



INTERSECTIONALITY IN ACTION

A Guide for Faculty and Campus Leaders for
Creating Inclusive Classrooms and Institutions

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IT TAKES A CAMPUS

Building Capacity to Sustain the Diversity Journey

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This chapter describes the diversity and inclusion (D&I) journey that has been ongoing at Kalamazoo College during the last decade. It identifies key themes that have informed our work as a way of illustrating the successes as well as the challenges we have faced in our efforts to create a more inclusive student-focused campus community. Though each institutional context is different, we offer our experience as a case study that is applicable across a broad array of colleges and universities.

Since its inception, Kalamazoo's D&I approach has incorporated various types and levels of intersection (e.g., departmental and constituent intersections), and it is inclusive of all aspects of personal identity. The senior leadership (president's staff) leads the D&I institutional efforts and, recognizing that it impacts every aspect of our mission, brings a cross-functional, team-based approach to the work. Kalamazoo's D&I work involves colleagues with broadly diverse experience and skill sets who come from every part of campus. Moreover, as we commenced our work, we chose not to privilege any elements of personal identity over others. Colloquially we refer to "every part of every person" as a way to acknowledge the intersectional personal identities we seek to fully include. In other words, the term *intersectional* describes the multiple, differently situated campus colleagues who contribute to the work toward the full inclusion of every part of everyone on campus.

Background

Kalamazoo is a traditional residential liberal arts college of just under 1,500 students located halfway between Detroit and Chicago. In 2005, as a new president arrived, the college had less than 10% students of color, nearly no

degree-seeking international students, and less than 9% Pell-eligible students. The new president was perplexed by the absence of economic, geographic, and racial diversity at Kalamazoo. During the search process, she had emphasized her personal commitment to diversity and her philosophical position that a diverse campus community is an essential component of twenty-first-century educational excellence. Shortly after her arrival, she learned that, based on the 2000 United States Census, "Michigan [was] the most segregated state in the nation. Five of the 25 most racially segregated metropolitan regions in the United States—Detroit, Saginaw, Flint, Benton Harbor, and Muskegon—[were] in Michigan. . . . Almost all of the state's Black residents . . . [lived] in just 11 metropolitan regions . . . [and] roughly 70 of the state's 83 counties [were] overwhelmingly White" (Schneider, 2003). The state's public school systems were also the most segregated in the nation, with "82 percent of Black students . . . enrolled in just three [school] districts [and] some 90 percent of White students . . . enrolled in Detroit-region schools where 10 percent or less of the students [were] Black" (Schneider, 2003). She wondered what this might mean for recruitment, given that at the time more than 70% of the student body was from Michigan, and for how students interacted once they arrived on campus.

Conversations with campus constituents revealed that the issue of diversity had been a long-standing topic of concern, study, and sometimes conflict on the campus. Why, she wondered, had so little progress occurred?

To better understand the situation, an independent assessment, called an "Inclusivity Audit," was conducted by two experienced consultants. The charge to these individuals was to assess the readiness of the college to undertake, sustain, and make significant strides in the process of becoming a more diverse and inclusive campus, and to make recommendations for specific action steps that might lead to the development of a diversity mind-set at Kalamazoo. The findings would be used to guide future action and to inform the upcoming strategic planning process.

The consultants held strategic, confidential conversations with more than 50 students, faculty, and staff, and with all members of the then executive team.¹ They also reviewed numerous reports on various aspects of diversity at Kalamazoo dating back to 1995.

For purposes of the audit and the strategic planning work that followed, we defined *diversity* as the process of developing an environment that maximizes the potential of all constituents of the college. Diversity is not a final state; rather, it is an ongoing process. In embracing this definition we recognized that diversity is not limited to ethnicity, race, and gender. Rather, it is inclusive of all group identities. Additionally, developing an environment

that maximizes the potential of all people requires valuing group differences at the interpersonal and institutional levels.

The audit findings revealed that Kalamazoo had spent considerable energy and time “talking” about the importance of diversity but that very little had changed. According to the consultants, this view was informed by two main factors. First, there were very few people of color working at or attending Kalamazoo. Second, respondents did not perceive the campus climate as consistently respectful of everyone regardless of gender, race, national origin, or age. The consultants did, however, commend the college for its high-quality, in-depth analyses pertaining to diversity-related issues. They concluded in their confidential report to the president, “What is critical now is relevant action to match the rhetoric” (personal communication, 2006). Many institutions have been or will find themselves at a similar point, with unclear ideas about how to proceed but a clear idea that they must.

