

**THE DIVERSITY IMPERATIVE: EXCELLENCE, INSTITUTIONAL  
CULTURE, AND LIMITING ASSUMPTIONS AT SOME HISTORICALLY  
WHITE UNIVERSITIES**

Communitas

ISSN 1023-0556

2007 12: 1 - 17

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**ABSTRACT**

*Contrary to a still common belief that diversity lowers standards, current research in Higher Education indicates that an institution that wishes to maintain a competitive advantage needs to put well-managed diversity very high on its agenda, for reasons of academic and pedagogical excellence as well as to be responsive to changing local and global dynamics. In order to rearticulate diversity as an imperative driven by the search for excellence, the established institutional culture needs to be interrogated to understand why diversity is constructed as a “problem” and attitudes and values are maintained that are hostile to an inclusionary culture. A key element in this institutional culture is whiteness, and different forms of multiculturalism can be identified in terms of their relationship to the power of white privilege. This article names and discusses several assumptions that may underpin received practices and approaches within Historically White Universities (HWUs), which need to be rigorously challenged, and argues for an approach to diversity which can be described as “Critical Diversity”.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This article reflects on some issues pertaining to diversity<sup>1</sup> at universities in South Africa, particularly those that may be regarded as historically white (HWUs)<sup>2</sup>, and is informed by some trends in the Higher Education sector both in South Africa and internationally. The research on which the article is based was conducted at two such institutions (Steyn & Van Zyl 2001; Van Zyl, Steyn & Orr 2003). Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that resonances will exist within the institutional cultures of other HWUs in the country (See, for example, Hugo 1998). As the entire postapartheid education system restructures in response to changes brought about externally by globalisation and internally by the new legislative environment—particularly the demographic shifts occasioned by new access policies—diversity has been put firmly on the agenda. Michael Cross (2004: 406) comments:

South African campuses have embarked upon a wide range of initiatives to foster and respond to the changes within South African society while preparing students for the realities of increasing globalisation. They are slowly but steadily redirecting their student bodies and their staff to reflect the demographics of South African society. They have developed an increasing awareness about the need to address the social imbalances inherited from apartheid and the need to be responsive to wider social needs. The diversity project has gained momentum in this process. However, fragmentation of effort and a piecemeal approach still dominates institutional responses to these challenges (Cross 2004: 406).

As institutions face these new realities, the need is being felt to understand the impact of diversity, and to develop capacity at both an institutional and individual level in managing our new educational spaces. A fair body of knowledge has been built up detailing staff and student demographics, staff and student experiences, perceptions and attitudes, and organisational climate/culture. This work shows that demographically, the student composition has changed considerably. For example, by 2000 there was a majority of African students both in universities (60%) and technikons (72%), a demographic shift which has been hailed as amongst the most remarkable in the world (Cassim 2005: 658; Cooper & Subotzky 2001). Nevertheless, the changes to the student body are uneven within the HWUs—figures for contact students in 2005 show that the University of Johannesburg had a black<sup>3</sup> student intake of 70%, UFS had 65% black students, UCT had 49% , and Wits 64%. The University of Stellenbosch had 27% (DOE 2006: 29).

Changing the composition of the staff at universities, by contrast, has been “slow and lethargic”, raising the question of “whether transformation is taking place at all” (Cassim 2005: 658). It is estimated that the current profile will be difficult to change over the next 25 years (Hall 2007). The percentage of black staff in instruction and research positions, particularly, points to “serious employment inequalities in 2005” (DOE 2006: 40): the University of Johannesburg has 29% black academic staff, Wits had 25%, UCT 21%; UFS 17%, and Stellenbosch 12%.

This unevenness results in a “lack of fit” between students and lecturers. It can be stated generally that it is often at the interfaces between the different university constituencies, between faculty, students and administrative staff that difficult diversity issues most visibly come to the fore. Moreover, lack of transformation is perceived as a problem mostly by underrepresented groups, whereas dominant groups show less concern for the issues, may feel threatened by change, or even show latent hostility to transformation processes (Steyn & Van Zyl 2001; Erasmus 2006). The upshot is that as far as effecting inclusive diverse communities is concerned, our institutions are not where we want them to be, and much remains to be done (Duncan 2005; Erasmus & De Wet 2003; Ismail 2002; Narsee 2004; Shackleton *et al.* 2006; Steyn & Van Zyl 2001). To a large extent, the challenge is to move beyond the rhetoric of inclusion to practices that ensure it. This includes addressing the way in which dominant norms affect marginalized groups (Gubitosi-White 1996; Narsee 2004).

#### **THE ESTABLISHED NORMS IN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AT HWUs**

The changes undertaken towards transformation at the HWUs generally reflect the understanding of transformation as being a process of “putting mechanisms in place to change the profile of staff and students” (Lewin 2000: 7).

Even in South African ‘best practice’ institutions, the activities that were engaged in and deemed high in priority were those that dealt with the specific functional aspects of legislative compliance. For example, the development of policy was rated 1 by all four institutions (most important), as was the preparation of the annual equity reports (which are required to be submitted to the Department of Labour in September of each year). Target setting, which is part of the legislative requirements, was also rated 1 by all four institutions. It would thus appear from the rankings, as well as from the depth interviews that equity officers are preoccupied with compliance as a major part of their daily activities (Cassim 2005: 427).

