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# Diversity Training Needs Assessment

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**Diversity Training Needs Assessment**
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**DRAFT**

by
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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Introduction**

The Diversity Action Council of Wagner College requested a needs assessment for a diversity-training program for the Wagner campus community. A series of informal meetings with students, faculty, staff, and administrators was arranged on March 28, 2007.

**Key Themes**

Several key themes emerged from the various group discussions. They are organized in three categories: (a) Strengths, (b) Issues, and (c) What needs to be done.

**Issues**

**What needs to be done**

**Strengths**
- Opportunity to capitalize on proximity to New York City
- Strong study abroad program
- Strong community-based experiential learning curriculum (Learning Community)
- Efforts are made by faculty and staff to incorporate issues of diversity in the curriculum and extracurricular activities

**Issues**
- Aware of issues, but do not want to take action
- Not comfortable in speaking up
- Divisions and stereotypes among students: e.g., athletes and theater majors
- Skepticism, resistance, and apathy toward diversity
- Students are overloaded, and as a result, do not engage unless it is required
- The goal of the college's diversity initiative is not clear to all

- Student, staff, and faculty are not diverse enough

**What needs to be done**
- Better communication mechanism and environment for open communication
- Scholarship for underrepresented groups of students
- Support system to increase international students
- Better hiring mechanism to diversify faculty and staff
- Better support from parents
- Broaden the understanding of diversity beyond race
- Actively engage student organizations
- Address issues of diversity at the student orientation
- Training needs to be informative, interactive, informal, and fun

## Recommendations

Based on the themes identified through discussions with campus community members, diversity training at Wagner College could productively focus on the following points.

### Suggestions for Training Content

1. Introduce a broad definition of diversity.
2. Provide a clear explanation of the goals of the college's diversity initiative and its activities.
3. Get buy-in for diversity.
4. Examine ways to diversify student, faculty, and staff.
5. Examine hidden biases and stereotypes.
6. Concentrate on communication skills that empower people to discuss difficult issues.

### Suggestions for Training Delivery

1. The training needs to be interactive, informal, and fun
2. Everyone on campus needs to participate.
3. Involve student organizations and Residence Life in the planning and delivery of the training.
4. Consider offering diversity training at the student orientation.

## INTRODUCTION

The Diversity Action Council of Wagner College requested a needs assessment for a diversity-training program for the Wagner campus community. A series of informal meetings with students, faculty, staff, and administrators was arranged on March 28, 2007. The following groups met with me and exchanged ideas on how they see the state of diversity at Wagner College.

1. Students (10 students recruited by DAC)
2. Diversity and Internationalization Action Council members (9 members)
3. Deans (4 members from Student Development Dean's office)
4. Faculty (8 faculty members recruited by DAC)
5. Co-curricular Programs and Residence Life staff (5 staff members)
6. Provost
7. Administrators, staff, faculty (8 people)
8. Student group representatives (6 students representing 4 student groups)

No discussion questions were prepared beforehand, and discussions were conducted in an unstructured manner. I opened most of the meetings by explaining the purpose of my visit, and asked people to share their views and observations on diversity at Wagner College.

## KEY THEMES

Several key themes emerged from the various group discussions. They are organized in three categories: (a) Strengths, (b) Issues, and (c) What needs to be done. Original discussions that formed these themes can be found in the Appendix, where results from each meeting are described.

**Strengths**

- Opportunity to capitalize on proximity to New York City
    People emphasized that Wagner's location, close to New York City, is a major strength in any effort to incorporate diversity in the curriculum. There is ample opportunity for Wagner students and faculty to get out to New York and engage in issues that contribute to their own diversity awareness and cultural competence, and also contribute to positive social change.

- Strong study abroad program
  Students are clearly aware of the availability of study-abroad programs, such as Expanding Your Horizons (EYH). Actively promoting such programs enhance opportunities for students to broaden their world views.

