Emerging Trend: The Chief Diversity Officer Phenomenon within Higher Education

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Given that this study touched on the sensitive topic of diversity, very little research exist on the subject of chief diversity officers (CDOs), this research investigated the emergence of the CDO position within higher education. This qualitative study examined seven CDOs and their institutions in order to assess the impact these leaders are having on the campus culture at their institutions as multicultural educators. The CDOs at the institutions differed in how they ascended to that role, their titles, who they reported to, and areas of responsibilities. Some cited near perfect harmony among members of the campus community around diversity issues, while others had met with challenges. Additionally, the CDOs did experience some success with collaboration on diversity initiatives.

Keywords: diversity, chief diversity officer, higher education institutions

INTRODUCTION

A growing trend on campuses nationwide appears to be the hiring of chief diversity officers (CDO). This development in achieving diversity outcomes has yielded a professional association, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), that is dedicated to serving “as the preeminent voice for diversity officers in higher education” (NADOHE, 2009, p. 1). Incorporated in 2006, NADOHE boasts well over 90 members and close to 150 institutions (NADOHE, 2009). Gose (2006) noted that elite universities, such as Harvard, Texas A&M, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Virginia, all have chief diversity officers. But, he posited:

Are universities making a serious new commitment to diversifying the faculty, curriculum, and student body, or are these high-profile appointments a way for university presidents to appease minority students and professors who have been clamoring for a stronger voice on campuses? (Gose, 2006, p. B1)

The quest to educate members of a community on matters related to diversity has often been left up to a few individuals, in this case: CDOs. These individuals have a tremendous responsibility and must navigate through unpredictable channels in order to enact change. A potential threat to the CDO’s effectiveness is the unwillingness of members of the campus community to abide by and comply with the policies and initiatives generated out of the diversity office. A backlash over the need for a CDO can result in members of the community becoming hostile to the individual’s attempts to break down barriers causing obstacles for those within the institution. Resistance can occur because of the perception that little, if any, problems related to diversity exist at the institution; therefore, a CDO, let alone any new diversity policy, is unnecessary. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of seven CDOs on the campus culture at their respective institutions.

For those who hold the title CDO, a presumption exists by some within the institution that the CDO should be the sole authority for building a campus culture that embraces diversity. This can sometimes lead to an overload for the CDO and have unintended consequences. Rosser and Javinar (2003) concluded that there is a correlation between how a student affairs professional views their job responsibilities and their job satisfaction. Already, those who work in diversity-related positions on college campuses, typically at the director, assistant director, and coordinator
levels, acknowledge they are the go-to individuals when it comes to diversity. As a result, other colleagues not in diversity-related positions take on the persona that they are free from having to focus too much attention to diversity. This situation has caused some within diversity and multicultural affairs positions to feel alienated from colleagues who demonstrate little or no interest in diversity, but who pass multicultural responsibilities to the diversity person.

Although the hiring of CDOs might provide one avenue to promote diversity on college campuses, it is uncertain how effective they will be in implementing diversity initiatives. Smith (2009) warned of the practice of tokenism where individuals may be visible representatives of an organizational leadership structure, but functionally invisible. Still new to the scene, CDOs effectiveness remains unknown.

**The Diversity Challenge on College Campuses**

Chubin (2006) reported that college campuses are continually dealing with issues related to diversity, tolerance, and equity. More recently, Smith (2009) stated “diversity is an imperative that must be embraced if colleges and universities are to be successful in a pluralistic and interconnected world” (p. 1). Therefore, these institutions need better ways to communicate the importance of diversity. Attention to diversity has expanded over the last century to include gender issues, racial and ethnic differences, and to a lesser extent, sexual orientation, religion, and physical disability. Many institutions of higher learning are preparing their graduates to be more diversity conscious and to be able to work with individuals from many cultures by increasing opportunities of exposure to and interaction with diverse populations. Williams and Clowney (2007) observed four driving forces that contribute to higher education institutions increasing their attention to diversity: (a) legal and political dynamics, (b) changing demographics, (c) rise of a postindustrial knowledge economy, and (d) persistent societal inequities. Institutions have enacted diversity policies, implemented aggressive minority recruitment plans, created multicultural centers, and hired additional staff to program multicultural events for the entire campus community. However, despite their best efforts to create environments that are conducive and receptive to diversity, some institutions have been ineffective due to opposition or lack of commitment on campus from multiple groups including the administration (Williams, 2008; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005). As Walker (1979) stated decades ago “universities can be incredibly tenacious in their counteractions to being shoved,” and “university administrators possess no immunity from the tendency of people in organizations to resist orders” (p. 96).

