

DRAFT

*Meeting
June 13, 1993
at 3:30pm*

DISCUSSION PAPER ON
THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND'S
DIVERSITY INITIATIVE
March 26, 1993

Submitted by M. Van Leesten Associates, Inc.

R. Leesten

BACKGROUND

The University of Rhode Island is involved in the important process of examining the options available to the institution regarding its future. President Robert Carothers has put forth the following vision that goes beyond basic survival.

"In our quest for knowledge, the University of Rhode Island is building a new culture for learning. We will share in the power of discovery through collaborative teaching, learning and research, and through independent inquiry and free speech. This culture generates a spirited public life for our students, who will become engaged and productive leaders. Our research, scholarship, critical analysis and creative expression serve Rhode Island, the nation and the world. In this evolving future, our commitment to continuous improvement and high quality will guide our decisions.

The University community respects the dignity of each individual, valuing the diversity among us. We demand of ourselves uncompromising integrity, with imagination and pride evident in every aspect of our work".

It is within this context that the University's Diversity Initiative has been developed. The University's administration clearly recognizes that there is a symbiotic relationship between the goals and objectives of the Diversity Initiative and the broad vision of reconceptualizing the University. Related to these matters is the Black Student Leadership Group's (BSLG) concerns, commitment and demands for change. The administration's interest in making diversity a high priority, from a strategic planning point of view, is morally as well as politically correct.

The University of Rhode Island has retained M. Van Leesten Associates, Inc. (MVLA) to assist the University in meeting the stated goals and objectives of its Diversity Initiative. In preparing this report, regarding the Diversity Initiative, MVLA has undertaken the following:

- o A review of the vision and mission put forth by the University's administration, as a first step towards bringing issues together to identify common themes.
- o A review of the Black Student Leadership Group's (BSLG) demands and the University's response.

o Participated in meetings and discussion groups with members of the University's administration, the BSLG leadership, alumnus and staff.

o Analyzed documents and activities related to the University's Diversity Initiative as prepared by the President and his executive team.

o Examined the University's affirmative action plans.

From this review, it is apparent that the University's present administration has demonstrated an intent to challenge the old order and create a new one that incorporates the strengths of the old. The broad initiatives of the University coupled with the BSLG's plausible demands presents the University with a unique set of challenges and opportunities. The two dynamics are woven together and serve as one important basis for the necessary changes. The absence of either of the dynamics renders the important diversity objectives and the broader vision of the University increasingly difficult to achieve.

The proposed new vision and mission coupled with the BSLG's demands and the Diversity Initiative present a real challenge to the University. It is evident that the existing paradigm of the University must change if the noble vision of the University is to be realized. The choices are simple, change or slip into institutional mediocrity.

It is also evident that consensus building amongst the various groups is essential to creating systemic change and achieving the new vision and its related objectives. Change will be difficult. Institutional change does not come easy nor neatly. But it can occur if the passion for change and excellence is a by product of the consensus building process.

The Diversity Initiative is the University's litmus test. The extent to which the University is able to succeed in meeting its diversity objectives will be a key measure of its ability to reach other important and related objectives. The power of an idea reinforced by commitment is the single force that intervenes and changes things. The BSLG represents just that. In fact, we are reminded of the student led movement some twenty-five (25) years ago at Brown University that resulted in changing that University's paradigm. Today, Brown is reaping the benefits as a leading institution as a direct result of that revolution.

The driving force in making systemic change rests in the possibility that the University could be a national leader, in areas of study related to cultural diversity, amongst universities and colleges given the significance of this issue. Change can only

occur if there exists a multiplicity of change agents working simultaneously. Diversity, in a true sense will only exist to the extent that systemic change occurs throughout the University. The Diversity Initiative and the BSLG as change agents then become important parts of a broader strategic plan for change.