- Strong community-based experiential learning curriculum (Learning Community)
  Students, faculty, and staff all mentioned the effectiveness of community-based experiential curriculum in raising awareness, and understanding issues related to diversity. Several testimonials were given from students on experiences in LC courses that opened their minds to new communities and diversity issues.

- Efforts are made by faculty and staff to incorporate issues of diversity in the curriculum and  extracurricular activities
  Students expressed their appreciation for faculty members who took an extra effort to incorporate the issues of diversity in the curriculum. They also acknowledged that the faculty members are knowledgeable in a variety of issues related to diversity. Faculty and staff mentioned a variety of  extracurricular activities and events to promote diversity offered to the campus community.

**Issues**

- Aware of issues, but do not want to take action
  People observed that some persons do not take action to correct diversity–related problems on campus, such as overhearing a racial slur. There is a noticeable attitude of not wanting to confront the issue and 'rock the boat.'

- Not comfortable in speaking up
  Some people shared the observation that people may fear to speak up and express their opinions related to diversity. There is some sense of concern that they do not know 'what is right' and may say something that is not right. This sense of not feeling safe to speak up seems to be prevalent among staff, more so than faculty or students.

- Divisions and stereotypes among students: e.g., athletes and theater majors
  Many students expressed a concern that there are divisions among students. Some people describe it as being 'cliquish.' One person mentioned that there is no overt tension among different groups of students, but there is no interaction either. What seems to be problematic is the fact that some of these groups are attached with stereotypes. For example, most minority students happened to be athletes, and therefore, minority students are stereotyped as athletes who got into the college because of a scholarship. Also, male students who are theater majors are stereotyped as gay.

- Skepticism, resistance, and apathy toward diversity
  There are signs of skepticism, resistance, and apathy toward the college's effort to promote diversity. Some persons noted that they do not understand the goal of the

college's diversity initiative. One person said it feels like the college is trying to achieve "photographic diversity," bringing brown faces into the college's promotional literature. Others observed that there is a sense among the campus community that diversity is another 'fad' and an effort to raise funds. This sense of skepticism and resistance seemed to be more prevalent among faculty members.

- Students are overloaded, and as a result, do not engage unless it is required
  Disappointment was expressed by students, faculty, and staff who had organized events on diversity issues with low attendance. Students observed that they are often overloaded with both school work and extracurricular activities, and as a result it is difficult to persuade them to participate in events and activities, unless they are required as part of course work or mandated by the faculty.

- The goal of the college's diversity initiative is not clear to all
  Several people noted that the goal and purpose of the college's diversity initiative is not very clear. Some people did not know of the existence or activities of the Diversity Action Council.

- Student, staff, and faculty are not diverse enough
  Many people observed that the Wagner campus community is not diverse enough, in terms of race, geographical background, and socioeconomic class. Students expressed that not having others with diverse backgrounds sometimes limits the depth of their learning. One students said, "You can only learn so much by imagining what other people's experiences are like. I think you can learn more by having face-to-face exchange with those who can actually talk from their experiences that are so different from mine." Faculty also shared their concerns that full-time faculty are not diverse. Students, however, observed that the faculty are more diverse than the student body. Minority students and staff expressed an initial level of discomfort when coming to Wagner and being surrounded by a predominantly white population.

**What needs to be done**

- Better communication mechanism and environment for open communication
  People emphasized the importance of developing better communication. They noted that the information is not shared with all of the campus community, which may breed misinformed rumors. Also, some persons observed the importance of developing an environment where people feel safe to express their opinions more openly.

- Scholarship for underrepresented groups of students
  Many people emphasized the importance of providing a scholarship for minority and underrepresented groups of students as a key strategy to diversify the student body. Many believe that diversity at Wagner is constrained by lack of financial support for a broader base of students.

