

Diversity Initiatives for Tribal Colleges and Universities: Maintaining Heritage While Promoting Inclusion

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Institutions have become more diverse and inclusive causing tension among different ethnicities at times. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCU) were established to educate Native Americans as these individuals historically had few opportunities to pursue a college education in the United States. We examine the transformation of a TCU into a master's level degree-granting state university. Increasing diversity while maintaining its Native American history allows the university to be a leader of diversity and inclusion in the 21st century. We conclude with a summary of outcomes on these initiatives for similar universities that are trying to increase diversity without incidence.

Keywords: Native American, tribal college, diversity, inclusion, dynamic capabilities

INTRODUCTION

With an increase of diversity around college campuses, race tensions have caused unfortunate incidents. These transgressions have not escaped Native Americans. The controversial ban of mascot of Chief Illiniwek at the University of Illinois caused many public protests and demonstrations for and against the figure in 2007. This disagreement has proponents on both sides still in contention today. While some students and alumni strongly want to bring the mascot back, protesters of Native American decent have held signs reading “I am not a mascot. I am not a symbol. That’s why I am here today” (Ryan, 2018, p. 1). Another example can be connected to Native American week at the University of Oklahoma. Several students urinated on a tepee, used racial slurs, and made several stereotype-themed parties including: Border Patrol, Mekong Delta, and Cowboys and Indians (Duara & Hennessy-Fiske, 2015). This led to some Native American students describing blatant outright racism towards them. In another incidence, in May 2018, two young prospective Native American students at Colorado State had police called as they took a tour of the campus (Jaschik, 2018). The problem is not exclusive to Native Americans, as situations have transpired that have impacted African Americans, LGBT, among other minority groups. A recent example occurred at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill where a Confederate Soldier monument was toppled, leading to several protests and arrests (Morgan, 2018).

Insensitivity can be problematic when professors use derogatory references in class (Jaschik, 2015) or an administration indicates that certain students don't "fit the mold" of the institution (Shire, 2015).

As a lack of diversity initiatives were apparent at these institutions, administration had to find appropriate responses that would not exacerbate race relations. Such responses include staff being required to resign, compulsory diversity training for students, staff and faculty, and a creation of diversity officer positions (Keller, 2016; Shire, 2015; Stripling, 2016; Svrluga, 2016). This solution is reactive and highly problematic because: (a) school loses reputation (b) decrease funding and donations (c) increase costs of programs and faculty positions. Therefore, it is imperative to deter many of these scenarios that universities create a proactive approach. Diversity initiatives can be implemented throughout an institution (Trendowski, J. et. al, 2019) and have a positive impact on the outcomes of a diverse population of students (Trendowski, S. et. al, 2019).

DYNAMIC CAPABILITIES OF INCLUSION AT UNCP

Teece, et. al (1997) define dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments. Penrose (1959) viewed the management of resources equally important to owning them, thus providing an alternative view to the structure-conduct-performance model within strategy (Nair, et. al, 2008). The University of North Carolina Pembroke was initially founded as a normal school in 1887 for Native Americans in the South. Originally, there was one building, one teacher and approximately 15 students (University of North Carolina Pembroke, 2018). It was one of the only colleges for decades to serve this population until American Indian leaders used the "self-determination" movement to help pass legislation for more institutions in the 1960s (Boyer, 1997). As inclusion increased throughout the years, and colleges became more diverse, UNCP started enrolling other demographics and eventually lost its TCU recognition.

The current campus has grown, changed in demographics, and developed into a master's level degree granting university. Today UNCP exemplifies co-specialization (Teece, 2009) where the value of the combination of programs is greater than the value in isolation. The mergers provided external acquisition of complementary resources (Grant, 1991), thereby making the resulting entity much better suited for a dynamic educational environment that has seen tremendous change since the 1960s. Fast-changing markets require the ability to reconfigure the firm's asset structure and accomplish the necessary internal and external transformation (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993).

