What's In A Degree?

An examination of Diversity & Inclusion in College Programs

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Film & Television Production Department
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Dedicated to the Many Voices of the world that

brave the interestingly, challenging waters of higher education, specifically those that

are the first in their generation to do so.

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This thesis will examine diversity and inclusion initiatives, or lack thereof at various institutions. This includes examining diversity and inclusion goals as defined by institutions, identifying various methods used and presenting potential ways to expand and yield not only diverse campuses, but a culture of understanding and respect for various social classes including race, gender, sexual preference etcetera.

Keywords: curriculum, inclusivity, college, institution, education, higher educations, programs, social class, race, gender.

INTRODUCTION

What's In A Dream?

When a fresh-faced high-school graduate realizes their dream of a career in the filmmaking industry, it is only the beginning of a myriad of decisions. Some will choose to jump head-first into the industry by creating films with a portable device or in the best case scenario, an actual digital video camera. They will make films that are inexplicably bad and they will either learn etter, or they will quit.

Figure 1 Visualization of Fresh Faced Graduates

Some will seek out on-set experience or lean on other skills to filter down into a related careers. Others, will join smaller departmental agencies or post-houses in search of an internship (or at best, an entry-level position) that might allow them continue to develop the skills they've scratched the surface of in school. But, when a graduate decides to seek post-baccalaureate education to achieve said career goals, they probably have a set of expectations in mind.

We all want to come up with the next big idea, the next hit movie or TV show. In fact, some might wager that most film and television students imagine their big break is, in the words of Pocahontas, "Just around the riverbend," also known as the edge of the

graduation stage. In a digitally driven age with video at the forefront, the possibilities and opportunities should be endless. Maybe the possibilities are endless.

The question is, do the goals and learning outcomes for college programs of study, (mine being film and television specifically) truly benefit long-lasting careers? The aim of this paper is to explore college programs, their learning outcomes and proposed teaching methods. It will examine the advantages and disadvantages of learning within the confines of a predefined program, the limits to these outcomes and teaching methods, and assess how often these methods are updated in order to continue the development of the learning process.

So to begin, we must ask ourselves, what's in a dream? Defined as a strongly desired goal or purpose and synonymized by the word 'ideal', a dream is also identified as something that fully satisfies a wish. [1] A common wish for a recent high school graduate, (or for their parents) is to continue his or her education, in hopes of eventually landing a dream job at their dream company for their dream position. Here we'll explore the Knowing – Doing Gap. Generally speaking, most people know that to fulfill their

dreams of obtaining and maintaining a successful career, they must pursue higher education.

But exactly how does one go from this education and launch into said successful path? The Knowing

Figure 2 Visualization of Knowing - Doing Gap

[1] Webster, Noah. *New Collegiate Dictionary. A Merriam-Webster.* Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1963.

– Doing gap addresses the idea of turning knowledge into action consistent with gained knowledge. [2]

So it's relevance here as a student attempts to reach their goal, after all their efforts and energies are aimed at the education, the gap is filled some, when a curriculum supports inclusivity as an underlying thread when addressing focus or acknowledging learning outcomes. As a military brat, I had to pick up and reestablish my life in various cultures and locations numerous times throughout my childhood education.

I would venture to say that my way of thinking, being and adapting has excelled because of this exposure to the world, and all the flavors it has to offer. How much more would college education prove viable with the inclusion of various 'flavors', cultures and perspectives? We might never know, but we can speculate. Why not imagine it, so?

Initially, I wanted to focus solely on film and television programs, examining only its' curriculum and methods of inclusivity. Shortly after beginning my research, I realized that I'd narrowed my examining field too strictly. Cultural diversity and inclusivity are imperative in all fields, and while it specifically relates to me in my field, I was forced to ask myself, how inclusive is this notion? I simply could not advocate for an idea echoed by and needed for so many voices, behind a selfish focus.

[2] "New Book by Stanford Business School Faculty Members Calls for Corporate Management Based on Facts." *Ascribe Higher Education News Service*, March 21, 2006. Accessed October 18, 2018. http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-143492772.html?refid=easy_hf.

WHAT'S THE GOAL?

For the purpose of this thesis, I want to define the goal as the target where a student's efforts and energies are aimed. I want to establish this goal broadly by labeling it an 'education.' Education is defined as the process of receiving or giving systemic instruction, especially at a school or university, or the knowledge and development resulting from process of education. [3] Our specific goal of inclusion in educational programs begins with the curriculum, the establishment of learning

Figure 3 Visualization of The Goal as the Target

outcomes and then funnels out to the instructors. The question that instructors should ask in order to deal with the marginalized populations in their classes is: How can I incorporate diversity into my curriculum?

