

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:

Rhetoric Into Practice

By

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Arts and Sciences, 1963, 1965, 1968

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***“...One might begin by asking about inclusion into what? An inferior and less challenging education? One that fails to prepare students for the challenge of different ideas and the evaluation of their own assumptions? A world in which their feelings take precedence over other matters that need to be confronted? ...In fact, by failing to provide the challenge of open discourse, we shortchange students from groups that have had to deal with exclusion, just as we shortchange those who might not...”* President Robert J. Zimmer, University of Chicago, July 29, 2017**

I enthusiastically endorse Chancellor Patrick Gallagher’s goal of having the University of Pittsburgh become a world class model of *diversity and inclusion*. Accordingly, this article is submitted in the context of the University Senate’s efforts to articulate a set of Pitt Principles, particularly the principle related to *diversity and inclusion* and with the general intent of facilitating the translation of the rhetoric of *diversity and inclusion* into practice without having adverse impact on the Civil Rights Movement.

Herein, the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) is used in reference to African Americans’ decades-long struggle to [1] end de facto and de jure racial discrimination; and [2] enable African Americans to have equal opportunities for education, employment, health, housing, voting, and all rights specified by the Constitution. The CRM was never exclusionary but rather focused on African Americans’ “long march to freedom” given America’s shameful legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, and institutional as well as individual racism. At Pitt, the 1960s and 1970s CRM initiatives focused on increasing the numbers of African American students, faculty, staff, and administrators as well as implementing academic initiatives such as Africana Studies and the African American Collection.

Adverse impact on the CRM began during the 1960s when John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925 which ushered in Affirmative Action (AA) for a wider array of protected classes, i.e., Order 10925 directed government contractors to take affirmative action not only on behalf of African Americans but also for others regardless of their “race, creed, color, or national origin.” In 1967, “sex” was added to the list of those protected and, as many have noted, White women were the disproportionate beneficiaries of AA.

Contestations regarding AA helped pave the way for the 1978 “Bakke” ruling that indicated higher education institutions had a *compelling interest* in the pursuit of *diversity*. *Diversity* further detracted from the CRM because implementers addressed not only race, creed, color, national origin and sex but also factors such as religion, class, language, ethnicity, veteran status, sexual orientations, marital status, socio-economic status, physically and mentally challenged, gender, age, and political beliefs.

As evidenced by statements emanating from several University of Pittsburgh administrators, diversity is so elastic, so amorphous and, ironically, so inclusive that it refers to essentially every

known human set of collective differences. As such, and without specific diversity priorities, it is not clear what is specifically supported. For example, would Residence Life (see below) seek to hire Advisors with different *ancestry* (whatever is meant by *ancestry*) as vigorously as they would pursue those of different racial backgrounds?" Other examples of elastic University statements regarding *diversity* are as follows:

[1] School of Education: "We strive to continually develop and maintain a School culture that recognizes and celebrates a diversity of backgrounds, experiences, viewpoints, and beliefs. The School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh aims to recruit and retain a diverse population of students and administration who can contribute to an inclusive learning environment of mutual respect...." The statement goes on to list U.S. Students of Color, LGBTQIA, International Students, Military and Veterans, and Students with Disabilities.

[2] Year of Diversity: "As a campus community, we celebrate [1] diversity in all of its forms; [2] including but not limited to race, culture, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, religion, political affiliation, socio-economic status, and academic approaches. ...We want to provide many opportunities throughout the year to build understanding, from appreciating art from different cultures to fighting for social justice." (Underlining mine)

[3] The Office of Diversity and Inclusion: "The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) was established in 2015 to help build the University into a world-class model of diversity and inclusion defined by inclusive excellence and an environment that allows everyone to thrive. ODI is committed to fostering diversity and celebrating differences, educating the community on the benefits of diversity, promoting equity, eliminating discrimination, and advancing equal access to all opportunities at the University."

[4] Student Affairs, Residence Life: "We acknowledge that human differences comes [sic] in many forms, including: race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, genetic information, disability, or status as a veteran."