Higher education has long played a key role in the preparation and development of young men and women to fulfill societal needs in the workforce and civic sectors. McDonald and associates (2002) asserted that colleges and universities were “sanctuaries of our personal and civic values, incubators of intellect and integrity (p. 8).” Decades ago, Boyer (1987) noted the world needs more innovations from younger generations who are well-informed and thirst for new knowledge. In characterizing America as a nation transforming into a knowledge-driven economy, Florida (2002) contends higher education will be essential in increasing the creative class. Seemingly, as colleges and universities help prepare America’s future workforce and leaders, they have struggled to create effective multicultural campuses in which to do so.

**Affirming Diversity on Campus**

Multicultural education has taken on numerous descriptions. Nieto (2000) likened it to an ongoing learning process aimed at overcoming bigotry. According to Banks and Banks (2007),

> A major goal of multicultural education is to change teaching and learning approaches so that students of both genders and from diverse cultural, ethnic, and language groups will have equal opportunities to learn in educational institutions. (p. 13)
Banks and Banks (2007) identified four approaches to applying multicultural content in an educational setting. They include the contributions approach, or level 1. On this level, the general focus is placed on key historical figures and dates. Level 2 is the additive approach where more emphasis is placed on historical content; however, little substantive change is infused into the existing structure or curriculum. Level 3 or the transformation approach seeks to change existing forms of instruction in order to encompass a more diverse perspective. The last stage, level 4 or the social action approach, challenges individuals to make their own conclusions and take action. The different levels represent the progression that multicultural education can take if given proper attention.

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**Chief Diversity Officers Defined**

The United States is a diverse country. Its people—a mixture of various ethnicities, races, religions, and thoughts—somehow converge to make for a widely unique living-learning environment that brings together individuals of different heritage, faith, and beliefs. Ten years ago, Thelin (2003) concluded that dealing with the growing diversity within our higher education institutions would be a major challenge. The emergence of the CDO has proven to be a popular solution for many institutions to promote and coordinate diversity on college campuses. However, it is uncertain how effective these CDOs are in implementing diversity initiatives.

While the evolution of a new administrative head within higher education is not necessarily novel, it is new to have an administrative head whose sole responsibility is diversity, even for higher education. Previous additions to the higher education organizational structure include chief communications officer, chief information officer, and chief student affairs officer. In defining a CDO, Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) characterized this individual as “a senior administrator who guides, coordinates, leads, enhances, and at times supervises the formal diversity capabilities of the institution in an effort to build sustainable capacity to achieve an environment that is inclusive and excellent for all” (p. 8). They contend that CDOs can influence their respective institutions by “elevating visibility and credibility of campus diversity function, leading strategic diversity planning efforts, building new institutional diversity infrastructure, enhancing structural diversity success, informing the search process, and building new academics diversity courses and initiatives” (p. 9). Smith (2009) offered a framework derived from historical and current trends within higher education. Smith (2009) factored in

- access and success of underrepresented student populations;
- campus climate and intergroup relations;
- education and scholarship; and
- institutional viability and vitality.

According to Smith (2009) “these dimensions provide a way of understanding what institutional capacity for diversity might mean and what it might look like (p. 64).”

