



Reflections on Diversity at Bridgewater State College 2009

In 2003, President Dana Mohler-Faria commissioned the President's Taskforce on Affirmative Action and Diversity. The charge of this cross-divisional taskforce was to "look in the mirror at the state of diversity at Bridgewater State College, reflecting students, staff, faculty and alumni."

Although many aspects about the report were questioned, what became glaringly clear and unchallenged was the realization that Bridgewater was a changing institution. Of the many recommendations of the taskforce, none was more significant than the college's decision to include diversity as one of its strategic priorities -- **Enhancing campus participation in our diverse and global society** -- as outlined in the "BSC 2011: Bridgewater State College Strategic Plan for Quality and Growth."

In 2006 the college formed The Diversity Council and began to lay the foundation for Bridgewater's existing diversity efforts. Working diligently, the council developed the Diversity Resource Guide and engaged in campus-wide dialogue around the college's definition of, which states:

Through a campus-wide commitment to civility, respect and equality, and the promotion of academic excellence, BSC can be an environment that values the participation of all its members -- faculty, staff, students, alumni, administrators and community supporters. Through educating our students to participate "in our diverse and global society," BSC works to create a climate where people of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, ages, religions, nationalities, gender identities, disability statuses and other social identities learn from and with each other, and gain a better understanding and mutual respect for similarities and differences

Responding to the need to unite the disparate diversity efforts on campus, the Diversity Council recommended to President Mohler- Faria that the college create the Office Institutional Diversity (OID), which would report to the president's division. In 2007, Bridgewater State College became first of the nine Massachusetts State Colleges to create an Office of Institutional Diversity and a GLBTA Pride Center.

In the ensuing months, the Diversity Council incorporated the abovementioned definition of diversity into the larger context of a campus-wide diversity plan, which, not by accident, was tied to the College's strategic plan. Five broad strategic goals were established:

- Create and sustain resources for faculty, staff and administrators to broaden their ability to teach and advise students from diversity social locations;
- Offer excellence in education and prepare students to take their place in our global society, and attract, retain and graduate increasing numbers of students from diversity social locations and historically underrepresented populations;

- Attract and retain greater numbers of faculty, staff and administrators from underrepresented populations;
- Create, and sustain a welcoming, supportive and inclusive campus environment;
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with external constituents with regards to diversity in the region, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the nation and the world.

In the Fall of 2008, Bridgewater was one of six New England colleges/universities to receive \$100,000 Project Compass grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the purpose of which was to study the factors that prevented retention, graduation rates and academic success of students of color, first-generation and low-income students.

Data from the Project Compass Community of Practice suggests *that retention and graduation rates indicate a disparity in success between the populations of students of interest in this project and the majority of students of the College.*

In Fall 2008, 42 percent of BSC first-time freshmen appeared in at least one of the three Project Compass target groups: over 12 percent of Bridgewater freshmen are students of color; nearly 30 percent are first-generation; and 14.6 percent are from low-income households. Overall, BSC serves 10,269 students (8,120 FTE), 94 percent coming from Massachusetts, and the vast majority from Southeastern Massachusetts.

The BSC Project Compass Community of Practice (COP) is composed of all the major functions of the institution: faculty, student affairs, academic affairs and the president's office.

The COP's work is guided by the Theory of Change for the project, which presumes that:

If institutions develop programs and services systemically, resulting from:

- collaboration of leaders from campus stakeholder groups (including administrators, faculty, students, community leaders);
- examination of local data and current literature on retention, and;
- alignment of the implementation of new programs and services for underserved students with current campus policies, practices and procedures that support academic success;

then underserved students will experience higher levels of persistence and success.

Through a data-driven, targeted approach -- the Project Compass COP -- we will:

- increase academic and co-curricular support;
- develop an integrated advising process around engaged student learning to be documented in a formal portfolio;
- expand and improve faculty and staff development aimed at promoting engaged student learning pedagogies and cultural inclusion;
- improve strategies for advising in the majors;

- create strategies to address the economic needs of our students, and improve data.

As I reflect on the accomplishments of the past several years, I am proud of our achievements, humbled by the outpouring of support from faculty, staff and students, and excited about the possibilities on the horizon. Through your efforts we are transforming our campus.

Faculty are engaging in reflective conversations about their personal narratives surrounding power and privilege. Students have organized themselves and formed the Student Diversity Council. Academic and administrative leaders are engaging in conversations to find concrete ways to tie the traditional, extrinsic incentives to the refined diversity and inclusion agenda. Our staff in housing and facilities have organized and implemented the Annual Mix-It-Up Day. We are using the Inclusive Excellence framework to articulate our coordinated efforts. We are seeing more faculty, staff and administrators joining the choir for inclusion. Each semester more units are answering the call to align their priorities with the college's espoused value of inclusion.

In a very short period of time we have accomplished much. Below is a partial list of our achievements:

- Received \$400,000 from Nellie Mae Educational Foundation to support the retention and graduation of our students of color, first-generations students and low-income students
- Enhanced Annual Faculty and Staff Diversity Reception
- In partnership with TERI, hosted Upward Bound Summer Program on campus
- Established Student Diversity Council
- Established the BSC Creed Taskforce
- Established the Bias Response Team
- Established Universal Bathroom Policy on campus
- Increased cross-divisional collaboration
- Established diversity as part of college's strategic direction
- Established campus-wide book discussion series regarding diversity and inclusion
- Established the Teaching for Inclusive Excellence program (T.I.E.)
- Established the Diversity and Inclusion Research Institute (DIRI)
- Created the Portfolio of Excellence (POE) program

In closing, the reflections we see in the mirror are a direct result of your efforts, your commitment to our institutional mission, and your passion for student, staff and faculty success. Bridgewater's tradition of excellence is becoming more and more inclusive. The state of diversity at BSC is strong!

Respectfully,

William T. Lewis, Sr. PhD