If we are to make good on the promise of *diversity and inclusion*, then we must go beyond regurgitating *diversity and inclusion* principles and, as in the case of sound academic planning, establish *diversity and inclusion* priorities and benchmarks as well as articulate valid and reliable forms of assessment. How else, for example, would we know if the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) was fulfilling its mission of building "...the University into a world-class model of diversity and inclusion defined by inclusive excellence and an environment that allows everyone to thrive." How would we know if the Department of Africana Studies; Equipose; or the Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies Program were "thriving" aspects of campus *diversity*? In a meritocratic classroom, what does it specifically mean for all students to "thrive?" Moreover, movement from rhetoric to practice requires an environment in which these and related questions might be asked and discussed.

If the University was in fact interested in "diversity in all forms," then there should be no hesitation if some students proposed the creation of a new Alt-Right Student Union, with the same institutional support as the Black Action Society. If the desire is for students to benefit from "diversity in all forms," then there should not be violent opposition to speakers who wish to discuss diverse views related to [1] how biology could be destiny or [2] that global warming is not settled-science.

In order that *diversity and inclusiveness* be pursued with all deliberate speed, might not Pitt be a leader when it comes to ending being host to historically segregated White and African American fraternities and sororities? Are the goals of *diversity and inclusion* best realized by having nearly 600

balkanized student groups on the Pittsburgh Campus? When the University refers to “Black” students, does it have in mind the *diversity* reflected by the myriad of cultures represented by recent African and Caribbean immigrants, the descendants of African slaves in America, or something else?

Given that the Diversity and Inclusion Office supports Title IX, shouldn't it take the lead in assessing whether Lantern Night (“...the University's oldest tradition, welcomes first-year and transfer women to the University as alumnae symbolically pass the light of learning from one generation of Pitt women to the next”) is a violation of Title IX? Even if Lantern Night is not a Title IX violation, in the spirit of *diversity and inclusion*, then why not end that tradition and create a new program for all first-year students?

Without operational definitions, statements of priorities and very specific benchmark criteria such as the ones used for academic program planning, *diversity and inclusion* might be headed for the outcome W. B. Yeats described when he wrote in “The Second Coming,” i.e., things fall apart because there is no center that holds. Moreover, as the *Diversity and Inclusion Supernova* burns out, untold harm could be done to the CRM.

With no intent of lending support to the position paper written by James Damore, it is worth considering his following statements: “...Echo chambers maintain themselves by creating a shared spirit and keeping discussion confined within certain limits. As Noam Chomsky once observed, ‘The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum.’ But echo chambers also have to guard against dissent and opposition. Whether it's in our homes, online or in our workplaces, a consensus is maintained by shaming people into conformity or excommunicating them if they persist in violating taboos...”

http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2017/08/damore_i_was_fired_because_of_ideological_echo_chamber_at_google.html

Given the content of this article, three recommendations are offered for advancing the University's *diversity and inclusion* initiative.

Recommendation 1. To enable the University becoming a “world-class model of diversity and inclusion,” the University leadership should consult appropriately and then [1] promulgate the categories of collective human differences (diversity) that constitute the University's top 5 institutional priorities; [2] state the specific goals each University responsibility center has for fulfilling the University's top 5 diversity priorities; [3] declare the acceptable means of measuring the specified top 5 diversity outcomes; [4] determine appropriate diversity benchmark institutions and do the comparisons; and [5] produce an annual University report on diversity outcomes.

Recommendation 2. Given [1] the Federal mandate to desegregate the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's state-owned institutions of higher education; [2] Pennsylvania's programmatic efforts to support economically and educationally disadvantaged students; [3] the racial composition of the population served by the University of Pittsburgh; [4] the historical underrepresentation of African Americans, at the University of Pittsburgh in particular as well as in higher education in general; and [5] the continued racial gaps in educational achievement, wealth, health and most measures of well-being, African American students, staff, faculty and administrators should be declared one of the University's highest priorities when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

Recommendation 3. We must provide operational definitions for what is meant by the practice of inclusion. We must, for example, state the specific steps to be taken in order to make effective use of human differences to improve classroom learning, administrative decision making,

staff performance, and shared governance. Institutionally, we should fund [1] a demonstration project whereby specific aspects of inclusion are shown to enhance the University Senate's roles in shared governance, and [2] a demonstration project whereby specific aspects of inclusion are shown to enhance the Pittsburgh Campus Student Government's role in promoting the "concerns, interests, needs, and welfare of the student body."