Diversity and Inclusion Climate Assessment

Offered by:
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For:
The Trachtenberg School of Public Policy & Public Administration

Submitted To:
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Section Three: Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The Trachtenberg School is between a compliant organization and a multicultural organization. Most of its current activities are externally motivated rather than intrinsically grounded. Nonetheless, the desire to have a diverse and inclusive culture exists. However, without courage, skills, resources, and action, this dream will continue to be deferred. To realize the dream, a critical mass of Trachtenberg leaders need to self-reflect, check biases, be open to learning, call on their courage, and draw upon their influence to lead the way for others in the Trachtenberg community.

Their leadership will also empower Trachtenberg students to take ownership in their learning, be peer leaders, and thoroughly understand the value of operating in a diverse and inclusive environment. AAC&U eloquently defines inclusion, such that there is an “increase [in] awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions.” As public policy leaders or public administrators, understanding, managing, influencing and even changing complex systems and institutions are the heart of the work. Imagine Trachtenberg students leading the way.

Now, it is true that “the numbers aren’t always there” in terms of recruiting underrepresented students. However, Trachtenberg can still cultivate a culture of diversity and inclusion because it is more than mere representation by a set of categories on a diversity list. It is a mindset, a behavior, a commitment and an intrinsic value. As Trachtenberg develops leaders to perpetuate inclusiveness in systems, a shift will occur and the numbers will begin to be available.

It is no longer enough to say, “we are thinking about it,” and point to a few activities to try to validate commitment. If the Trachtenberg community is seriously dedicated, then the next step is to take action. Cultivating a culture of diversity and inclusion is not an easy feat, but the Trachtenberg community appears ready to take on the challenge. Following are a set of short- and long-term recommendations to get started.
Short-term recommendations

Establish and clearly articulate a statement about the School’s commitment to diversity and inclusion

The Trachtenberg School’s mission and vision should include, as one of its core values, a statement about its commitment to diversity and inclusion. To do this, the School needs to decide what it wants to be and how it wants to be perceived in the world. The statement should be clear, easy to remember and included on the website and all major publications. It should also become a part of the language when describing Trachtenberg’s values, goals, progress, prestige, successes and/or challenges. This sends a clear message to those in the School, as well as in the community, that diversity and inclusion are important and values to be embraced.

Modify the Trachtenberg website

Nowadays, the impact of print materials is diminishing. Most prospective students and faculty will visit a website for insight into a school’s environment, and the “hook” is the homepage. We recommend that the series of videos on the homepage include more diversity and make a strong statement about the School’s commitment. Also, consider highlighting some of the work being done in the project courses. A slight shift from the emphasis on policy, to an emphasis on the people, would make a huge and noticeable difference.

The anchor statement on the website is as follows:

Do you believe that one person can make a difference from within a system? Do you want to develop your understanding of management, leadership, evaluation, administration, statistics and policy while being in the heart of Washington, D.C. – the nucleus of political power in the USA? Are you ready to apply your new skills and knowledge to details like budgets and program evaluation as well as big picture issues including health care and education reform? Do you want to be an agent for change in the public, private or nonprofit sector?

We recommend leading with a statement that connects the School more to the population’s policymakers and change agents will impact. Washington, D.C. is indeed the “nucleus of political power in the USA,” but can also be depicted as “a culturally rich environment that embraces the very strengths that our nation was built upon.”

Rethink the Diversity and Inclusion Committee Structure

There should be one Diversity and Inclusion Committee to include faculty, staff and students. The committee should be charged by the director and should have very
specific deliverables and measurable goals. The membership should rotate and last no longer than a two-year term. Consider authorizing one faculty, staff and student member to co-chair the committee. The director may need to shift duties and responsibilities around to allow for participation. To mitigate challenges that come with competing commitments, consider offering faculty members service time, staff members a trade (put one duty on hold), and allow students to earn practicum or internship credits. The D&I committee needs to be institutionalized so that regardless of the student, faculty or staff turnover, the vision remains and is successfully carried out each year.

**Create a Diversity and Inclusion Graduate Research Associate Position**

Recognizing that a commitment to any new initiative requires both fiscal and human resources, establishing a Graduate Research Associate position to focus on D&I initiatives would alleviate the need to make such an effort a part of an existing staff member’s job. However, this should be considered a short-term solution until the work is a part of someone’s job and ultimately woven into the School’s fabric. In the event a GA is hired, develop it such that it is research-based and supports curriculum development and avoid it becoming an activities-based position.

**Collaborate with other departments on campus**

There are several departments on campus such as Sociology, Africana Studies, and the Peace Studies Department that would make great partners for public programming that could demonstrate the School’s commitment to Diversity and Inclusion. With some relationship building and mutually beneficial activities, additional resources can be made available for students, faculty and staff.

**Conduct a series of Intergroup Dialogues**

These opportunities facilitate dialogue among students, faculty, and staff, and contribute to the professional, social, economic, cognitive, and spiritual development of all participants. They are a safe space for difficult conversations on diversity and inclusion and allow for powerful learning opportunities due to collaborative thinking. Consider conducting a dialogue as a part of the Forum series as to avoid tacking on another activity until the larger infrastructure is better established.

We recommend having these dialogues facilitated by someone outside of the School.
Build Staff Capacity

The Inclusive Excellence model suggests that organizations can create an inclusive environment in the event there is will and skill. It is clear that will exists among many Trachtenberg community members, and particularly the committee members who commissioned this study. What is missing is skill. Thus, we recommend designating time, opportunity and resources for staff, faculty and students who are managing the diversity and inclusion implementation process to participate in diversity trainings or activities to build personal and professional skill. It is especially important to build their capacity and enable them to have the ability to communicate to a broad range of audiences about Trachtenberg’s commitment, mitigate emerging challenges and pushback, recognize personal biases and how they can influence outcomes, and encourage fellow community members through the transition as necessary.