     For the film and television program, it's not as simple as showing a film with minorities cast as the lead actors, although this can be a starting point. It includes acknowledgement of what's missing from an already established machine known as the film industry. College curriculums can also be viewed as already established machines. Most curriculums have were created years ago and develop little outside of physical technological advancements within the classroom.

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[3] Webster, Noah. *New Collegiate Dictionary. A Merriam-Webster*. Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1963.

One could say that providing this inclusive experience will require a difference in the mindsets of instructors. Take for instance an arts class, such as English Composition or even Film Studies. They will have to ask themselves, not only what is essential to the curriculum in terms of making students aware of "the classics", but also, "What will resonate and connect with my students on a personal level to ensure they fully appreciate the concepts that are being communicated in my classes?"

THE PROCESS

Many colleges are starting to require deeper conversation, more feedback from minority students, and an in depth look at curriculums that have been in place for years, but haven't changed with the landscape of the student population.

In New York, Hamilton College enacted a strategy for incorporating diversity that requires professors to open the discussion of inclusion in their classes no matter what the course is. It is necessary, no matter the discipline, to recognize that inclusion is not a matter of the professor's opinion any more. "This is an innovative approach to engaging with contemporary issues of inclusion and diversity in the curriculum," said Patrick Reynolds, immediate past dean of the faculty, "one that has the potential not only to resonate with the academic interests of each of our students, but to prepare them better to apply the expertise of their major in their post-Hamilton careers and lives."

 Developments continue as the college strives to find a way to satisfy both its' student body's wishes and appease faculty, some in disagreement with the requirement. The solution for the upcoming 2019 school year seems to be that departments and specific programs will decide how the requirement is best met based on their disciplines within said programs.

Despite the challenges of initial proposals, overall the college understands the importance of inclusion across various social categories including: race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age, abilities or disabilities, religion, gender and nationality. "No matter one's major, our faculty believes that the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to understand numerical concepts and the ability to interact effectively with people from different backgrounds and cultures are prudent and appropriate expectations for an educated person in today's society," Vige Barrie, college spokesperson, said in a statement. [4]

Advocates of curriculum diversity say that requiring scholars to recognize and discourse notions and ideas through a range of lenses with colleagues from dissimilar backgrounds is just as necessary in a progressively inclusive culture as every other basic lesson learned in being a successful college student. That is, the concept of including the perceptions of one's peers in one's considerations of how to approach expression of ideas is just as important as it was in preschool when learning to share toys and make friends. This continues the thought I began earlier, when acknowledging a military brat's background versus a typical civilian's upbringing. Most people grow up in one to two towns most, and engage with friends at an early age, building relationships that they carry with them throughout most of their lives. This type of familiarity breeds a level of understanding between those involves, but has the potential to cause an exclusion

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[4] "Majoring in Diversity." Hamilton College's New Department-specific Diversity Requirement Sparks Debate. Accessed October 18, 2018. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/07/26/hamilton-colleges-new-department-specific-diversity-requirement-sparks-debate.

towards other races, cultures or ideas they might not brush shoulders with in the one or two towns they gained exposure to during childhood.

An enlightened Catholic school in Texas, St. Edward's University, is overhauling a sequence of individual multi-ethnic and impartiality in justice-focused courses that were once enough to fulfill the school's diversity requirement for professors in an attempt to encourage more discussion and improvements across more classes. On it's website, the University even lists creating an inclusive campus as the responsibility of everyone that walks it's halls. We deeply believe in the dignity of every person and work toward ways to uphold a safe environment that honors and respects people regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, religious and spiritual beliefs, nationality, and other important identities, experiences, and perspectives. [5]

THE CHALLENGE: INCLUSIVITY

Of course, these ideals are unsurprisingly provocative. Changes in standards that have been upheld for so long as many institutions is bound to be met with criticism and pushback. Even educators who would consider themselves to be generally inclusive and considerate of their students' ethnic backgrounds struggle with where to begin with this change.
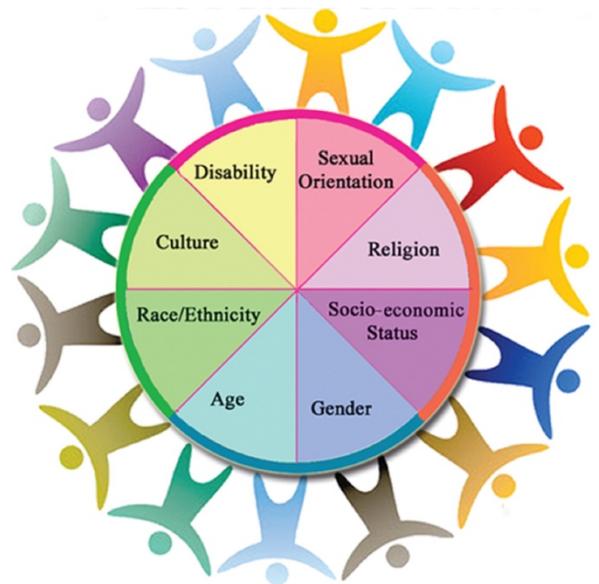