To assist with the transition from rhetoric to action, the consultants offered 17 recommendations focusing on the following main strategic imperatives:

- Articulate a new vision for a diverse and inclusive Kalamazoo community and effectively communicate the importance of this vision and its centrality to Kalamazoo’s mission.
- Build the capacity of the leadership team and the faculty to undertake sustained diversity work and establish expectations and accountability measures related to these efforts.
- Become a more inclusive and student-focused campus.
- Ensure the college’s operations (admission and financial aid strategies, curriculum design and review, hiring and onboarding practices, vendor identification and selection, etc.) reflect the college’s commitment to diversity and inclusion.

In closing, the report offered some cautionary remarks:

The new president has become the symbol of newfound confidence that cultural change can indeed be effected at last. Her presidency offers renewed hope. Can one person, of any color or gender, single-handedly revitalize and rejuvenate an institution of higher learning bound by tradition? No. Can one person change an entire campus, and all its constituencies, and especially around issues of diversity? No. (personal communication, 2006)

Consequently, the consultants recommended that the college immediately identify interim diversity leadership to undertake this work as soon as possible. A recently retired faculty member agreed to assume this role. Our initial

efforts focused on enhancing the capacity of the leadership team through a series of retreats and organizing conversations among triads of diverse individuals throughout the campus who explored their experiences with diversity and their hopes for diversity and inclusion at Kalamazoo.

These efforts provided the foundation from which the strategic priority to “create a diverse and inclusive student focused campus” emerged. Central to this priority was increasing all forms of representational diversity (economic, gender, geographic, national, and racial/ethnic) among the student body and ensuring that Kalamazoo students would have an opportunity to engage with faculty and staff who reflect the international and multicultural dimensions of the twenty-first-century global community. Recognizing that systemic institutional change would be required to realize the goal of creating a diverse and inclusive campus, the plan also set the expectation that “Kalamazoo College will be an intercultural institution in which the campus community is engaged in learning across differences in a context where no culture dominates.”

Philosophy

As we began our diversity journey, the college adopted an infuse-and-embed philosophy that guided both policy and practice. It is characterized by recognizing two crucial principles.

First, genuine cultural change can be achieved only if diversity work is infused and embedded into the everyday work of the institution. Diversity and inclusion work cannot be perceived as an add-on for an already very busy campus community. Institutional leaders must develop a diversity mind-set that will inform everything they do each day.

Second, institutional leaders must own and lead the diversity work. They must be institutional diversity champions, and to do so they must be knowledgeable about issues of diversity and inclusion and develop the skills necessary to infuse and embed a diversity mind-set into their current responsibilities. Students quite correctly often see themselves as the primary innovators on campus. However, long-term systemic change requires a time commitment that goes beyond the typical four-year tenure of a student. Institutional leadership, faculty, and senior administrators must provide the leadership for sustained diversity work.

We have also taken an evidence-based approach to our work. What we have learned from careful study of other institutions, the literature,² and most importantly, from the experience of our students, faculty, and staff has provided a solid evidence base for planning and action.

Though initially led and continuously championed by the leadership team, our diversity journey has depended upon significant cooperation and cross-fertilization of ideas among many on campus, including academic affairs, student development, admission, advancement, the board of trustees, and more. The call to enhance the overall student experience has resulted in new intersections among various campus constituencies, as faculty, administrators, and staff (collectively and individually) make sense of students' Kalamazoo experience.

Once the board of trustees endorsed the strategic plan, our D&I work took on greater depth and breadth, including requirements for accountability. Combined with our infuse-and-embed philosophy, our work developed in some thematic ways.

Themes

Representational Diversity

Though not sufficient in itself, a necessary step in creating a more inclusive campus community is addressing representational diversity—that is, the makeup of the student body, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni board. At Kalamazoo, we took several explicit steps to enhance our representational diversity.