Despite several name changes (Croatan Normal School, Indian Normal School of Robeson County, Cherokee Indian Normal School of Robeson County, Pembroke State College for Indians, Pembroke State College, Pembroke State University) the University of North Carolina at Pembroke has been the epicenter of diversity for southeastern North Carolina. UNCP has the highest level of diversity both in North Carolina and the Southern United States collectively. Additionally, they rank sixth (tied) among all national universities regarding diversity. The university, itself, has around 7,000 students with ethnicities that include: 34% African American, 15% American Indian, 5 % Hispanic, 3% multiracial, 39 % white, and 1% unknown (University, 2018). This template of increasing diversity while maintaining its original Native American roots allows the college to be a leader in diversity. The sustained competitive advantage of organizations is a function of its managerial and organizational processes (Teece, et. al, 1997). It is the application of institutional initiatives that beget diversity into a dynamic capability, and thus an advantage for UNCP.

The student population has transformed from being exclusively Native American (1887-1849) to present day (UNCP, 2018). However, even with the decline in percentage of Native Americans over the years, UNCP has been able to maintain much of its identity and roots as a Tribal College. This increases cultural competency for all who attend and not only facilitates an understanding of the Native American cultures, but also empowers members who identify within this group (Marcotte, et. al. 2019). UNCP retains its identity and increases cultural competency through various scholarships, programs, and

symbols. Organizational learning is routine-based, history dependent, and target-oriented (Levitt & March, 1988). Organizations learn by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behavior. Learning involves matching routines to situations and interpreting the past. Such an idiosyncratic interpretation of the past is considered at least as important as what happened. (Levitt & March, 1988). Learning is cumulative and it greatest when it builds upon what is already known (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Organizational knowledge is of strategic importance to the firm (Kogut & Zander, 1992). Learning is a dynamic capability of an organization (Winter, 2000).

The University of North Carolina at Pembroke exemplifies diversity while retaining the college's ideology and original culture. Dynamic capabilities represent learned and stable patterns of organizational activity through which the firm systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness (Zollo & Winter, 2002). UNCP has developed its dynamic capabilities over 130 years.

RETAINING ORIGINAL NATIVE AMERICAN DEMOGRAPHICS

The university promotes Native American scholarships to bolster the population and affirm its roots as an institution that educates this specific population of students. UNCP informs American Indian students who are applying of several statewide scholarships. The school's website directs students to the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs (NCCIA) which helps students attain several special grants prior to entry. NCCIA is not affiliated with the university but is augmented with specific information for Native American graduate student scholarships within the university, along with a 10-page document for undergraduate scholarship opportunities. UNCP also writes grants for students with Native American decent. This year a \$1.1 million grant over five-year time period was procured by UNCP to support the Educational Leadership Program, many of which will include Native American students. This will provide twenty tuition free scholarships for students. Furthermore, once enrolled, students may apply for additional scholarships exclusively for Native American students. The Center for Student Success sends out emails to potential students with qualifying GPA's for specific majors and scholarships. For example, of the 25 scholarships in the School of Education, seven are exclusively offered to Native Americans. An email to a qualifying student would state the availability of such scholarships if prior qualifications were met.

PROMOTING CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Besides state and college wide scholarships to support Native Americans, UNCP has existing programs which promote the original Native American culture. These programs and activities promote cultural competency for the entire student population. For example, an American Indian Studies program exists which students examine issues of sovereignty, nation building, colonization, social justice, and the historical roots of American Indian lives as they are lived today. There are multiple courses and students may take many of these classes as electives even if they are not enrolled in the major. Furthermore, a Native American student organization assists with creating activities and events surrounding the culture. The purpose, according to the school website, is to "promote pride in our Native American Heritage, explore economic, political and educational opportunities of Native Americans and to promote the unification of Native students on our campus" (UNCP, 2018). With this purpose in mind, the organization has many discussions and events with leaders around North Carolina. All students are welcome to this organization and several introductory secessions are offered throughout the year. Students in some of the American Indian studies classes are required attend at least one meeting. Lastly, the chancellor, who is Lumbee Indian, also created the Native American Speaker series. This is a series of presentations with prominent people such as artists, chefs, and scholars within the American Indian community. Chef Sean Sherman conducted a food demonstration honoring native food ways. In other words, it was an