THE BLACK STUDENT LEADERSHIP GROUP (BSLG)

The BSLG's interest and demands bring a focused Black concern that impacts broader cultural and educational systems at the University that are in need of change. Just as the Civil Rights Movement was Black led, the impact of that movement has done more to alter the social, educational and legal fabric of US society for the good of all than any other change agent to date. We firmly believe that there exists a similar dynamic as it relates to the demands of the BSLG. In our view, the commitment of this group is long term and that only bodes well for the University.

It is clear that the demands of the BSLG are closely related to the University's Diversity Initiative and in essence are important shared values of the administration. This relationship between the BSLG and the administration should be continually nurtured. There will remain, however, disagreements regarding change methodologies and the pace of such change. This can be minimized through communication, but it is unlikely to be completely resolved. The shared value exists and its a simple matter of pressing on.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR TALENT DEVELOPMENT (SPTD)

This program's outstanding hallmark is not only in its performance to date, but in the consistent sense of advocacy it has provided to the University and the ethnic communities in Rhode Island over the term of its existence. SPTD has been the singular voice that has challenged the University, the General Assembly and the community at large in a most effective way on behalf of minority students and their participation at the University. As a direct result of the University's past lack of prioritization of the diversity issue, it has placed the SPTD, in light of its advocacy, in an adversarial relationship at times with the University's administration and faculty.

The SPTD has nonetheless carved out an important institutional and cultural niche at the University in that it provides important psychological and educational support to the multi-ethnic groups on the campus which often experience a sense of isolation.

The University's refreshing direction regarding the importance of the Diversity Initiative should give rise to recognizing the SPTD as an important asset and strength upon which to build its multicultural program and as an integral component of this initiative.

The SPTD brings to the table

- 1) an established institutional presence;
- 2) recognition as the home of the Black Student leadership and other multi-cultural groups;
- 3) extensive alumnus established over its 25 year existence; and
- 4) support in the general assembly and the Board of Governors.

As the University examines the way in which it will more effectively manage its Diversity Initiative, it should factor into that equation the appropriate role of the SPTD. There are obvious synergies inherent in incorporating the SPTD effort into the broader University vision, that is committed to multi-culturalism. A fresh look should be taken at the mission and structure of SPTD with an eye toward greater inclusivity as it relates to the University's "new" vision. A prevalent attitude currently exists amongst a broad spectrum of the University's family that SPTD is different in a negative sense and operates to some extent at cross purposes with the University's current mission. Such an observation is perhaps correct to the extent that historically, the mission of the University did not view cultural diversity as an essential part of its future. It is anticipated that the development of the Diversity Initiative will address these issues.

MANAGEMENT OF THE DIVERSITY INITIATIVE PROGRAM

A review of the University's present organizational structure reveals that there does not exist a coherent management system responsible for carrying out the Diversity Initiative. This is a major task that requires appropriate management oversight, coordination and direction. The principles of Total Quality Management should be applied to the this program.

Someone needs to be charged with the fulltime responsibility of managing and coordinating this program with an eye towards integrating it into the broader University. Only when this has been accomplished will there be a change in the culture of the University community. It is a major effort that has profound potential for the creation of the "new" University. It will require someone with entrepreneurship, management ability and a commitment to the values that underly this new direction. It will also require someone who can effectively mobilize the diverse communities in our urban areas that serve as important and influential constituencies for the University. Such an approach is consistent with the University's commitment to Total Quality Management.

A quick inventory of programs and activities indicates that the University has a number of programs that could be defined as supportive to the Diversity Initiative. They are:

- The Talent Development Program
- Multicultural Student Services
- The College of Continuing Education (CCE) - Division of Student Services
- The Urban Field Center
- Strengthening African-American Studies
- The Development of Latino and Native American Studies
- NYSE and Study Abroad Organizations
- - Uhuru Sasa
- - The Latin American Student Organization
- Black Historical College Exchange Program
- The University's Counseling Center
- The Affirmative Action Officer
- Multi-Cultural Facility

All of these programs and activities have interconnecting features that are significant elements of the Diversity Initiative. Thus, a glaring problem, as stated before is the absence of a management system that can provide focused attention to these activities.

DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI-CULTURAL ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The notion of building the most comprehensive and academically sound ethnic studies program in the Northeast around Black, Latino, Asian and Native American Students, sends a significant signal to the external community of the seriousness of the University in creating a 21st Century campus environment and projecting the University as a national leader in ethnic studies.

The development of such a program can significantly enhance the University's ability to attract persons of various ethnic backgrounds to the faculty and staff. Further it can assist in creating a more supportive environment for potential multicultural students that bring the combination of diversity and academic excellence to the University. Additionally, it provides the kind of profile that can significantly enhance fund raising strategies in both the private and public sectors.

The development of a Multi-Cultural Academic Program would further reinforce the critical need for someone to manage the Diversity Initiative at a high level within the administration. This individual should be capable of providing consistent leadership in support of the individual efforts that by themselves will not mature in a timely manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Budgetary constraints are too often the standard reasons advanced for an institution's inability to make change. More money would obviously be helpful, and the University must continue to press hard in maximizing public and private financial support from a local, regional and national constituency. However, there is much that can be done with the limited resources that are currently available. These changes, we believe could indeed make a substantial difference in the University's environment.

We firmly believe that a University whose paradigm has been challenged can create a whole new face and a sense of purpose that can capture the imagination of private and public financial decision makers as well as the various publics that are important constituents toward enhancing fund development efforts.

Progressive planning and activity on those plans is the only way to cut through much of the cynicism and skepticism that pervades University life. It is important for the University to make certain that its Diversity Initiative is understood as being an essential part of President Carothers' vision to reconceptualize the University of Rhode Island. Continual reinforcement of that notion internally as well as externally is important to convey to all of the University's moving parts.

Momentum, a sense of forward movement as described within the President's vision, must be established. Following are a set of recommendations that incorporate the administration's initiatives, the demands of the Black Student Leadership Group and our own observations.

1. Establish a Vice President or Special Assistant to the President administrative office to implement the Diversity Program.
2. Establish a University Diversity Council. Membership should be comprised of persons from within and from outside the University.
3. Create a strategic plan and management system that supports the values and objectives of the University's Diversity Initiative.
4. Reorganize the existing programs and activities to support the Diversity Program, where possible.
5. Redefine the role of CCE as an important urban institution that needs to become a major player in the Diversity Program.

6. Develop a comprehensive case statement (a fund development strategy) in support of the Diversity Initiative.
7. Provide cultural diversity training to faculty and staff and student representatives.
8. Develop a plan that encourages private and public support for the new multi-cultural facility that would include a development committee that would have multi-cultural staff, faculty and student representatives.
9. Formalize a Cape Verdean and Liberian relationship as the basis for an African Development Relationship with the University.

Short term initiatives and objectives to be accomplished no later than _____ 1993.

- Development of the Malcolm X Reading Room.
- Hiring an Affirmative Action Officer.
- Appointing a person of color to one of the two high level positions in SPTD.
- Hiring of a Multi-Cultural Director.
- Develop an Affirmative Action hiring goal for Residential Managers.
- Broaden the role of the Director of Student Services -CCE- primary responsibility-Diversity Initiative.
- Provide assistance and support to the BSLG Middle School Mentor Program.
- Assign an information officer to maintain communication between all parties regarding the status of the Initiative and related activities.
- Develop a pro-active Affirmative Action Plan inclusive of goals and an implementation strategy for faculty, staff and employment opportunities.
- Create a development plan for the establishment of a Multi-Cultural Center.

CONCLUSION

An opportunity to change the University's culture was missed in the mid-late 1960's, when change was an operative word for institutions. President Carothers' vision, the BSLG's demands, the demographic realities of the day and the growing URI constituency's support for multi-cultural diversity provides the University with a new opportunity to create a more relevant and thus a more "attractive" University for scholarship and multi-cultural understanding. The measure of how effective this new vision and its goals can be achieved will rest to a large extent in the level of the courage and persistence that continues as a priority agenda item for President Carothers, his administration and the concerns of the BSLG, the catalyst for change is within this dynamic. The real challenge will be to harness these divergent, yet mutual interests, for constructive institutional change.