- The admissions office restructured staffing, travel, and recruitment strategies specifically to increase the number of students of color, international students, and students from outside Michigan, and to enhance the socioeconomic diversity of the student body.
- Although the staff already included a coordinator of multicultural recruitment, every member of the admission staff was given responsibility for the recruitment of underrepresented students. All admission counselors are expected to establish ties with high-performing, inner-city high schools and with community-based organizations (CBOs), such as LINK Unlimited and College Possible.
- Guidance counselors from these schools and CBOs are routinely invited to Kalamazoo's campus for an introduction to the college and for meaningful discussion on the topic of advising students of color for college admission.
- An annual multicultural student fly-in program provides high-achieving, underrepresented students with an early exposure to the campus.
- The advancement staff works with alumni and friends of the college to increase financial resources to support scholarships. This included a

gift to fund a five-year partnership with the Posse Foundation starting in 2009–2010, which provided a major boost to our efforts to create a more diverse student body.

- The college has made less significant strides on faculty and staff diversity, although this remains an important priority. The provost has more explicitly engaged faculty search committees in crafting position descriptions and building and assessing the qualifications of a more diverse pool of applicants. More recently, the office of human resources has made changes in recruiting strategies for staff positions, creating targeted job postings that might engage more diverse populations, and emphasizing building diverse candidate pools. The college has also taken advantage of opportunity hires as a way to build the diversity of the employee base.

We have seen tremendous success in enhancing the representational diversity of the student body. From fall 2005 to fall 2014, the student body has changed from 9.8% domestic students of color to 26.0%, from 0.4% degree-seeking international students to 6.4%, and from 8.9% Pell-eligible students to 21.7%.

Capacity Building

Another important theme in our work over the past decade was explicit attention to building capacity for diversity and inclusion across all members of the campus community, understanding that intersections across divisions and job classifications would enhance our success. After a team of faculty and staff attended the spring 2008 Diversity Summit sponsored by the Great Lakes Colleges Association, Kalamazoo prioritized building the capacity of the employee base and identified VISIONS, Inc., as consultants and one of our key partners for this part of our work.

This capacity-building work started with the president's staff, all of whom participated in the first VISIONS workshop in 2009. The leadership team subsequently engaged in a yearlong process of ongoing learning and discussion as follow-up. Most of the team has participated in a second, more advanced workshop, and they continue to meet with the VISIONS consultants to focus on how best to continue advancing diversity and inclusion initiatives on campus.

The VISIONS workshops have been a key strategy for continued capacity building among faculty and staff. To date, 56% of employees have participated. The college has also supported other diversity and inclusion initiatives for faculty, staff, and students. This has included trainings through

Eliminating Racism and Claiming/Celebrating Equality (ERAC/CE), a local group that focuses on building antiracist organizations; a minigrant program to which employees can apply and in which they can create opportunities to further enhance our capacity for this work; and dedicated time at new-employee orientation for discussing the institution's commitment to and work on diversity and inclusion.

Evidence-Based Focus

Throughout our work, we have given sustained attention to the quality of the student experience and considered real ways we could improve it. One of the best tools we employed was campus-based research, which informed our planning and action. Here, we recount some specific examples.

The vice president for student development and the provost collaborated to create a cross-divisional “data and decisions” group in 2008–2009. The group's first project was analysis of existing data (primarily through the National Survey of Student Engagement and the Higher Education Research Institute's Cooperative Institutional Research Program surveys) on students' expectations for and experiences with diversity. A significant early finding from this group was that Kalamazoo students, across the board, came to campus with higher expectations for experiences with diversity than students at peer institutions, that their expectations “were not met” at higher rates than students at peer institutions, and that our student athletes were more satisfied with their experiences with diversity than the Kalamazoo student body in general. This was followed by a focus-group research project to better understand the experiences of African American students. These findings, which were echoed in subsequent focus-group research, helped us understand that students experienced the campus differently based on their racial identity (e.g., extra scrutiny for students of color, the expectation that such students “represent” all other students of color), that the capacity of the overall community to fully engage with issues of difference was limited in ways that negatively impacted students (both in the classroom and with peers outside of the classroom), and that there were real actions that could mitigate the negative experiences of our African American students.