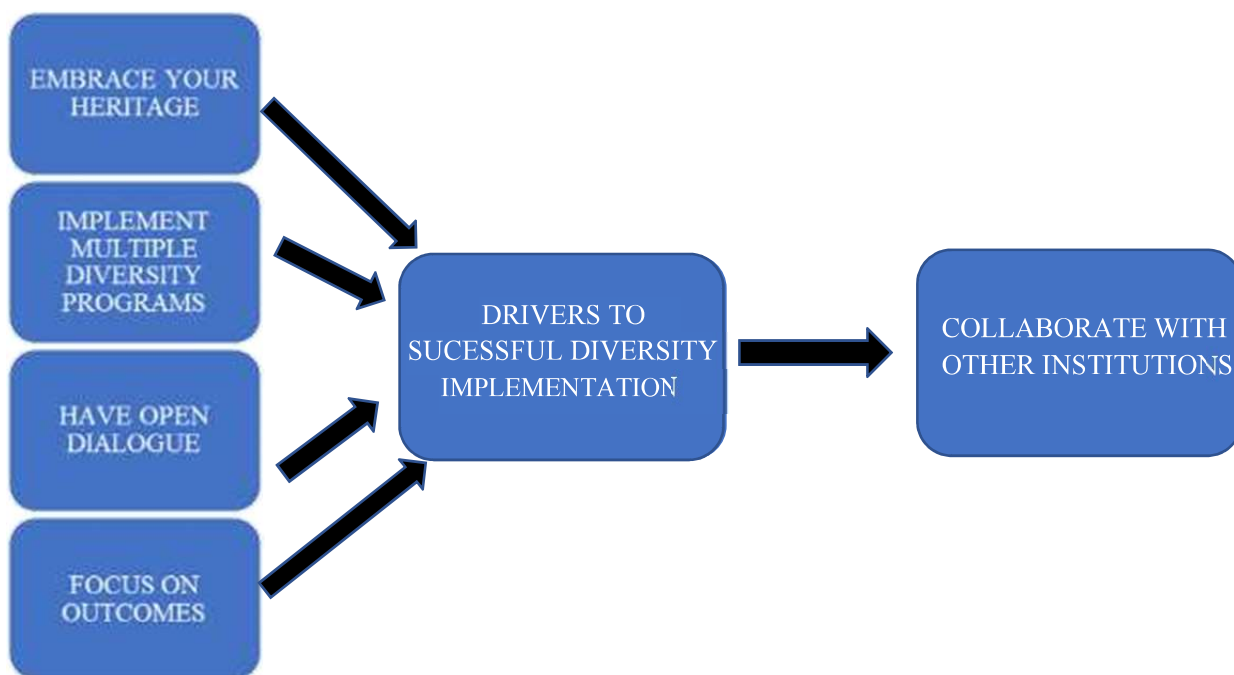
opportunity for the collective student body to understand and sample foods that are indigenous to Native Americans, thus allowing all students in the cafeteria to experience the Native American culture.

Lastly, symbols of the original roots still exist and are ubiquitous across campus. When students first come to the university, students must take a freshman seminar class. During this class most students are required to visit the Museum of the Southeast American Indian, which is located on campus. This is an exhibit of culture for the Native Americans in the region. Furthermore, the entire university staff is also given a 1-hour lecture every year about the history of the university and the significance of Native Americans to the college. The dedication of tradition extends to various statues, names of buildings, and even the school mascot which is a red-tailed hawk (important to the people in the region). The logo of the sports teams features this hawk with a Native American head in front. The university embraces its original Lumbee Native American roots and is not seen as exploitation. Potentially, that may be why the red-tailed hawk mascot is embraced by the general population and community which is primarily Lumbee. Finally, at graduation and commencement multiple traditions are displayed of the indigenous people of the region. These include dress, songs, and musical instruments of the native people during the precession.

