

Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs

By Raechele L. Pope, Amy L. Reynolds, and John A. Mueller
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Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs presents a thorough description of what it means to be a multiculturally literate practitioner in higher education. Hamilton (2004) asserts that the book is “practical enough to use on a daily basis and should be included in every student affairs professional’s library,” (2004, p. 1112). The current reviewers heartily agree that this volume should be a staple of Student Affairs preparation programs and a companion for professionals in the field. Those who direct orientation, transition, and retention efforts especially will find value in its pages.

In their preface, Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller make a strong case for infusing multiculturalism into Student Affairs practice. They assert, “The more [that] multiculturalism is integrated into the very center of students affairs work instead of merely being added on, the more the profession changes and transforms itself into one that is truly meeting the needs of all students and is contributing to the creation of multicultural campuses” (p. xv).

Three purposes for this volume are outlined by the authors: 1) to offer a model of core competencies for student affairs professionals that incorporates multicultural issues; 2) to extend the significant progress that has been made in the counseling psychology multicultural literature to Student Affairs; and 3) to present specific examples of effective practice and use realistic case studies to help Student Affairs professionals (and practitioners in training) apply multicultural awareness and knowledge (p. xvi).

In Part One, Pope et al. set forward the Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence, initially developed by Pope and Reynolds (1997). As part of the model, the authors have created a list of seven core student affairs competencies: administrative and management; theory and translation; helping and interpersonal; ethical and legal; teaching and training; assessment and evaluation; and multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Pope et al., p. 8). Each of these competencies is treated in a chapter of the book, making it easy for the reader to focus on a specific area at a time.

In Chapter One, the authors define multicultural competence as “the

awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self" (p. 13). Rather than leaving this open to interpretation, they have charted 33 characteristics of a multiculturally competent student affairs practitioner, with categories for multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. Exemplary practices in each of the three areas are addressed. Defining multicultural competence in this comprehensive manner pushes readers to analyze their own levels of competence through self-reflection and to aspire to greater understanding and higher-order skills. The authors make it clear that multicultural competency cannot be left to the "experts" in the field; every practitioner must become proficient.

A significant discussion on student development theory and translation occurs in Chapter 2. The authors acknowledge, "Some of the [foundational] theories used by student affairs have expanded and changed, and other new theories have been developed in the past twenty years to accommodate diverse populations that were not included in the theories when first developed" (p. 31). The example of the psychosocial theory of Chickering (1969) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) is used to illustrate how a theory can expand over time to explain the development of increasingly diverse student populations.

The authors also point out that new theories have been created or applied to student affairs to extend our understanding of the development of students of color, women, LGBT students, and those who are first-generation students. Pope et al. clearly state that "the fact that a theory is based primarily on one population does not make it a flawed theory. It is simply a theory that may be more useful with the population upon which it is based" (p. 38). The authors go on to claim that the most influential theories need "in-depth exploration of their ability to incorporate and make meaning of the unique experiences of underrepresented groups as well as their ability to furnish necessary conceptualizations, tools, and strategies for working in a diverse setting" (p. 38). Caution against using student development theory in a simplistic or reductionistic way is also given in Chapter Two, one of the strongest chapters in the book.

Chapter Three addresses the concept of multicultural competence in administration and management and presents Pope's 1995 Multicultural Change Intervention Matrix (MCIM). The MCIM comes out of Multicultural Organization Development (MCOB), which Pope (1995) has described as "a systematic planned change effort using behavioral science knowledge and technologies for improving organizational effectiveness" (p. 55).

The MCIM, which is directed toward student affairs administrators, focuses on three targets of change: individual, group, and institutional. The model also differentiates actions that work within the existing system (first-order change) from systemic change (second-order change). The authors provide an example of first-order change as simply adding staff members who are women or persons of color to a department. Second-order change occurs when the department commits to a reexamination of its mission, values, and goals. Institutional second-order change stems from tying professional advancement to multicultural competencies and making these competencies an institutional value. To create a multicultural

organization, Pope et al. postulate that efforts must be centered on all three targets (individual, group, and institutional) and at both levels (first- and second-order) (pp. 59–60). The MCIM provides a framework for systemic change; three significant uses of the MCIM include assessment, reevaluation of curriculum, and strategic planning (p. 60).