**An Instrument of Change**

Undoubtedly, CDOs can be viewed as instruments of change. Change agents tend to be leaders who are skilled at framing issues, building coalitions, and establishing a climate where group members can seek a common solution (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Kotter (1996) offered eight strategies for successful change within an organization: (a) create a sense of urgency, (b) assemble a team of skilled, competent, and well-connected individuals, (c) develop a vision and a strategy for change, (d) communicate that vision within the organization, (e) reorganize structure, (f)
generate short term wins, (g) use the change as a building block to success, and (h) explore new approaches. As with most organizations, members can sometimes resist change. Often, resistance to change is a result of organizational members feeling that the power structure to which they were accustomed is now threatened (Senge, 1990). In higher education environments, “change to create diverse learning and professional environments is hard” (Williams, 2008, p. 29). CDOs, although they may be viewed skeptically by some, have the potential to turn a hostile situation into a non-hostile one through outreach and collaborative relationships. Bolman and Deal (2003) recognized that leaders who fail at leading their organization through change tend to lack mobility in four essential frames: (a) structural, (b) human resource, (c) political, and (d) symbolic. Frames are “mental maps” that allows for clarity when maneuvering in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Understanding and successfully navigating between these frames are critical for leaders to be effective when their organization is experiencing change. CDOs must be skilled at managing people and navigating through bureaucracy.

A Point of Reference for the CDO Position

When embarking on new initiatives that require restructuring, resources for more assessments are often necessary. These resources should provide the person leading these initiatives with a foundation for assessing the dynamics and needs of the institution as it relates, in this instance: diversity. Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) argued that when an institution hires a CDO, it must factor in the fiscal cost to enable the CDO to be successful. This includes provisions for adequate staffing, office space and other essentials in order to properly assist with policy formation and implementation.

In addition to resources, CDOs must have the power and authority to enforce the policies created to guide the institution into becoming more tolerant on diversity. Advocates for a CDO position argue that the chief diversity officer must be classified at an executive-level position that reports directly to the president. Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) observed that “a primary source of influence for chief diversity officers is their location at the presidential or provost level of the administrative hierarchy” (p. 15). If CDOs were lower in the organizational structure some would argue that their effectiveness to initiate substantive change would be difficult because they would not have as much direct access to the upper administration that sets the policy for the organization.

A potential threat to the chief diversity officer’s effectiveness is the unwillingness of members of the campus community to abide by and comply with the policies and initiatives generated out of the diversity office. A backlash over the need for a CDO can result in members of the community becoming hostile to the individual’s attempts to break down barriers for those within the institution. Resistance can result because of a perception that the institution has no problems with diversity; therefore, a chief diversity officer is neither necessary nor is diversity policy needed.

Also, a threat to bringing in a chief diversity officer is the possibility of overloading the position with the sole responsibility for diversity. Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) stated “the chief diversity officer is not singularly responsible for diversity” (p. 10). Senior-level diversity officers can fall subject to being the “go to” person unless steps are taken to communicate to the campus community that this individual is charged with motivating and leading campus diversity efforts and not with bearing the sole responsibility for all diversity initiatives.

Chief diversity officers play an integral role in creating a campus climate that is receptive to diversity. “They are not hired to maintain the status quo but to improve the campus climate, diversify the campus community, and enhance the diversity capabilities of the institution through their leadership, projects, initiatives, relationships, and presence” (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, p. 11). Creating a campus community that values diversity cannot be the sole responsibility of a one person instead diversity efforts must be included within all units of the institutional structure. Therefore, CDOs are constantly searching for ways to collaborate within the institutional community and the outside community as well. This study sought to ascertain the following: What educational impact do chief diversity officers have on their campuses in this leadership role?

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METHODOLOGY

Design

This study examines chief diversity officers at four-year higher education institutions. Merriam (2009) observed that qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of how people make meaning of and interpret their experiences. Yin (2003) found that the case study method affords the researcher an opportunity to holistically identify and understand situations and circumstances. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) observed that the differences in conditions and reactions within complicated situations surface in case study research. While the definition of diversity is broad, this study included but was not limited to the following: race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and physical abilities. Given that this study touched on the sensitive topic of diversity, and very little research exists on the subject of CDOs, qualitative research was chosen to capture not only the uniqueness of each CDO who participated in the study, but to establish any common patterns, as well as inconsistencies, across them.