MODEL FOR SUCCESSFUL DIVERSITY IMPLEMENTATION AT TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Despite growing diversity of the student population, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke is still able to maintain its identity. Historically TCU's have solely educated Native Americans. Today, the institutions can be a conduit for social equality and understanding. Providing positive experiences and interactions with cultures will make students more understanding of different cultures. This modality can have high efficacy for 21st century diversity in education by increasing social competency. We offer several suggestions to institutions to be able to embrace their past while promoting diversity and inclusion (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1
KEY DRIVERS TO SUCCESSFUL DIVERSITY IMPLEMENTATION**



1. **Embrace your heritage.** To have successful diversity implementation, a university must first embrace their heritage, or it will slowly be diffused as new students enter. Therefore, as it has been suggested by Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, and Szapocznik (2010), culture retention should consist of cultural practices, beliefs or values, and ethnic identity. UNCP embraces its heritage by implementing this trio through a variety of seminars and symbols (as discussed above). Not only does it believe in the retention of its identity but education of outsiders through discussions that immerse the unfamiliar student body with the traditions and experiences of the native Lumbee through dance, food, and other cultural means. Examples included bringing chefs and speakers to campus. These events are not sporadic or scarce, rather, are regularly held to highlight the population.
2. **Have open dialogue.** In addition to providing the information, an open dialogue will help various sides understand one another. For non-natives, it provides an opportunity to hear about the struggles that native people faced historically and currently. This occurs at UNCP through commencement and various classes. Students learn about the history of the Lumbee and struggles they have endured. Besides taking various general education classes that encompass Native American studies, less confrontational forums are offered. UNCP offers a Powwow, an event which is open to the community and student body, to learn about the rich history and tradition (BraveNation Powwow and Gathering, 2019). Students can buy a t-shirt with a motif that symbolizes “the relationship of humans to the animal and spirit world.” Subsequently, the student body learns about the importance of certain symbols in the Native American culture. This interaction between the community and students provides a platform to have an open dialogue and learn more about historical representations and struggles they may face in contemporary society.
3. **Implement multiple diversity programs.** Throughout much of its history, UNCP was known by different names and despite only being home to Native American students. As UNCP grows in population and diversity, it will be home to other underrepresented groups. Each of these groups deserves to have the same protection and benefits that are afforded to Native students as part of the UNCP family. It is especially salient in minority individuals to embrace their identity, have a voice, and find programs as heritage-culture retention predicted personal self-esteem and life satisfaction (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015). Therefore, UNCP needs to keep encouraging the students that are at UNCP to be active in their school and community. Being able to have clubs/groups people can identify and belong to is important for retention of students. (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015). Not all students will feel inclined to join a The Native American Club. However, having a wide variety of organizations where students can interact with a group they identify with is essential. In addition to specific groups like Spanish Club and Chinese Club, UNCP also provides professional organizations such as The International Business Students Club (IBSC) that provide a platform for a diverse body of students to foster academic excellence. As a result, UNCP not only offers different diverse groups, but also has organizations based off interests such as Business club or sport club teams (Student Organizations, 2019).
4. **Focus on academic outcomes.** As discussed, UNCP has an academic reputation that goes beyond merely diversity. At the end of the day, it is an institution of higher learning. By focusing on the academic outcomes, all student groups will benefit from the overall university reputation. Intern, the high rigor and diverse population will attract many more students. When a prospective student is looking for a strong master’s granting program in the southeast, he or she will consider the school on academic merits. Notably, the diversity and inclusion component, though also important, will be most likely a secondary characteristic. Universities can continue encouraging diversity, much like UNCP, by offering scholarships to diverse population of students as long as they maintain academic standards. As mentioned, UNCP has a wide variety of scholarships for diverse student populations.
5. **Collaborate with other Community Partners and Other Institutions.** UNCP continuously tries to collaborate with partners in the field to drive successful diversity implementation. The Office of Community and Civic Engagement continuously finds new partners to ensure successful

diversity integration throughout campus no matter the population of student the campus is working with. For example, the office partners with Special Olympics to allow college students to interact with students that have special needs. The symbiotic relationship allows an organization to teach to a diverse population as many students in the region and community are Lumbee. Furthermore, other partnerships include STEM SENC, which provides after school learning of STEM to a varied population of high school students. This further drives diversity as the college students are able to work with various populations. Collaborating or sharing ideas with similar institutions is also essential to improve inclusion. UNCP is part of a group Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States. Though each school will have its own independent challenges, many obstacles may be consistent among the group. By sharing perspective, and potentially resources, the collective group should benefit. This example can certainly extend beyond TCUs, as any institution can benefit from working together towards a common mission of inclusion.

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