- Support system to increase international students

    As another way to increase diversity on campus, people mentioned the importance of increasing the number of international students. They pointed out that Wagner currently lacks infrastructure to support international students (such as English as a second language classes), which constrains Wagner's capacity to admit more international students.

- Better hiring mechanism to diversify faculty and staff

    Many faculty and staff believed the hiring mechanism should be modified to improve diversity among faculty and staff. They noted the importance of more centralized policy from the college administration, and financial support for outreach to increase the pool of diverse candidates.

- Better support from parents

    Some persons pointed out that the efforts to expose students to diverse communities through experiential learning curricula has faced strong opposition from parents. In order to facilitate student learning, parents also need to be convinced that promoting diversity is good for their children's education.

- Broaden the understanding of diversity beyond race

    Many people requested to broaden the definition of diversity beyond race. They pointed out that often times issues such as disability, sexual orientation, and social class do not get enough attention, and these should also be recognized as diversity issues on campus.

- Actively engage student organizations

    Many students and staff suggested the importance of engaging student organizations in diversity training and other diversity-related activities. They observed that student organizations can be a good vehicle to promote diversity. Better coordination of activities among student organizations can also decrease duplication of effort.

- Address issues of diversity at the student orientation

    Students advocated that student orientation should be used as an opportunity to get the freshmen involved in diversity efforts.

- Training needs to be informative, interactive, informal, and fun

    Students requested that if diversity training is to be offered to the campus community, it needs to be informative, interactive, informal and fun. Coordinators of Co-curricular Programs and Residence Life also supported that idea to make diversity training appealing to the students.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIVERSITY TRAINING

Based on the themes identified through discussions with campus community members, diversity training at Wagner College could productively focus on the following points.

**Suggestions for Training Content**

1. Introduce a broad definition of diversity.
    The training needs to direct people to think of diversity in broad terms that encompass issues beyond race. Focus needs to be placed on providing generic ways to handle any kind of social differences that a person may encounter inside or outside the campus community, and how to develop an inclusive environment for all.

2. Provide a clear explanation of the goals of the college's diversity initiative and its activities.
    The training should provide members of the campus community with a clear explanation of the goal of the college's diversity initiative, and specific information on what activities are involved in the diversity initiative.

3. Get buy-in for diversity.
    The training should provide a framework for everyone to be involved and buy in to the goals of promoting diversity on campus. This requires a persuasive argument for the importance of diversity in general, and a safe environment where various perspectives may be freely discussed.

4. Examine ways to diversify student, faculty, and staff.
    The training can be an opportunity for members of the campus community to examine existing barriers in diversifying students, faculty, and staff. The training can be used to collect creative ideas for diversifying the campus population.

5. Examine hidden biases and stereotypes.
    The training should be an opportunity for members of the campus community to examine their individual biases and stereotypes, and the impact of those stereotypes on some groups of people on campus.

6. Concentrate on communication skills that empower people to discuss difficult issues.
    The training needs to empower people with skills to discuss diversity-related issues when they see a problem. People need to know how they can bring up an issue without necessarily feeling confrontational. The training also needs to address how to create an environment for open communication. Some problems related to 'groupthink' can be highlighted to emphasize the importance of creating a safe environment for open communication.

**Suggestions for Training Delivery**

1. The training needs to be interactive, informal, and fun
    Efforts need to be made to make the training interactive and fun.

2. Everyone on campus needs to participate.
    The training needs to be incorporate all members of the campus community, including
    students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

3. Involve student organizations and Residence Life in the planning and delivery of the training.
    Students made it clear that events that involve student organizations and Residence Life
    are better received and better attended by students. It is also important to coordinate with
    these groups to reduce duplication of efforts on campus.

4. Consider offering diversity training at the student orientation.
    Students repeatedly mentioned the importance of making an impact on the freshmen at
    the time of orientation.