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were recruited during the annual conference of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education held in Washington, DC in February 2009 (NADOHE, 2009). At the conference, potential participants were screened by the researcher to ensure they were the designated CDO at their institution and contact information was collected. After the conference a follow-up e-mail was then sent out to potential participants soliciting their involvement in the study. Upon agreement by the CDO to take part in the study, an e-mail was then sent to set-up the actual interview along with a consent form explaining the study to the CDO. Once confirmation of their participation was received, a date and time was set-up for a telephone, and in one instance, a face-to-face interview with the CDO.

Sample

Seven CDOs from different institutions were selected for participation in this study. CDO participants were selected, in part, because their respective institutions had stated in their missions or a separate document a commitment to creating and maintaining diversity. They were purposefully selected so that individuals who can best represent and contribute to understanding the phenomenon being studied are selected (Babbie, 2001; Creswell, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The selection criteria used to identify and include individuals to this study were:

- their designation as the CDO at the institution,
- their employment at different Carnegie types, and
- their location in different regions of the U.S.

Prior to obtaining data, internal review board (IRB) approval to conduct this research was granted. To protect the participants, assuring confidentiality and anonymity are critical in securing participation and gaining access (Darlington & Scott, 2002; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, pseudonyms for participants and their institutions were used in the reporting of findings.

Data Collection

Interviews with the CDO were conducted over the telephone or in face-to-face meetings. Interviews varied from one-half hour to one hour and a half. As an aid, a tape recorder assisted in
obtaining full and exact quotations for analysis and reporting (Patton, 1990). For reliability purposes, the interviews followed a standard protocol in which each CDO was asked the exact same fifteen questions relating on their background and their role as CDO (see the Appendix). As a result of this format, the researcher was able to probe each interviewee for additional information or to elaborate on responses. The interviews were immediately transcribed, thereby keeping consistent with Yin’s (2009) recommendation for conducting case study research. To aid with reliability, transcripts were reviewed and checked for accuracy.

In defining triangulation, Merriam (1998) stated that “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p. 204) is necessary. Although the primary source of data in this study were the interviews with the CDOs, for purposes of triangulation and data verification, the institutional website was used to corroborate or add information about organizational structure of the CDO office, diversity initiatives and documents, and programming.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using what Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified as typological categories or themes or grounded theory. To address the research question, further analysis consisted of the following: To determine the educational impact of chief diversity officers at their institutions, transcribed interviews were twice-read looking for emerging themes. The interviews were then coded into categories to make generalizations. Merriam (2009) noted that coding enables the researcher to pull together pieces of data that are relevant to answering the research questions.

Analysis of essential documents such as diversity reports and statements produced another source of information since they provided “valuable information because of what the evaluator can learn directly by reading them” (Patton, 1990, p. 233). Initially, a cross-case analysis of the transcribed interviews was performed using pattern coding to identify emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Study Institutions and CDOs

Seven CDOs from different institutions were selected for participation in this study. Two were situated in the Midwest, two in the North and Northeast, one in the Northwest, one in the South, and one in the Southwest region of the United States. The types of institutions were also diverse in that participating institutions were either public research or private liberal arts institutional types. In addition to the CDOs and institutions having their own distinct qualities, each shared some similarities. For example, all but one of the CDOs is female; however, in respect to race, one is Hispanic, one is Caucasian, and five are African American. The titles held by the CDOs also varied because two were classified as Vice Presidents, one was an Associate Vice Chancellor, two were Special Assistants, and two were Directors. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the CDOs and institutions.

STUDY FINDINGS

In this study, the institutions varied by type, enrollment size, percentage of student diversity, and geographical location. Three major themes that emerged from this study were (a) personal connection to diversity; (b) gaining visibility on campus; and (c) looking toward the future. The CDOs at the institutions differed in how they ascended to that role, their titles, and areas of responsibilities. Some cited near-perfect harmony among members of the campus community around diversity issues, while others were met with challenges.
Table 1  

