

# Dimensions of Diversity

Sociology 421 – Sociology of Education

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## STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY – 1960's

**Characterized as** compliance-oriented, recruitment directed programs measured by increasing the numbers of under-represented populations. Perceived as “the morally right thing to do,” support programs were created to recruit and retain disadvantaged students.

**Objectives** – to help people overcome barriers for access and to end discrimination.

**Root Cause** – lack of access attributed to institutional discrimination or racism.

**The solution** – refine and expand support operations or business functions of our institutions to accommodate affirmative action initiatives and federal compliance laws regarding hiring and admissions processes.

### Basic Assumptions:

**Assimilation** – Underrepresented populations would eventually assimilate into the institutional culture;

**Critical Mass** – A critical mass of underrepresented populations was needed to achieve diversity, and once achieved, the institution would change;

**Remediation** – Underrepresented students were disadvantaged or under-prepared and needed remediation as in a “deficit thinking” mode.

- Because structural diversity emphasizes human resource functions such as access, support and remediation, diversity initiatives were often marginalized.
- In time, diversity initiatives simply became a human resource function – hiring faculty and admitting students to achieve a critical mass of underrepresented populations.
- Critical mass can be achieved, just having more women and minorities or people with disabilities in an organization does not necessarily change the way of doing business.
- Structural diversity has limited applications for influencing academic culture. It is still a vital part of our current diversity paradigm, but it is under constant review and revision to provide best practices models.

## MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY – 1970's and 1980's

**Characterized** by attempts to introduce and infuse diversity, cultural customs and issues into our institutions.

- Underrepresented populations are valued for their potential to recruit and retain others and to contribute toward making institutions more aware of multicultural issues.
- Focus on student affairs with emphasis on curriculum change, but attention toward enhancing academic affairs overall.

### Problems:

- Access for underrepresented populations;
- Negative campus climate for women and minorities;
- Lack of multicultural awareness and institutional discrimination.

### Solutions:

- Introduce campus-wide minority Action Plans (e.g., Michigan Mandate, Madison Plan)
- Increase the number and type of student service programs;
- Create new cultural awareness initiatives;
- Create new ethnic studies programs.

### **Objectives:**

- Change campus attitudes toward more positive views on ethnic and racialized issues.
- Encourage women, minorities and other protected groups to contribute toward enhancing campus climate and curriculum change.

### **Assumptions:**

- **Celebrating differences** is more important than assimilating into the institutional culture;
- **Multiculturalism** assumes diverse populations contribute to exposure of multicultural customs and gendered ideas in the classroom and on campus;
- **Achieving Critical Mass** is still a goal for change;
- **Affirmative Action** compliance is a primary driver for recruitment and retention.

### **Results:**

**Compelling interest** to increase diversity creates growth but limited expansion of ethnic studies programs. Definition of diversity changes and includes new underrepresented populations. Increases in underrepresented populations have been slow to materialize. We must think differently about diversity initiatives for the future.

## **CONTEXT DIVERSITY – 1990's**

An emerging paradigm that emphasizes reframing rather than reforming academic cultures to meet the needs of all populations and especially underrepresented groups. It strives to create a learning community with myriad ways to attract diverse populations and have them thrive in an academic or workplace environment.

**Characterized by** attempts to change academic culture to address the needs of the recent demographic shifts in US populations over the last few decades.

**Shifts diversity initiatives** from current concepts about recruitment and retention to new activities that reflect concepts such as *attracting* and *thriving*.

**Results** are measured not only by how well we attract diverse populations, but also by how well we enhance our campus cultures to improve upon the academic and work performance among all students, faculty and staff.

**The focus** is on increasing diversity by using building diversity into the context of the higher education system, our learning community and beyond. The concern for access and achieving critical mass are no longer the main problems. The lack of underrepresented populations is a symptom, not the problem. Underperformance issues and conflict over the cultural context of higher education surface as major problems.

**Solutions** – find creative ways to create systematic change in campus climate and academic culture. Reframe (expand/shift) pedagogy and curriculum without giving up good educational practices. Include a variety of cultural contexts, learning/teaching styles that serve the needs of a growing multicontextual population.

### **Assumptions:**

- **Compelling Interest** provides more than just exposure to multicultural ideas and populations, it also provides new multicultural ways for creating synergy and new knowledge;
- **Achieving a critical mass** of underrepresented populations is still viable, but becoming a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) does not eliminate the problems of academic cultural conflict and underperformance;
- **Affirmative Action** plans and initiatives are still necessary for federal compliance, but access and legal challenges toward programs the suggest cultural preference means rethinking how to achieve campus diversity.