**APPENDIX.**
**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM EACH MEETING**

**1. Breakfast meeting with the students**
(10 students attended, met in the cafeteria)

Concerns related to diversity issues
- Observed some 'racial slur' being used to pick on particular type of students.
- Observed some insensitive comments and behaviors not being corrected.
- When some insensitive jokes/comments were made students laughed along. People don't speak out.
- Students who are concerned do not feel they have the power to correct the ones who are acting in an insensitive manner.
- Many students are not engaged, unless it is a required or mandated.
- There is a divide/faction among the student groups. You see athletes occupy one corner of the cafeteria, and theater students occupy another corner. When the cafeteria changed the layout of the food counters and the TV, it created confusion, because people didn't know where to go.
- Not enough international/exchange students in the undergraduate courses.
- Need more support system for the international students.
- Have study abroad curriculum but need to make it more available to students.
- Wagner is an expensive university. That result in less diverse student body.
- Scholarship is given to the athletes. But not much scholarship available to students of color with financial needs.
- There is some sense of resentment against athletes who get a 'free ride'; especially when the team is not doing very well, or the athletes admit that they are playing the sport for the tuition.

Observations about the faculty
- In general, faculty members are very knowledgeable about the issue of diversity.
- Many faculty members try to incorporate diversity issues in their course curricula, though there are a few who seem to resist having anything to do with diversity.
- Faculty itself is diverse.

Suggestion to the faculty
- Encourage faculty members to introduce "a quote" or "statistics" of the day (or the month) that are relevant to diversity, and link the diversity issue to the subject matter.

How the 'training/workshop' needs to be done
- Need to capture students' attention at the very beginning of life at Wagner.
- Maybe at the time of new student orientation.
- Involve peer leaders.
- Need to actively collaborate with already existing student organizations.
- Need to engage upperclassmen.

- Actively engage "residence life" – students may listen more to peers than to authority figures.
- Use the lobby of the student housing. It will be easier to participate. More informal setting.
- Actively incorporate the issue of diversity in the classroom. Some instructors do a good job, but not all of them. Use the LC curriculum.
- Need to engage sport team in diversity events
- Can be done as an extra-credit activity.
- Many students are too busy to attend any extra 'training' or 'activity.' Some 'integrated approach is needed to reduce the time commitment. Can't be 'another' thing for students to do. Many students already have a lot on their plates.
- The 'training' or 'workshop' needs to be something interactive. Not just lectures.
- The training needs to be shared with faculty, staff, and students.
- The training needs to be fun.
- The purpose and expected outcome of the training needs to be clearly communicated beforehand.

What the training/workshop need to address
- The training needs to be 'informative.' Need to provide the most current information on a variety of different cultural issues.
- The training needs to address issues more than race. Social class issues needs to be addressed. Sexuality issues and religion need to be among the issues addressed.
- Wagner college itself is not very diverse.
- Need to actively use the geographical advantage of being close to Manhattan. Get out there. There's so much going on in the city.

## 2. Meeting with DAC/IAC members
(9 members of the Diversity and Internationalization Action Councils attended)

Concerns on diversifying staff
- Need for more diversity in staff.
- People who want to work at entry-level staff positions are mostly from Staten Island, which decreases the level of diversity in the pool.
- It's easier to hire from among people you know.
- Wagner doesn't have a clear centralized policy nor the history to increase diversity among the staff through systematic hiring. Hiring activity is mostly decentralized.
- We don't feel we are proactive enough in diversifying the staff.
- There is a financial constraint for hiring administrative staff. Outreach efforts are mostly on each department's budget.
- Similar challenges also exist for faculty hiring.

Observations on campus climate in general
- There is some sense of apathy in the campus community about diversity. People say that diversity is another 'buzz word' or say things like "Oh, diversity, again."

- Majority of faculty and staff are white. Some sense of discomfort among people who identify themselves as white in the push for diversity.
- Diversity needs to be discussed beyond the one-dimensional 'race' issue.
- It needs a specific measure to assess the outcome.