*Chief Diversity Officers and Institutional Distinctions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chief Diversity Officer</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Previous Experience</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>University Classification</th>
<th>University Enrollment</th>
<th>% Minority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Hall</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Southwest</td>
<td>Public-Research</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Lee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Associate Vice Chancellor</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public-Research</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Harris</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Special Assistant</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Northwest</td>
<td>Public-Research</td>
<td>25,000</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Drake</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>Private-Liberal Arts</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>17% (including international students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kay</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Vice President</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Public-Research</td>
<td>12,500</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Giles</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Special Assistant</td>
<td>K12/College administration</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public-Master's</td>
<td>9,800</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Burke</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Public-Research</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CDOs Personal Connection to Diversity

It is not uncommon for individuals who work in diversity to have an emotional connection to the topic. Sometimes prior experiences, whether personal or professional, compel individuals to champion the cause of equity and inclusion. Such was the case with several of the CDO participants. For Dr. Lee, who happened to be a person of color, diversity is important because “I’ve had to deal with the issue of diversity all my life.” This CDO had been exposed to injustice at an early age and saw firsthand as an educator the inequalities within education. Adding to the sentiment of dealing with diversity over the course of one’s life, Ms. Drake added “I’ve been a recipient of the Civil Rights Movement.”

In reflecting on her passion for diversity, Dr. Harris, who is not a person of color, acknowledged, “I’ve had the privilege of being brought up to speed by African Americans on cultural awareness.” Another way of looking at diversity is that it is inevitable in this age of rapidly growing and changing global society. Projected demographic trends in the U.S. population suggest that we are going to see a substantial increase in the number of minority groups, specifically, the Latino population (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). Therefore, in the grand scheme of things, as Dr. Giles stated, “diversity is something we have no choice in.”

The CDO on Campus

In recalling why the CDO position was created at their campuses, Dr. Harris noted, “the campus climate survey that the previous President initiated in the 1990s and one of the things that came up in that document was the need to do something about diversity.” One other CDO cited a campus climate survey as the reason for the CDO position at that campus. All but one CDO indicated that their president was a major factor in the creation of the position. Responding to the growing need to adequately address the needs of a changing campus appears to be the main reason for the emergence of the chief diversity officer position within the institutions studied. For example, the duties of CDO were assigned to Ms. Drake because she already worked on multicultural issues. Now with a staff to assist her, she oversees the mandatory diversity program during freshmen orientation, the academic bridge program, and faculty of color mentoring and support. Still on her agenda is to make the curriculum more inclusive. She commented, “We still have some work to do in terms of infusing the topic into the curriculum and we have some work to do to get faculty on board.”

In speaking of the institution’s current culture about diversity, Dr. Hall described it as “being taken for granted.” Student retention has been positive (not everyone dropped out). But retention may not be as high as one likes. Adding to the diversity climate conversation, Dr. Lee explained, “diversity is on everybody’s list, but where it is on everybody’s list is what I question,” while Mr. Burke characterized the culture at his campus as having “a level of respect for diversity.” However, Mr. Burke remains skeptical on whether this respect is genuine or if it is the sometimes obligatory public display of support for diversity that is expressed by individuals who privately may feel otherwise. It is worth noting that the location of one institution in a remote part of the country that historically has been unreceptive to diversity led Dr. Harris to acknowledge “there is a strain in regards to diversity, but it hasn’t yet reached a tipping point.”

Earlier, Williams (2008) discussed the proper placement of the CDO within the organizational chart. Researchers and practitioners suggest that having the CDO positioned at the director’s level is adequate for influencing campus culture, but it would be beneficial if this person were to be on the president’s cabinet. In explaining his institution’s success with implementing changes that affect campus culture, Dr. Lee stated “instead of going bottom up, we go top down, that means talking to the administration and legislatures about diverse issues and have them send information down.” Due to the newness of the position, a permanent role had not been defined for Dr. Harris: “we are sort of left to do what we want.” In describing her duties, Dr. Giles reflected “[I try] to be a strong advocate for diversity. Everything that I do, I look for the diversity in it... I live it, I speak it... I try to be a resource through my office.”