Figure 4 Visualization of Social Classes & Diversity

[5] "Diversity and Inclusion." St. Edward's University. Accessed October 18, 2018. https://www.stedwards.edu/get-involved/diversity-inclusion.

Many schools like to advertise the diversification of their campuses, but when it comes to curriculum inclusion, it becomes a vague concept, and many schools fail to lay out a specific plan to show professors where to begin in weaving it in their teaching. Without defining what diversity inclusion is, schools drop the ball in executing on their diversification goals as many instructors are simply stuck. Others still, don't even see the need for inclusion as it doesn't seem to relate directly to their discipline. Someone on these campuses has to provide the missing link and head up the effort to help their peers in their struggles to include these different perspectives in their syllabus.

At North Carolina's State University College of Natural Resources, lecturer and the head of the diversity office, Thomas Easley utilizes his days trying to close that gap for other educators. In an effort to encourage his colleagues to beef up the substance of their curriculum, he is currently developing a year-long initiative that will provide training and material to faculty that will help to guide their journeys into cultural curriculum inclusion.

The Diversity Digest is NCSU's online newsletter for the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity. Published weekly throughout the academic year, the newsletter chose to interview Easley. Answering the question of how he sees the concepts and practices of creating and supporting diversity and equity in the university best implemented at the school he states, "Diversity isn't something that can be met through programs only. It must be integrated into everything we do at the institution. I think that almost every college having a position that is focused on diversity is a huge step in the right direction. Having an NCBI Team and the Opening Doors program as a model for people to learn more about diversity are examples of progress. Having Alternative Spring Break trips where people go and learn about other cultures and learn how they

contribute (or don't help) globally is something all students can participate in to learn about the world around them." [6]

Some educators, like Easley, do not need or require much hand-held guidance, that is, they incorporate this diversity in their work daily and naturally. Perhaps it is because they've already personally embraced the philosophies necessary to do so. Others seem to be solidified in their subject matter and thus, the approach to educating their students for a myriad of reasons, including the original reasons they joined the institutions they are working at. Some were hired strictly for research reasons that don't include diverging off into re-creating or changing curriculum, but rather adding to what's already established, much further down the line. Still others, are bogged down by the requirements of a particular curriculum and don't have time to think about what isn't being covered by it. Some colleges focus the challenge of diversity to the dorm assignments. Harvard College lists their mission as educating the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society.

Their Mission and Vision Statement establish several thoughts: 'Beginning in the classroom with exposure to new ideas, new ways of understanding, and new ways of knowing, students embark on a journey of intellectual transformation. Through a diverse living environment, where students live with people who are studying different topics, who come from different walks of life and have evolving identities, intellectual transformation is deepened and conditions for social transformation are created. From this we hope that students will begin to fashion their lives by gaining a sense of what

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[6] "Thomas Easley, Director, Community for Diversity." Office for Institutional Equity and Diversity. Accessed October 18, 2018. https://oied.ncsu.edu/divweb/2016/03/24/thomas-easley-director-community-for-diversity/#.

they want to do with their gifts and talents, assessing their values and interests, and learning how they can best serve the world. We are committed to creating and sustaining the conditions that enable all Harvard College students to experience an unparalleled educational journey that is intellectually, socially, and personally transformative.'[7]

This mission and vision statement is indeed ambitious, and hits all the initial concerns that the common student and their parents might have. The thought I cannot seem to shake is the wording across the different sites. Words like commitment, are not used when addressing diversity or inclusion in the mission statement. If done so, it might bring its' focus too forward, and cause students currently attending to realize it's really not at the forefront, if a focus at all. I can't help but wonder if these choices are made intentionally or without notice.

The focus seems to be each universities rich history and or technological development, and what programs it offers in correlation to the career the particular university is sure to streamline the student into directly after receiving education there.