### 3. Meeting with Deans
(4 members attended this meeting)

Concerns on communication
- There is some sense that people hold their own assumptions about what things are and how things should be, and operate under those assumptions. The challenge is how to bring those assumptions to the surface for examination.
- There is some shared discomfort and/or fear among staff to express their opinions and observations. Things remain unsaid. In some cases, things are expressed in 'codes.' People seem to worry what is OK to say. How can we have an environment where we can discuss things in a candid manner?
- Need to find a better way to disseminate information. Not everyone gets the information, but we operate under the assumption that everyone has the information.
- Challenges in communicating with parents.

Observations on community-based experiential learning
- Community-based work may be an effective way for students to learn more issues related to diversity, but many students are not well prepared to go into the community. Students express discomfort going into the community. Parents express concern for sending their children into an unfamiliar community.
- Some double standards exist in community-based experiential learning. Students and parents like the idea of community-based learning, until they are sent to a place they do not want to go.

Observations on the college's diversity efforts
- There is some resistance against efforts to address diversity. Some persons expressed a feeling that diversity was "shoved down their throat."
- Efforts need to be made to keep the 'big picture' in mind.
- Assess the campus climate. Examine how people feel being at Wagner.
- Demographics of Wagner are predominantly white. Adding more nonwhite people to the campus raises the challenge of integrating them into a predominantly white campus environment.

<u>Observations on campus climate in general</u>
- There is a general sense among students and staff that too many things are going on and it's hard to keep up. Many good events are planned and offered, but not many faculty/staff/students attend. Unless it's 'required' people don't go. Students see these events as another thing they have to do.
- With many things going on there is a shortage in staffing.
- Need more support for the student groups.
- There is some assumption about the student athletes, that they are given unwarranted privilege.

## 4. Lunch meeting with faculty
(8 faculty members attended the meeting)

<u>Observations on the college's diversity effort</u>
- The university's effort to promote diversity feels shallow. It seems to just promote "photographic diversity" to create a facade that the college is diverse.
- The goal of the college is not very clear. What are we trying to accomplish?
- Not strong support and institutional support for diversity.
- Diversity effort needs to include things beyond race, such as disability and social class. Also need to pay attention to status and class differences within the college.
- The university's effort to promote diversity feels like it is part of the fund-raising, development effort.

<u>Observations on faculty and student diversity</u>
- Not much diversity among the full-time faculty.
- Need to have a scholarship for students from underrepresented populations. Unless we recognize that the racial divide coincides with the financial line and try to remedy it, we will not have a diverse student body.
- Need to have a better mechanism for student retention.
- Most of the African-American students are athletes.

## 5. Meeting with staff for Co-curricular Programs and Residence Life
(5 staff members attended the meeting)

- There is a need to recruit more residence assistants.
- Most of the students of color on campus are athletes.
- Many diversity events are coordinated with student organizations.
- Students generally want to be entertained.
- It is important to get people to understand that diversity is not jut about 'color.'
- Students tend to be 'cliquish.' They rarely diverge from the group they belong to. You can see that in the way people sit together for lunch. Students need to get out of their comfort zone.
- Staff, faculty, and administrators don't seem to connect with each other. They all need to be more involved.

- It is important for one to understand and come to terms with one's own identity before facing other groups.
- There is some sense of distrust against the administration: a sort of "us vs. them" mentality. Some members of student organizations exhibit disdain against authority.
- Some groups of people also seem to not want to associate with anything to do with diversity, using a "stay away from trouble" or "don't rock the boat" attitude.

## 6. Meeting with Provost

- The college has an opportunity to capitalize on the geographical proximity to New York City.
- The college see's itself as homogenous.
- Two main barriers for diversifying the student body: (1) for some the college is not prestigious enough, and (2) the college is fairly expensive for some.
- Need to think about a variety of ways to reach out to diversify the faculty pool.
- Faculty need to own the diversity effort. It should not be somebody else's concern.
- It's important to have diversity issues woven into the curriculum.

