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COMMENTARY

Multicultural Education and California's Community Colleges

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PACE | Policy Analysis for California Education

PUBLISHED: February 5, 2013

The inclusion of multicultural education has become a major goal of California's leaders within the past five years. California's leaders recognize the importance of serving the state's increasingly diverse student population and preparing students to be successful in a competitive global society. The Academic Senate, the major faculty body in California, stated that ''the underlying principles of multicultural curriculum apply to all disciplines and that efforts to better serve [our] underrepresented students will contribute to the success of all students as they learn to function in the multicultural world of the 21st Century'' (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 1995, p. 10). In fact, infusing multicultural education across the curriculum was one of the major goals of the Senate's 2005–2006 strategic plan.

In "Multicultural Graduation Requirements Among California's Community Colleges", co-authors Shelly L. Hess, Donand F. Uerling and William E. Piland demonstrate minority students tend to have lower retention rates because they become alienated and disconnected from the campus community, and many students enter college classrooms with stereotypes and negative attitudes towards individuals outside of their racial and ethnic groups. Multicultural education is important because it helps address this issue. Their study revealed that of the 109 California community colleges, only 50 colleges (fewer than half) had a multicultural graduation requirement as of 2005-06. In addition, the type of multicultural requirement in far too many cases did not include higher order thinking skills concerning multicultural education. Statistical analysis showed no relationship between the diversity of a college with regard to its students and employees and a multicultural graduation requirement. These findings suggested the state was falling behind in its goal for multicultural education.

During the 2009 plenary session, soon after the co-authors completed their research, the Academic Senateresolved to ''research the current statewide practices for implementing ethnic studies as required in Title 5, section 55063 and report back findings and recommendations''. Furthermore the Senate resolved to encourage all of the California community college curriculum committees to review the Title 5 ethnic studies requirement and determine if their students are meeting it.

As indicated in the Hess, et al, study, multicultural education has a vital role to play in the educational experiences of all community college students. The curriculum needs to reflect the realities of a diverse student body. Further research is needed to determine how much progress has been made more recently in the adoption of these requirements among California community colleges.

The study can be found here: Shelly L. Hess, Donald F. Uerling & William E. Piland, "Multicultural Graduation Requirements Among California's Community Colleges," Community College Journal of Research and Practice, Volume 36, Issue 12, 2012.

Suggested citation Policy Analysis for California Education. (2013). *Multicultural education and California's community colleges* [Commentary]. Policy Analysis for California Education.

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