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In respect to collaboration across campus, Ms. Drake makes it a point to collaborate and connect with all units. She said, “I cannot think of one area that I have not collaborated with.” Dr. Giles echoed the importance of collaboration and offered “I have to. There is no way that I could do everything that I have to do without collaboration.” All the CDO participants stated they had created or oversaw a committee of individuals from the campus community that met regularly to promote diversity. Having such a committee was essential to getting members of the campus involved in the implementation of diversity initiatives and creating an awareness and appreciation of diversity.

Some CDOs did have success collaborating with faculty on diversity initiatives while others were still exploring opportunities. Dr. Hall noted that some faculty expressed initial frustration about her position as they felt her office would direct resources from academic affairs. Ms. Drake acknowledged:

I am beginning to work on that. I have not had a lot of experience with that. We recently recognized that we need to increase minority representation within the faculty ranks. I had conversations with Human Resources looking into climate and environment.

Dr. Giles noted he collaborates with faculty by doing, “diversity training at the invitation of faculty. I role model how you can infuse diversity into the curriculum. Faculty members will come to me with I have a great program and I’d like to bring a speaker to campus.”

Being a part of the university president’s cabinet has its advantages, especially if the CDO can go to his or her colleagues with an initiative related to diversity and your colleagues happen to be vice presidents. Ms. Kay pointed out that “I serve on the president’s cabinet and I collaborate with all the other vice presidents.” This kind of access makes a difference because information about diversity is delivered to organizational chiefs directly as opposed to having to work its way through structural channels that often begin at the counselor/advisor or coordinator level.

Responding to the impact the CDOs were having on their campuses with diversity-related strategies and programs, Dr. Lee noted, “I’ve continued a lot of the programs in place. One of the programs is the retention of minority faculty. My role is to talk to Deans and articulate that the needs of minority faculty are different than the traditional faculty.” Dr. Harris commented that her efforts made her unit more “faculty oriented” and a “strategic planning group.” Dr. Harris added “We brought somebody in to train us to do workshops using the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) model. We did a good job in training the trainers that we eventually trained the upper administration. Dr. Hall noted she “worked with student organizations and developed collaborative efforts with Title V initiatives and work more closely with Hispanic-serving institutions.” She added “I’m currently putting together a faculty tool kit.” Ms. Drake remarked that at her institution, “we now have a mandatory freshmen orientation program that introduces the topic of respect for self and respect for others.” Ms. Kay commented that her campus just “completed our second campus climate survey.”

The evolution of diversity at the CDOs’ respective campuses was also of interest in this study. Dr. Lee observed, “I’ve seen it evolve from one point where we didn’t hear the president talk about diversity.” Looking ahead to what needs to be in place in order for the campus to move forward with diversity, Dr. Harris stated “we are not going to get to the next level of change until there is an accountability component to diversity.” In other words, the administration needs to ask the necessary question of how many minorities were hired in the division, and why they left the institution or department. Collectively, all the CDO participants observed that the main concern of the administration, given the uncertainty of the economy, is the budget. However, not too far off the radar is retention of students and faculty of color, as well as increasing women in administration.

The Future of CDOs

In looking to the future, some CDOs commented that as changing demographics increase the number of students of color on campus, institutions are going to have to be better prepared to
accommodate them. Dr. Lee said, "Colleges and professors are going to have to be taught to deal with these students." Dr. Lee is optimistic that she can increase the diversity campus on campus by beefing up local recruitment. Dr. Harris explained "we are working with the various minority populations to grow the next generation of faculty and leadership within the institution out of people who are already here."

Not everyone shared a sense of optimism about their institution's growth in diversity. Ms. Drake shared, "Personally, I fear my college will look just the way it is today. They do not see a need to change and be different because it has served them well in the past." Admittedly, all of the CDO participants were optimistic about the impact that their work will have on the culture in their institutions. They confess that they will have to confront certain challenges, such as conveying the importance of diversity in an ever-changing society, offering programming that will expose and inform the campus community about diversity, and recruiting and retaining students and faculty of color.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

There is no precedence for the CDO position within the upper higher education administrative ranks. Those who assume such a role are undoubtedly trailblazers for their success in transforming their campuses. Their success can be interpreted as a major innovative development in administrative leadership and diversity efforts. To examine how CDOs tackle their responsibilities yields important information about innovative leadership changes within higher education.

