

Theorizing and Practicing “Inclusive Excellence”

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Jesus Trevino, Associate Provost for [Multicultural Excellence](#), spoke to the Faculty Senate on February 8, 2008 about the progress that's being made with diversity—or, [inclusive excellence](#)—initiatives on campus. As reported in the recent *Campus Climate Survey* (viewable [here](#)), support for diversity initiatives of various kinds is growing on campus. Significant contributions have been made by many people and groups, but there's still work to be done. This includes involving more faculty in discussions of campus diversity. There has not been the kind of faculty outreach that Jesus would like. He'd like us to report on how our curriculum and learning goals support inclusive excellence initiatives. He's invited us to participate in the [Diversity Summit](#) scheduled for Friday, May 2 by offering an opening panel on “Inclusive Excellence and the Curriculum.” We've also been invited to provide faculty representatives for the Multicultural Center's Consortium for Student Success and Inclusive Excellence, chaired by Johanna Leyba (Assistant Provost for Inclusive Excellence). This group meets the second Friday of every month at the Leo Block Alumni House. The Faculty Senate is working with Jesus to make good on these invitations.

Diversity has a special appeal for anthropologists. My personal experience with diversity issues on campus in my time as Senate prez has not been a happy one. I worry about the strength of our commitment to inclusive excellence for three reasons:

1. **Administrative non-responsiveness** to expressed concerns about climate issues in the academic units.

In the last couple of years I've had some long conversations with faculty and graduate students of color in several units about issues of respect and enfranchisement. Since the numbers of “minority” faculty and students on campus are low I don't think there's a risk of over-generalizing here, although I certainly wouldn't presume to speak for all faculty and students of color. My expressions of concern to superiors have met with one of two responses: (a) silence or (b) subject-changing. This experience has been personally disturbing, but more importantly it seems to align with the experiences of those climate survey respondents who've suggested that we need to better “walk the talk” of diversity (*Campus Climate Survey*, page 17).

2. **Questionable public actions**, such as last August's GSIS International Bridge-Builder Award (reported [here](#) and [here](#)). There are, of course, multiple views about the wisdom of this award. From my perspective as an anthropologist it was a sharp stick in the eye to anyone who's committed to (a) the cause of human rights for indigenous and working peoples (which our department has a long tradition of serving through our scholarship and applied work) and (b) the application of rigorous evidential standards to

judging an individual's contributions to the public good. Personally, I think the award for international bridge-building would have been better made to *faculty* in the Daniels College of Business who've been working with multinational corporations to inculcate values around social responsibility and environmental sustainability. But what's done is done. The open question is whether we'll redeem ourselves by acting on a proposal—suggested and supported during the vigorous email debate that preceded the GSIS awards dinner—to sponsor an open-to-the-public *Conference on Indigenous Rights*. This would signal our respect for the critics of this public action, say something positive about our commitment to diversity, and nicely dovetail with the emerging campus-wide conversation about sustainability—broadly understood to include culture as well as environment—initiated by the recent [Provost's Conference](#). *Will the dean and faculty in GSIS take the lead on this?*

3. Impoverished thinking about diversity as reflected in two official university documents, namely (a) the newly revised Vision, Values, Mission, Goals (VVMG) [statements](#), and (b) the Undergraduate Student [Learning Outcomes](#) recently approved by the Undergraduate Council.

As evidenced in part by the VVMG "[Back Story](#)" that I posted elsewhere in the Pulpit blog, our UPAC Mission and Goals Task Force sought to fold Inclusive Excellence ideals into our goals statement in multiple places. We discussed why diversity matters and how, as a practical matter, it should be understood. We highlighted the relationships between diversity, liberal learning, and civic engagement. We emphasized pedagogical and ethical commitments to cultivating intercultural literacy and protecting human rights. These statements were excised from the final document in the interest of brevity and elegance. But they haunt the document and constitute, for many of us, the substantive basis of what we should be talking about.

The Student Learning Outcome dedicated to "Engaging with Human Diversity" is similarly impoverished. Although "constructively engaging" with diversity and "critically reflecting" on identity are laudable outcomes, in my view they are neither logically prior to, nor even as readily assessable as an outcome that's a bit harder-headed: *understanding the nature and sources of human diversity and the difference that difference makes in everyday life*. It seems to me that such understanding is hugely deficient in our society's troubled relationship with diversity, and is the primary concern of those faculty and students who are struggling with climate issues on campus. Indeed, the *Campus Climate Survey* disclosed a belief, especially among women, that white people "...need to move beyond tolerance of differences to a deeper understanding of people different from themselves", and that "more meaningful dialogue between groups" is in order (page 15).

Bottom line: we need to do some soul-searching about what we stand for—both conceptually and practically—as regards diversity. The upcoming Diversity Summit and the impending General Education review process offer two opportunities for doing precisely that as concerns diversity and the curriculum. Those deliberations might consider the substantive documents produced by the UPAC Mission and Goals Task

Force. At the very least, we need better administrative responsiveness to the everyday workplace diversity concerns that percolate up from below.