## 7. Meeting with administrators, staff, and faculty
(8 people attended this meeting)

- There was a survey administered for faculty and students awhile ago. Need to revisit and take a look at what the survey results showed.
- Need to be intentional in the community-based curriculum. Unless the faculty give good instruction, community-based activities can reinforce negative stereotypes.
- College is a nurturing, family environment. However, when you are a newcomer, and not yet part of the family, you can feel isolated.
- College needs to take "action" in doing more on diversity. Some faculty members who have been in the college for awhile, and haven't seen much changes on the campus, may be feeling impatient and frustrated.
- Achieving faculty diversity needs to be given more priority. Also need to examine faculty of color retention rate.
- The college needs a champion in diversity, who can show things in practice, not just words.
- There are some constraints in financial resources for diversity efforts.
- Interestingly, Asian is the least represented minority group on campus.
- Not many international students on campus. Need support mechanisms for international students before increasing their numbers.
- It is important to increase financial aid and/or scholarships for minority students.
- It may be important to actively use the alumni network for student recruitment and for financial support for students of color.
- There is a need for more open communication and dialogue. There is a sense of confusion on campus as to what direction we are going in relation to diversity.

**8. Meeting with student group representatives**
(6 students representing 4 student organizations attended this meeting,
representing "Hello" Jewish Student Organization, Nubian Student Union,
Amnesty International, and Alpha Phi Omega)

<u>Observations on the diversity of student body</u>
- There is a general sense that the student body is not diverse.
- We may not have any statistics on it, but students think we have a large gay population on campus.
- No scholarship specifically targets minority students. If we were to bring in more minority students, it is important to have such a scholarship.
- It is important to have a more diverse student body. It is hard to broaden our perspective when having class discussions with people who are from very similar cultural and social backgrounds. There is a difference between imagining how other people think, versus having them share their own experience with us and discuss the issues together.
- Most of the minority students on campus are athletes.
- Not having many straight men on campus poses a particular challenge in terms of gender dynamics. Some straight men seem to take advantage of their status. Need to have more diverse male student population.

<u>Observations on the curriculum</u>
- Learning Community curriculum is effective in raising awareness among students who never had an opportunity to work with some particular community.
- The effectiveness of the experiential learning curriculum depends on the commitment of the faculty member. Some faculty members take it more seriously than others.
- The college has a good study-abroad curriculum.
- Curriculum also need to incorporate more non-Western thoughts and scholarship.

<u>Suggestions on how to organize diversity events</u>
- It is important to work with many student groups and clubs when organizing any event. What is most crucial is to get the information out to the students through many channels.
- Students are required to do many things and may find it difficult to take initiative or participate in more activities.
- It seems that the three-to-four-day orientation for freshmen is a good opportunity to get students interested in the issue of diversity, before they get into a state of apathy.
- Every fall we have "club fair." It may be a good idea to do it more than once a year and use it as an opportunity to get students involved.

<u>Observations on the college's diversity effort</u>
- Diversity needs to be addressed beyond racial diversity. There are many other things that need to be looked at beyond race.
- There are some stereotyping of students based on what they do: e.g., a male theater major is often assumed to be gay. A minority, usually African American student, is often assumed to be an athlete with scholarship.

- There is no overt tension between different groups of students, but there is no interaction either. There is a segregation in the dining hall. One section is for athletes and another section for theater majors.
- Students are cognizant that we need to do more to promote diversity and find a way to have better interaction among diverse groups, but nothing happens. Students are not willing to take initiative.
- Not many students are aware of the existence of the Diversity Action Council and its activities.
- There is some sense of disconnect and apathy among the students.

Observations on faculty and administration
- Faculty seem to be more diverse then students.
- Administration is willing to listen to student voice, but it is not backed up with the action. Nothing happens.