

Toward the Promise: Centering Equity, Justice, and Inclusion in a Doctoral Leadership Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Those in higher education stand on the cusp of an opportunity—an opportunity to fulfill the promise that higher education will provide access to liberty, freedom, resources, respect, ownership, and the ability to pursue happiness. The dominance of Eurocentric and Western knowledge, practices, beliefs, and perspectives in organizational leadership programs has yet to be disrupted. Consequently, many doctoral programs reinforce colonialism and White superiority instead of affirming and preparing students to work in a diverse and pluralistic society. This chapter presents some practical ways structural racism in higher education can be interrupted through a program overhaul and redesign to center justice and equity in all aspects of the program.

INTRODUCTION

When a Black person has finished his education in our schools, then he has been equipped to begin the life of a Europeanized White man (Woodson, 1933, pg. 9).

Those in higher education stand on the cusp of an opportunity—an opportunity to fulfill the promise that higher education will provide access to liberty, freedom, resources, respect, ownership, and the ability to pursue happiness. Although much has been done in higher education to raise awareness about social inequities, little has been achieved in terms of interrupting structural racism and the marginalization of diverse students, faculty, and leaders (Powell, 2008). The dominance of Eurocentric and Western knowledge, practices, beliefs, and perspectives in organizational leadership programs has yet to be disrupted. Consequently, many doctoral programs reinforce colonialism and White superiority instead of affirming and preparing students to work in a diverse and pluralistic society (Barber et al., 2020).

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The interconnected and interdependent realities of racism, classism, and sexism have long-lasting effects on the leadership opportunities and entrepreneurship of African American, Native/Indigenous, Latina/o/x, and Southeast Asian people (Steinmetz, 2020). Many doctoral organizational leadership programs throughout the United States reinforce systemic racism because they are not responsive to the needs of the student body nor do they reflect changes to the nature of teaching and learning. These programs fail to acknowledge the inequitable distribution of power and resources that feeds into social inequities, leaving the outcomes of disenfranchised people, including students, to be a matter of hard work, luck, and pedigree. This chapter presents a case of one program that centered the needs, perspectives, and experiences of people from historically marginalized communities in the design of the program in an effort to disrupt the status quo (Barber et al., 2020). This chapter walks the reader through events that led up to the redesign, details how data were used in decision-making, and provides insight into lessons learned during the process and post redesign.

EQUITY-MINDED INSTITUTIONS

The campus that is the case of this redesign was committed to equity. Educational institutions committed to equity have the following in common: an equity-minded campus culture, use of data as a tool for advancing equity and inclusion, and the alignment of strategic goals and institutional capacity-building.

An equity-minded campus acts to correct the educational debt owed to students. Constructive conversations and reflections about race are embedded, embraced, and facilitated.

Institutions committed to equity use data in strategic ways to critically reflect, align goals, and build capacity. The Center for Urban Education has developed procedures and tools for using data in ways that are equity-minded. One of the recommended approaches is disaggregating data by race/ethnicity and other categories appropriate for the context and goals. Data sources should be strategic and represent multiple perspectives and various areas within an institution. Research, both quantitative and qualitative, should be conducted to capture comprehensive insights into the needs of the campus. Making sense of the data using equity-minded theories and frameworks is an important step because assumptions are often made about what the data mean. The overall goal of using data is that all groups experience outcomes at a rate equal to that of the highest performing group (McNair et al., 2020).

Institutions committed to equity employ an equity-minded strategy that places a clear focus on those students in need of corrective justice. The term *diversity* has been used too loosely to include everything from eye color to height and geographical region. Best practice identifies those groups directly impacted by historical inequities and keeps them the focal point for the corrections (McNair et al., 20).

Importance of Diversity and Representation

An equity-minded campus understands the importance of faculty diversity. A plethora of research and literature demonstrates that diversity gives an organization a competitive advantage. There are different types of diversity. Representational diversity—inclusion of multiple genders, sexual orientations, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and languages—is surface diversity. Surface diversity produces divergent thinking and is correlated with more effective teams. Surface diversity improves a team’s ability to solve complex problems and predict errors. Functional diversity consists of specific attitudes, skills, traits, and capital that are essential to the organization’s ecology and its mission in the community. The varied

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