

Chapter 12

From Flashpoint to Resolution: Equipping Presidents to Master the Tightrope During DEI Crises

Omar Estrada Torres

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6282-286X>

Clark Atlanta University, USA

Sean Warner

Clark Atlanta University, USA

ABSTRACT

In the evolving landscape of higher education, college and university presidents are increasingly confronted with crises that intersect with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues. This chapter offers a comprehensive exploration of why and how aspiring presidents must be adept at managing such crises to foster a resilient and inclusive academic community. Emphasizing the critical role of DEI leadership, the chapter underscores the importance of a proactive and strategic approach to crisis management. It outlines practical strategies for addressing and mitigating DEI-related challenges, engaging stakeholders in meaningful dialogue, and implementing policies that promote equity and inclusivity. By focusing on practical, actionable the chapter aims to equip future leaders with the tools necessary for not only managing immediate crises but also driving long-term institutional change. This forward-thinking approach ensures that DEI issues are integrated into the core mission of the institution, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and inclusive academic environment.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-7748-2.ch012

INTRODUCTION

In this rapidly changing and increasingly diverse higher education landscape it is clear that two things are certain about American colleges and universities: 1. that they are increasingly diverse climates and 2. that they will always be confronted with crises that challenge their cultural ethos and stated missions. Executive leadership in such environments requires a special kind of skill set and temperament authentically devoted to leaving the institutions better than the way they found it.

Today's college and university president faces a complex set of campus dynamics related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) that will invariably shape how observers and current and future stakeholders assess their leadership proficiency and dexterity. These issues are not merely peripheral concerns but are central to the mission and values of higher education institutions. The responsibility to lead in times of student campus protests and DEI crises—whether sparked by Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action in higher education admissions policies or a woman's right to control her body. Presidents and their teams have to demonstrate the kind of leadership that transmits a sense that they authentically care about the needs and concerns of their stakeholders and are legitimately invested in getting it right in a humane and transparent way. So, when incidents of racial injustice, gender discrimination, or a particular university political position regarding the Jewish-Hamas or Russia-Ukraine war erupt on campus, the President and his/her/their executive team are adroitly poised to answer the call. This skill set and disposition requires a unique blend of courage, empathy, and strategic acumen. In other words, it means college presidents must be poised to demonstrate genuine congruence and transparency (without jeopardizing confidentiality) in the way they listen, communicate and act with current and potential stakeholders (Chi-Chung, 2023). It signals a sincerity of engagement which conveys that he/she/they is/are present, take nothing for granted and legitimately care about the wellbeing of the constituents in their orbit. They care enough to accept responsibility, be held accountable, and own mistakes when errors or miscalculations are made. This disposition takes a great deal of self-confidence, discipline and comfort with not knowing or not having all the answers – sometimes.

Restrictions on DEI initiatives, including doing away with identity centers, administrative personnel, academic majors and literature, are increasingly becoming commonplace, particularly in states, like Florida, Ohio, and Texas (Papano, 2024). For universities that are dedicated to promoting diversity and tolerance, these limitations provide a significant barrier. They also put a lot of political pressure on presidents of colleges and universities, forcing them to comply with state and federal legislators' directives about funding and educational priorities.

36 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/from-flashpoint-to-resolution/365620

Related Content

Closing the Gap Between Students' Career Readiness and Employers' Expectations: An Innovative Competency-Based Approach

Jennifer L. Doherty-Restrepo, Katherine Perez, Michael Creeden, Bridgette Cramand McLudmer Charite (2023). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/closing-the-gap-between-students-career-readiness-and-employers-expectations/327348

Esports on Campus: Challenges, Considerations, and Opportunities

Brent A. Marsh, Thomas L. Andreand Samantha L. Payton (2020). *Higher Education Response to Exponential Societal Shifts* (pp. 330-355).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/esports-on-campus/259035

Degree Attainment in Online Learning Programs: A Study Using National Longitudinal Data

Heather Carter, Credence Baker, Kim Ryneansonand Juanita M. Reyes (2020). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 19-43).

www.irma-international.org/article/degree-attainment-in-online-learning-programs/265505

Applying Blooms Digital Taxonomy to Address Creativity and Second Order Digital Divide in Internet Skills

Aparna Purushothaman (2017). *Handbook of Research on Creative Problem-Solving Skill Development in Higher Education* (pp. 450-470).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/applying-blooms-digital-taxonomy-to-address-creativity-and-second-order-digital-divide-in-internet-skills/166493

Using Experiential Learning to Improve Student Attitude and Learning Quality in Software Engineering Education

Ferdinand Ndifor Che, Kenneth David Strangand Narasimha Rao Vajjhala (2021). *International Journal of Innovative Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (pp. 1-22).

www.irma-international.org/article/using-experiential-learning-to-improve-student-attitude-and-learning-quality-in-software-engineering-education/273133