To begin this process, consider connecting with George Washington University’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion or the Multicultural Student Center. Additionally, there are several online resources, publications and activities that are free and useful. Two to consider are the Multicultural Pavilion and the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Finally, you might consider hiring a consultant to provide a few workshops for your team.

Long-term Recommendations

Develop and implement a robust and inclusive recruitment plan for faculty

The Trachtenberg School should be seen as an attractive place for diverse populations. Experience has shown that achieving a critical mass of colleagues is essential to recruiting individuals who are from groups that are underrepresented. Faculty recruitment strategies that tend to work include: cluster hiring, faculty exchanges with minority-serving institutions, and pipeline programs.

The School can also use faculty, students and alumni to attract and hire candidates from diverse populations. If search firms are used, the School should develop a statement of expectation for searches around delivering a diverse pool of candidates and obtain data on the company’s track record for doing so.

Included in this plan should be a process for the evaluation of the retention and promotion process.
Revise and strengthen recruitment and admissions procedures
A revised and strengthened recruitment and admissions process should be part of the strategic plan for diversity and inclusion. Feedback suggests that much can be done to increase diversity but resources are scarce. A few suggestions here to consider:

- Strengthen and expand financial aid for underrepresented students, including need-based financial support and incentives for high achieving students;
- Increase the number, amount, and diversity of financial aid awards for Graduate Assistantships for high achieving students;
- Build a pipeline by participating in the PPIA Fellowship Program (focusing on Diversity and Leadership in public service)
  - PPIA Mission: To promote the inclusion and full participation of underrepresented groups in public service and to advance their leadership roles throughout our civic institutions serving domestic and international affairs; and
- Revamp existing feeder program with the DC Government and make it an authentic partnership whereby there is an exchange between Trachtenberg’s primary student body and the professionals who are part of the program.

Strengthen and broaden Orientation program
Recognizing that the start of the academic year is extremely busy and time for orientation is limited, an introduction to diversity and inclusion remains imperative. However, it does not start and end at orientation, as it is only the beginning of students’ exposure to diversity and inclusion at Trachtenberg. Infusing the learning and development throughout the academic year is key. Whatever is offered during new student orientation should be significant and memorable, but, most importantly, connected to the experience students should expect to have at the School. Recall the analysis about orientation and consider the planning process well in advance as to avoid students rendering it insignificant and “awkward”.

Support professional development
Expand diversity training and education opportunities for faculty, staff and students by hosting or providing funding to attend annual conferences and seminars. Additionally, incorporating diversity and inclusive excellence as a performance
dimension within annual performance appraisal for all faculty and staff makes a strong and positive statement about the importance of it within the School.

**Review current curriculum**

To begin incorporating diversity and inclusion concepts into the curriculum, the place to start is with the introductory courses. Both MPP and MPA students agree that the Public Policy and Public Administration courses are suitable and suggest faculty members rearrange the course to include diverse concepts. Encourage faculty to be intentional about choosing authors, literature, case studies, examples and activities that are inclusive and representative of the public students are preparing to serve.

**Strengthen community partnerships/collaborations**

The School’s reach and involvement already extend beyond the physical boundaries of the campus because of internships, employment and project work. Strengthening existing and developing new collaborations foster diversity and benefit the urban community as the neighboring communities and regions provide valuable resources for learning and personal growth. This also allows the School to think creatively about speakers to invite to the Forum series. In addition to the Forum series, Trachtenberg can provide an annual opportunity for discussions and exchange of ideas with elected officials, business and community leaders related to the Greater Washington Region and community issues impacting diversity and the urban community.

**Assessment and accountability**

To cultivate a culture of diversity and inclusion with a clear commitment, it is imperative that the School establish a set of related goals to achieve. Keep the goals simple and consider the Inclusive Excellence framework, whereby an inclusive environment embodies:

- **Access and success**\(^{17}\) – Diverse students are able to successfully matriculate, persist and acquire gainful employment
- **Climate and intergroup relations** – Foster an environment that acknowledges and celebrates diversity and encourages inclusive interactions and behaviors on a daily basis

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\(^{17}\) Rochester Institute of Technology has strategic plan outline that can serve as a beginning guide for Trachtenberg. Visit [https://www.rit.edu/diversity/institutional-infrastructure](https://www.rit.edu/diversity/institutional-infrastructure)
• **Education and scholarship** – Enable faculty and students to engage in learning that promotes varied perspectives and safe space for tough talk

• **Institutional infrastructure** – Resist diversity and inclusion as independent initiatives and create sustainable solutions that support progress towards achieving and maintaining diversity goals

Once the goals are established, develop a set of metrics to measure progress and hold all accountable. For example, each faculty, staff or student meeting can begin with a progress check, whereby the convener uses data to update progress towards a particular goal (i.e. access and success could be measured by retention rates and allocated financial aid). Upon updating, the group can have a brief conversation to determine whether they are on track or whether they need to make a midcourse correction.

To establish measurable goals, an online “Climate Assessment Survey” can be administered that will allow the School to establish a baseline. A series of community roundtable sessions can also contribute to setting goals and establishing baselines. The data from this assessment can also assist in developing baselines. Regardless, understanding where you want to go and knowing where you are will help guide your journey.