clarify the advantages and impacts of each approach on students?

How do we conduct research that will discover the best practices in “antiracism” workshops?

Is it content we are after or new processes? If it is new processes, how do we measure positive change in processes?

How can nationwide approaches to diversity take into account the fact that each campus has a different demographic make-up and different needs?

BUILDING A DIVERSE FACULTY AND STAFF

If we want our campuses to reflect the complexity and richness of the world our students will be entering, how do we educate graduate students, find successful ways of hiring and supporting a diverse faculty and staff, and develop a campus leadership committed to diversity? How is diversity of faculty and staff defined—do women, gays and lesbians, people of African or Caribbean ancestry “count” in the diversity definition? What are innovative ways of attracting new student populations to graduate study, or of promoting forward-looking career paths for staff? How can we promote new relationships among colleges across boundaries of race, ethnicity, or nationality to provide opportunities for faculty and staff to work in different environments and to promote diversity in creative ways? How can colleges which are in geographic areas which do not naturally attract a diverse population develop practices to encourage the hiring and retention of a diverse faculty and staff?

On Changing Campus Culture

How do we assess and change traditional departmental culture to ensure success for diverse faculty?

What are the barriers to acceptance of “new” research agendas by new female and minority faculty members?

What are the hidden barriers to building a diverse faculty? For example:—devaluation of nonelite degrees?—devaluation of teaching vs. research?—failure to create a welcoming culture?

In terms of prevention and interventions, what is needed to end the “revolving door” for women and minority faculty? Who stays and why? Who leaves and why?

Who are the support staff and how do they impact on changing the institution as a whole? How do help develop the concept of faculty role that works toward inclusive curricula?

Who and what are best faculty supports? mentors? families? communities?

How do we find the optimal level of tension that motivates involvement?

On Successful Programs

What is the role of the Preparing Future Faculty program in changing departments at all types of institutions, particularly community colleges and small liberal arts colleges?

Where are the successful programs/models for developing the undergraduate and graduate students who will become the diverse faculty of the future?

What support mechanisms are effective in nurturing faculty from underrepresented populations?

What are some of the best practices for promoting effective conversations across faculty and staff groups given personal, cultural, and disciplinary differences?

Are there institutions that reward successful programs that have built or are building diverse departments and staffs?

On Institutional Responsibilities

How does the age of the institution affect the rates of diversity?

What has been the effect and what will the future hold for a diverse faculty if the current trend to hire a high number of adjunct and non-tenure track faculty continues?

What is the role of unionization? Is it a barrier or a benefit?

What are the impacts of issues of Proposition 209-type legal actions on hiring for the long term

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