Several years later an expanded set of focus groups examined the diversity-related experiences of a wide range of students (i.e., what were students' direct experiences encountering diversity on campus—intentionally and unintentionally, with peers, in the classroom, and outside the classroom). These focus groups led to a spring 2013 report entitled “In Their Own Words,” the overall findings of which were presented to the entire campus. The following year, the president's staff charged a group of students, faculty, and staff with delving more deeply into the findings and recommending

ways in which the college could respond. Their report, “We Too Are K'zoo,” placed the findings in context by exploring how issues of race are playing out on other campuses across the United States and examining the extensive literature on diversity in academe. It also incorporated the experiences and perspectives of Kalamazoo faculty and staff and offered specific recommendations for moving forward. Some key recommendations included ongoing training for faculty and staff, broader curricular innovation and change focused on diversity and inclusion, recruitment of faculty and staff of color, enhanced support for international students, and consistent messaging about the college's commitment to and accountability for D&I-related competency. In response to “We Too Are K'Zoo,” a variety of efforts are now underway. The “sense of belonging” construct (Strayhorn, 2012) identified in the report was widely adopted by the college and encouraged the formation of a foundation for a grant on diversity and inclusion now being funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The activities of the grant represent another example of collaboration between academic affairs and student development and will support additional faculty and staff capacity building, address inclusion through curricular and pedagogical lenses, and provide additional support for inclusion work in student development.

Several years ago, we looked at the participation of three cohorts of graduates in what we designated “high-impact practices.” Our analysis showed significant differences by gender (men's participation rates were generally lower) but no apparent or significant differences based on race. A trend of decreasing study abroad participation, a signature experience for most Kalamazoo students, prompted us to form focus groups with students who chose not to study abroad, and the results led to changes in our recruiting approach and the historical messaging of study abroad as the opportunity for intercultural experiences. This shift in message focus to include other important outcomes of study abroad is meant to enhance the participation numbers of international students and domestic students of color.

While much of our work has been informed by formal intersectional research and subsequent action, we have also taken action informed by opportunity or more tacit information. The following are some examples of such courses of action:

- From 2008 to 2010, the college received a grant from the Council of Independent Colleges and the Walmart Foundation to support general programming and summer internships for first-generation students. This opportunity jump-started what has turned into sustained programs in support of first-generation students, including an

orientation brunch for students and their families and a formalized organization of first-generation students named G1. It also led us to look at issues of financial access to internships for all students.

- After a student conducted and shared his senior research project on the experiences of the growing Latin@ population on campus, we asked an emerita faculty member to spend the next year getting to know this student cohort better and to make recommendations for action.
- As the international student population grew, we recognized the need for more systemic support and a better understanding of relevant issues, and we established the International Student Issues Committee, which now meets quarterly.
- The increasing voice of transgender students on campus led to establishing gender-neutral bathrooms, updating the student housing policy, and developing practices that enable students to use preferred names and pronouns on campus.
- The office of religious and spiritual life has greatly expanded its support of a wide range of religious traditions, recruited a diverse group of student workers/volunteers, and developed a strong interfaith focus.
- Academic advisers and faculty members have learned more about working with neurodiverse students, such as those on the autism spectrum.

All of these efforts are examples of the intersectional nature of our work, in which various offices and student groups collaborate to make the campus more inclusive in a variety of ways.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

As an educational institution, Kalamazoo considers curriculum and pedagogy essential elements of D&I work. Perhaps the most significant change was the recent faculty approval of a new major, critical ethnic studies. While calls for area or ethnic studies at Kalamazoo date back to 1968, a student demonstration in fall 2012 helped launch the current initiative. The provost convened a working group of faculty to investigate the course and vision of ethnic studies at the college. The full faculty engaged in a discussion of the possibility of ethnic studies at Kalamazoo in late winter 2013. This groundwork led to a proposal to and grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (different from the one mentioned previously) that supported a two-year visiting faculty member in ethnic studies to work closely with faculty on issues

of race, diversity, and inclusion in the curriculum generally and to work with a core faculty group to develop a proposed ethnic studies curriculum. In late fall 2014 the faculty approved this new major.