In Chapter Four, multicultural competence in helping and advising is treated. Here, the authors offer seven critical skills and knowledge bases for those in a counseling or advising role: self-awareness, knowledge and understanding of cultural groups, knowledge about cultural concepts, culturally responsive interventions, dynamics of a cultural dyad, cultural assumptions underlying the helping process, and advocacy skills. The authors comment that the “key to building affirming relationships with others who are culturally different from us is being able to look for similarities and differences simultaneously” (p. 91).

Assessment and research, the subjects of Chapter Five, are important tools for student affairs practitioners. According to Pope et al. (2004), multiculturally competent researchers recognize their own assumptions, understand the difficulty in defining a population due to variances within cultures, use tools created for specific cultures in order to avoid inaccurate results, and use a variety of methods to collect data, including qualitative research. The authors describe qualitative research as having the potential to benefit the researcher and the participant through increased knowledge and empowerment (p. 115). A multiculturally incompetent researcher runs the risk of harming research participants and drawing incorrect conclusions based upon stereotypes, whether held knowingly or unknowingly.

Multicultural competence in ethics and professional standards is addressed in Chapter 6, where the authors remind us that the three essential values of student affairs are human dignity, equality, and community (Young, 1993). After reviewing time-honored principles of professional ethical practice, Pope et al. take up the cultural implications of professional ethics, community collaboration and multicultural ethics, and developing the values and ethics of students. They comment, “Multicultural issues must be infused into ethical principles and guidelines for the student affairs profession, deliberately and thoughtfully” (p. 128).

Teaching and training, whether formal or informal, are important roles of the student affairs professional. Chapter Six offers a compelling discussion of curricular transformation, multicultural issues in student affairs preparation programs, and multicultural issues in outreach and training efforts. Although this chapter is best read as part of the volume as a whole, it could also be used as a stand-alone piece in a classroom or in-service training session.

Part Two of the book focuses on the applications and implications of the model for research and practice. Chapter Eight takes stock of the current status of multicultural competence research and practical implications, while Chapter Nine draws the reader into an important discussion of reflection and practice. In Chapter Eight, readers are introduced to three self-report instruments which measure counselor multicultural competence and one instrument which requires

observation and scoring from a supervisor. Pope and colleagues are emphatic in stating that it is time for the student affairs profession to develop its own body of literature and instruments to measure growth in multicultural competence.

Chapter Nine concludes with a series of case studies which present an opportunity for readers to reflect upon and practice their approach to proposed situations. These reviewers found the case studies to be challenging in their richness and complexity of real-life multicultural issues. They could be used for class discussion and staff training purposes but would best be approached with a faculty member or practitioner with a high level of multicultural competency involved in the discussion.

The concluding chapter summarizes key themes of the book, which include challenging our assumptions, responding to the individual or culture (or both), and interweaving multicultural competence and traditional competencies. The reader cannot miss the overarching theme of this volume, which is the development of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills—all three are necessary for growth as a multicultural competent practitioner.

As reviewers (one a new professional, the other an experienced student affairs practitioner), we concur that *Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs* belongs on the book shelf of every student affairs professional or practitioner in training. To be sure, there are some concepts that will challenge newcomers to student affairs and experienced practitioners alike. Orientation staff members, who work with diverse student populations and are charged with the privilege and responsibility of welcoming all students on their campuses, will gain a solid grounding in multicultural competencies from this book. These reviewers believe that this volume should be required reading for graduate students in higher education programs. Professionals who have been in the field for a time may find this book of greatest value as graduate programs prior to year 2000 may not have included a strong multicultural component.

While much will be learned as an individual digests this book, it might best be used in a group setting. Dialogue in staff meetings, training sessions, and book groups will deepen the lessons contained in *Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs*.

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