Perhaps another section within the About Me page on university websites could be beneficial. This section could be entitled Values. This would allow universities to highlight the things, ideas and practices that matter most to the school as a unit. The Vision statements should be the roadmap for the mission, with the value statement being the

Figure 5 Visualization of Vision, Mission and Values

[7] "Mission, Vision, and History." Harvard College. Accessed October 18, 2018. https://college.harvard.edu/about/mission-and-vision.

explanation of the school's core behaviors and decisions. I would dare to say that how a university broadcasts, defines and addresses inclusion and diversity is indicative of its' priority to the campus, and the degree of intensity it focuses on said initiative.

Of course not all faculty and staff will be willing advocates for such. Perhaps, sometimes the most obvious advocates for Diversity Inclusion in Curriculum are the faculty who care to cultivate it, usually instructors of minority ethnic backgrounds. Many have had their own experiences with discrimination or lack of diversity on college campuses, and thus, the eagerness to make the connection for their current students, is more personal.

Sadly, while institutions are often agreeable verbally with their efforts, universities are often not organized to empower the individuals behind them. In his visits to multiple schools to engage faculty in diversity discussions, Easley has realized that many offices assigned to this task, lack the power to hire their own staff to help these efforts, and work with disparaging budgets limiting their ability to enact the change they want. They also deal with the pressure from administrators that are more concerned with other goals for the school as a whole and trying to balance the objectives of both parties. Easley noted that both power and influence are needed to actualize diversity.

Laura Hernandez-Ehrisman, a professor at St. Edward's, notes that while she encourages her colleagues to include at least the dialogue of diversity in their instruction, it is challenging to balance the course objectives and address this topic. She's seen other schools struggle as well. So much so that *The* Atlantic published an article about it, entitled, *The Complicated Process of Adding Diversity to the College*

Syllabus: From Physics to Forestry, schools are asking professors to reconsider the lens through which they teach.[8]

Even seasoned professors who have been absorbed in that kind of curricula for years say facilitating student discussions along those lines is not easy. Despite the challenges, encouraging such instruction is imperative, though it may be easier at institutions where diversity has been seared into the school value system for some time. Larger, public universities, for example, UCLA, have to consider the concerns of a broader population and constituency.

CONCLUSION: MOVING FORWARD

Thus far we've acknowledged some of the challenges of promoting diversity and inclusivity and being advocates for such. These challenges included lack of desire to, lack of training and outright ignorance of the need to do so. While each of these reasons has valid points and ideas, in my opinion, they do not outweigh the need to endure the challenge until the positive result is reached. I believe a University should be as inclusive as it freely is when deciding whether to receive the money of a student, whether majority, minority, international or otherwise.

We also acknowledged some ways various campuses are implementing the diversity and inclusion initiative. They included offering Alternative Spring Breaks, where students have the option to explore while emerged in a different location's culture and environment. Other suggestions included the universities offering training for faculty and staff on how to address diversity both within their discipline and in the

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[8] DeRuy, Emily. "Can Cross-Cultural Understanding Be Taught?" The Atlantic. August 09, 2016. Accessed October 18, 2018. https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/07/the-complicated-process-of-adding-diversity-to-the-college-syllabus/493643/.

classroom. Another great solution is getting feedback directly from the students about what they need or feel is void on their specific campus.

I think that Savannah College of Art & Design in particular has made some strides towards inclusivity when it comes to the acceptance of students from various countries. This was exciting to see. However, being up close and personal in some of the classrooms, the sight wasn't so pleasant. I saw maybe one or two Professors verbally express interest in the people and cultures represented there. I saw others publicly offend students about their accent or choice of clothing. I even personally experienced being called an angry black woman in front of my peers.

Within the film and television program specifically, there are numerous opportunities for discussions that evoke thoughts regarding diversity, as the industry itself is making huge strides almost daily. From the #MeToo movement, to articles being published by Netflix about the challenges black women face every day in Hollywood, even in the hair and make-up trailer. I'm excited about the notion that the industry is having these kinds of conversations because that gives me hope that it will trickle down into the classrooms, as we continue to try and mimick the industry while we learn it.

My hope is that eventually, for all campuses, not just SCAD's, inclusivity is at the forefront. For me, inclusivity doesn't mean full understanding and comprehension of all cultures, practices and behaviors. But rather a common respect, willingness to learn other perspectives and ideas and ways of being, and furthermore continuing to develop ways to keep the conversation alive in the classroom, as this is sure to have a great impact. When people feel welcome, good things happen. When students feel welcome, they not only survive college, they thrive in college and later on strive to do well in their careers.

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