

Transforming the First-Year Experience for Students of Color

Edited by L. I. Rendon, M. Garcia, & D. Person

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Reviewed by

Darrell C. Ray (dcray5@lsu.edu), Associate Dean of Students/Director of the Center for Student Leadership & Involvement, *Louisiana State University*

The landscape of American higher education continues to be characterized by a more diverse population than previous generations of students. Continuous changes in campus environments, the student demographic, and expansion of services being offered has significantly impacted all campuses. As students from diverse backgrounds enter campus, the faculty and staff must be cognizant of how the campus ethos can promote openness and provides a connection with all student populations. As more students of color matriculate through higher education, more attention must be devoted to the first year of the collegiate experience and its impact on their retention.

Within the three sections of the text, the authors carefully lay the foundation and outline factors that institutions, administrators, and faculty should consider when identifying needs of students of color, developing programmatic efforts, and transforming their campuses. Section 1, which includes the first three chapters, begins with a foundation chapter outlining the need for transformation on campuses and within campus culture. Chapter 1 includes operational definitions for terminology and statistical analysis of factors unique to students of color are provided. For the purposes of this text “students of color” has been defined as:

students who are (a) members of racial/ethnic groups that have been historically underrepresented and underserved in America’s education system and (b) socially defined as minorities who are most likely to become targets of oppression, prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination regardless of numerical status and distribution. (p. 7)

The chapter concludes by highlighting several critical educational issues for students of color. Issues examined include negotiating the transition to college, retention, pre-college experiences relating to success in college, college attendance factors affecting retention and academic success, inter-group relations, and teaching and

learning. Chapter 2 focuses on pre-collegiate experiences, values, and goals of first-year students of color. As indicated by the authors, there is little research on how students of color make the decision to attend college. Elements of the decision-making process are highlighted to provide the reader with an understanding of the process. Statistical data in terms of the decision-making process are also provided. Brief attention is given to the role values, aspirations, and goals have on the decision-making process.

The final chapter in the section discusses altering campus culture. Elements of how students can negotiate the transition to college are discussed. The chapter concludes with various programmatic efforts campuses can implement to facilitate a smoother transition into the campus culture. A critical element of this discussion is the campus's willingness to reach out to students of color.

Chapters 4 through 6 comprise section 2 of the text, which focuses on supporting students both in and out of the classroom. Chapter 4 examines the elements of creating an inclusive classroom environment. Issues for faculty and administrators to consider when thinking of how the classroom environment can be more supportive to students are listed. Specific examples of how to create an inclusive classroom are given as well. The next chapter provides information on how campus environments can promote healthy inter-group communications and relationships. Factors surrounding involvement for students of color are presented, and the chapter concludes with best practices of several campuses. Many of these examples are of how the campuses have responded to environment issues.

Chapter 6 investigates the academic and social integration of students of color into the campus community. Challenges to the healthy transition are discussed and provide support for campus administrators and faculty to consider when meeting students' needs. While there are some powerful assertions made within the chapter, several strong points are offered on how campuses can respond through strategic planning to meet students' needs.

The chapters within section 3 focus on addressing the needs of specific populations. Each of these chapters address concerns that may need to be considered based on specific populations of students of color. As each population will experience the campus environment differently, important positions are offered that should equip faculty and staff with a better understanding of what students of color may experience the first year. The chapters detail the following populations: chapter 7 – African Americans; chapter 8 – Latinos/as; chapter 9 – Asian/Pacific Americans; chapter 10 – American Indians/Alaska Natives; and chapter 11 – multiracial/bicultural students. While each of the chapters is not designed to address every issue students may encounter, they effectively provide a foundation for the reader. The foundation will allow readers to better connect with students and meet their needs. Aside from defining each population, the chapters cover a wide array of areas where the institution can impact students' lives. In addition to highlighting exemplary programs that have been established to respond to the needs of the students in each population, supplemental resources are provided for more research. These resources include videos, other texts, and web resources. There are also individual stories from students in each population to illustrate the needs of students

of color. Applicable theoretical frameworks support not only the necessity of institutional intervention, but coupled with the supplemental resources provide direction for institutions.

The final section and chapter of the text addresses the need for transformative change and details necessary elements for creating a truly transformative first-year experience for students of color. Each chapter of this text provides ample direction for a faculty or staff member to begin the process of transforming their campus. Many of the programmatic efforts appear to be better suited to small group interactions. While this may pose a problem for larger campuses or campuses with limited staffing structures they do provide context for programmatic interventions. Strong theoretical support, programmatic examples, and clear definitions effectively connect the material with any reader.