Beyond this specific curriculum development initiative, the faculty has devoted its attention to a wide spectrum of diversity and inclusion issues in many venues. These include our annual fall colloquia, which have brought to campus over the years scholars and thought leaders like Freeman Hrabowski, III, Beverly Daniel Tatum, and Sandra McGuire. Teaching and learning workshops have engaged faculty in considering how their pedagogies, their curricular content, and even their reading lists do or do not foster inclusive diversity. For example, some faculty members have changed the way small groups are constructed in their courses to ensure that no students are excluded in an inadvertent way, something consistently cited by students who participated in focus-group research.

We see our work toward diversity and inclusion at Kalamazoo as ongoing, without an obvious end in sight. We have learned a great deal on our journey to date and offer some of the lessons we have learned.

Lessons Learned

The infuse-and-embed philosophy may at times be in direct conflict with symbolic action that may satisfy or placate the immediate demands of the community. For example, as a result of our approach, we opted not to appoint a chief diversity officer. Instead, the college has provided ongoing professional development to enable members of the executive team to lead the work within their units. When vacancies in the leadership team occurred, the capacity to lead and/or contribute significantly to institutional diversity efforts represented an important lens used to screen candidates. For some, the absence of a diversity officer signals a lack of commitment rather than an executive team that was taking full ownership of its responsibility.

Change of this type and magnitude takes a long time. It is hard work, and it does not always progress in a straight line. For example, Kalamazoo's success in increasing representational diversity in a short time frame led to increased and sometimes heated demands for further change (e.g., regular demonstrations demanding an ethnic studies curriculum as well as a dedicated intercultural center) by domestic students of color and others. Increasing the diversity of the community and building awareness of related issues do not "solve" the challenges of D&I. They complicate the issues in necessary, growth-producing ways that are sometimes hard and unpleasant.

It is helpful to normalize the “bumpiness” that comes with serious attention to D&I. We recognize the value of setting and communicating reasonable expectations about the time involved in culture change (always slower than we want it to be and never finished) and of continually cultivating empathy on a community-wide basis as a primary condition for changing together.

It is important to acknowledge and continuously reinforce the complexity of this work, while simultaneously keeping the community apprised of progress. An individual or a team can be so deeply engaged in the work that it is assumed that everyone else can see what is being done. Communication on diversity efforts and outcomes should occur often and in multiple formats. Lessons learned should be shared broadly and often so that the community understands what is being learned and so that past diversity work can inform future efforts.

It is extremely important to provide support and encouragement to all on campus as they attempt to recognize and interact with people in new ways that might challenge deep-seated values and habits. The effort to change will not be without mistakes. To initiate and sustain long-term cultural change, everyone must cultivate a generosity of spirit and an openness that allow for the collective exploration and examination of mistakes in a spirit of learning. Getting others across campus to take ownership of this work also takes time, and it can come with anger or frustration with senior leadership. Recent examples of this type of ownership taking include Sister Circle, a support group for women of color provided through the counseling center; employees organizing their own follow-up to VISIONS or ERAC/CE training; and regular self-organized gatherings of faculty of color.

We also learned that comprehensive leadership and resources matter. We have already addressed some aspects of leadership. As another example, sustaining the college’s involvement in the Posse Scholars program at the end of its onetime, five-year grant required that the board of trustees take charge and include this significant financial commitment to increasing representational diversity in the operational budget. We translated strategic actions for D&I work into campaign priorities (e.g., scholarship endowments) and have sought and received grants to support our work from foundations and individuals.

Starting serious D&I work is challenging; continuing it is even more challenging in some ways because progress can be difficult to gauge. As the capacity and awareness of the institution are developed, more problematic practices, habits, and artifacts are discovered which, ideally, should lead to change. However, long-term, “taken-for-granted” institutional practices can

be very difficult to change once the need is identified. This is more subtle work than recruiting a diverse student body, and it is not easy.

We look forward to the next chapter of Kalamazoo’s work in creating a diverse and inclusive student-focused campus. And we hope the information shared in this chapter about our approach and the lessons learned will help others as they work on diversity and inclusion within their own contexts.

Notes

1. Communication from the Inclusivity Audit report reproduced in this chapter has remained anonymous and identified with “personal communication.”

2. Among the literature we reviewed, we found the following particularly helpful: Gusa (2010), who wrote about the culture of Whiteness within predominantly White institutions; Strayhorn (2012), who discussed students’ sense of belonging; and various publications from the American Association of Colleges and Universities on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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