While this study was based on a small sample size, it produces findings similar to Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) therefore it may be consistent with that larger study. Further studies should incorporate more CDOs within the participant pool and include CDOs at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as well. It would be interesting to study HBCUs that have a large minority enrollment (who may be Caucasian) and see what their campus community is like. In addition, future studies may want to also include Hispanic-serving and Native American-serving institutions. And while the qualitative approach allowed for CDOs to tell their stories, a quantitative survey would encompass more institutions for study.

Although chief diversity officers may be one solution to promoting diversity on college campuses, it is too soon to know how effective they will be in implementing diversity initiatives. This in no way undermines their importance and the fact that their presence as a senior administrative head of a division is a major breakthrough in American higher education. As with any new initiative, resources would provide the person assuming the position with the means for assessing the dynamics and needs of the institution for diversity. This should also include staff to assist with policy formation and implementation, as well as programming. In addition to resources must be the power and authority to enforce the policies created to guide the institution into becoming more receptive to diversity. The power to enforce is a key issue with the CDO position. Oftentimes with diversity efforts, those persons charged with promoting diversity (who are at the rank of a CDO) have very little impact because of the inability to enact meaningful change due to a reluctant community who face little to no consequences for being indifferent to diversity. That is why it is imperative that the chief diversity officer is an executive-level position that reports directly to the university president if this appointment is going to have any influence. As a direct report to the person who has the most authority at the institution, the chief diversity officer should be able to effectively pursue diversity policy and change without going through a lot of campus bureaucracy.

The likelihood that everyone within the campus community will agree that diversity is valued and embraced is increased once the entire campus community sees that the president has taken a serious interest in promoting diversity by appointing a CDO who directly reports to him or her. In order for organizations to get the message that diversity is the responsibility of everyone and not one individual, the CDO must be a strong and effective leader. This individual will have to successfully get the campus community to support diversity efforts by for example, assembling an institution-wide diversity committee comprised of representatives from the various units and
employee levels of the institution who will then assist in conveying the diversity message and initiatives that the CDO is trying to implement. Furthermore, it makes sense for the president to communicate to members of the institution in the beginning that the CDO position was created to assist the various sectors of the campus community improve on their diversity initiatives and outreach. This would eliminate any perception from employees of the institution that diversity is covered and is not part of their job functions. While this is not a final solution, it would at least be a start.

The emergence of the CDO position is an innovation within higher education that has far-reaching implications for the future of diversity efforts. The appointment of a CDO could be perceived as another “Band-Aid” tactic to appease critics and onlookers. It would be a major blow to diversity efforts across college campuses if the evolution of such an important position as the CDO became a casualty to budget cuts, business as usual, and continued aloofness toward diversity. Therefore, if higher education institutions are serious about wanting to address diversity to ensure an inclusive campus community, then they should

- appoint a senior level CDO who reports directly to the president,
- provide the CDO with sufficient financial resources and staffing, and
- support the initiatives and recommendations made by the CDO for addressing diversity on campus.

Appendix

Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) Interview Protocol

1. What is your background and how did you come into this position?
2. Why is diversity important to you personally?
3. Why did your institution decide to create the CDO position?
4. What are your primary areas of responsibility?
5. Do you collaborate with other entities in the institution? How?
6. To what extent are you involved with working with faculty on diversity initiatives?
7. Before you took the CDO position, what strategies did the institution use to build a campus culture that embraces and celebrates diversity?
8. How well did they work?
9. What diversity-related strategies and programs have you helped the institution develop and implement? (committees, personnel, finances, training)
10. Do you feel supported in your efforts to promote diversity? Why or why not?
11. Describe your campus’s current culture as it relates in respect to diversity?
12. Has the institution’s view on diversity changed over time? In what ways? Do you have concrete evidence of change?
13. Today, how do people on campus view diversity?
14. Today, what do you believe are the university’s main concerns?
15. What will this campus look like ten years from now? (students, faculty, staff, administration)?

REFERENCES


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