Lewin (2000) points out that such notions of transformation, linked with technicist discourses of planning, have addressed the liberal rights aspects of change but have not inculcated values and culture that support, sustain, and promote equity. The consequence, she stresses, has been that even the programmes of changing the liberal rights base of universities have been undermined, exemplified in the inability to change staff profiles, the failure to draw on the “full reservoirs of talent and diversity of perspectives and experience within the country”, and providing few positive role models for marginalized groups (UCT EE Plan Section 1 2000: 2).

Creating an institutional culture<sup>4</sup> conducive to the happiness of a diverse population requires active attention to the experiences of people within an institution. Given the power of establishment, and contrary to popular wisdom, such change does not simply fall into place with time, but is best facilitated through processes of genuine dialogue and deliberate policy. The dominant, inherited institutional culture, which was shaped around, and arose out of, a specific cultural base, needs to be made visible to those that function within it. Unless this process of raising awareness is actively taken on, it

remains a taken-for-granted given, operating mostly at an unconscious level to determine “the way things are”. For those whose cultural base forms the core of the institutional culture, the system works so seamlessly that, in most instances, they are more than likely not aware of the fact that there is a specific cultural bias at work. It is just experienced as the “normal” way of doing things. Where a great deal of status and privilege attaches to the cultural positionality, the invisibility of the assumptions deepens into assumptions that these “normal” ways of doing things are, in fact, appropriate for all people, and that they can, and even should, be universalised. Other ways are seen as deficient, as falling away from the norm, and therefore a problem which needs to be fixed, altered, and educated away. “Default identities” are characterised by a lack of reflexivity about how power underpins the privilege which defines the norms (Walker 2005: 135).

For those who fall outside of the centered positionality, there is an acute sense that the system does not work for them, and that the assumptions of the normality of the centre act as unarticulated, but powerful, barriers to success and comfort. In such an environment only those most adept at assimilation can succeed, and then at a price. For this reason, in education as in other social domains, the assimilation model is not regarded as supportive of developing or drawing upon the talent and abilities of a diverse population. In sum, the “problem” needs to be redefined as emanating from the centre, not the margins—and this applies not only as regards questions of race, but also gender and sexuality. Any serious work aimed at transformation needs to make visible the discourses, strategies and practices on which the centre depends for its legitimation and reproduction.

A crucial notion in the contemporary debates on “race” is that of “whiteness”. This can be seen as the social positioning which was opened up for those of European descent in relation to “others” through the enormous differences in power, wealth and influence established over three or four hundred years, and then further rationalised in the past 150 years through “race” theories and discourses (Steyn 2001). This privileged position continues to reproduce itself socially and ideologically, through normalising itself as the invisible centre of power, while keeping attention focused on the “others” which it marginalises, and constructs as being the source of the problems that need to be solved in a multicultural context.

An example of how whiteness operates is through mobilising key tropes around which dominant and resistance discourses of transformation are clustered, such as “educational standards”. The meaning of terms like these are construed as transparent and immutable, obscuring the fact that meanings are embedded within complex discourses which derive their meanings historically—in this case entrenched in Eurocentric notions of education and knowledge. Despite attempts from various quarters to implement transformation in line with the democratisation of the country, such discourses still work to channel and maintain relations of power, to construct and organise definitions of transformation, and prescribe its extent and form. Different social subjects are located in relation to each other within these discourses: the people

who are centred are the (mostly) white males who “know what it takes”, and who are able to construct themselves as benevolent, even charitable, gatekeepers of that which must be protected from deterioration for the sake of all involved, the models of what it means to have “merit”. For black people, the subjectivities that are constructed are those of the bearers of the “problem” that must be changed: they need to be helped, trained, reconstructed. They must follow and practice diligently, all the time depending on the models to show them how, and to decide when, and on what terms, they may gain access or succeed.

Inextricably intertwined with the power of whiteness, the sheer inertia of the past has a formidable force in resisting change, requiring great energy and commitment from those who are straining to transform institutional culture. As in so many South African organisations generally, there appears to be a disjuncture between the formal rhetoric of commitment to transformation and the underlying, privately held attitudes of a large percentage of those whose everyday choices, decisions and manner of operating serve to create and maintain the status quo institutional culture.

### **CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY**

Both the terms *multiculturalism* and *diversity* acquired a bad reputation through the way in which the apartheid system used them to manipulate differences to further its goals of dividing people and institutionalising inequality. Because we need a vocabulary to talk about difference within a framework of social justice, however, we need to retool this vocabulary (Cross 2004; Cassim 2005). I therefore outline various schools of multiculturalism which can be distinguished in terms of the position they adopt towards the centred institutional culture described above.

*Conservative* approaches to multiculturalism try to keep the colonial and white supremacist relations as intact as possible, without naming them as such. Characteristically, such versions of multiculturalism construct those seeking to be accommodated in systems from which they were previously excluded as coming from “culturally deprived backgrounds”. Other groups are “add-ons” to the dominant culture, and can benefit from “joining the club” — provided they denude themselves of their “other” practices. It posits monolingualism, and the knowledge, practices, measures and discourses of dominant (European) culture. *Liberal multiculturalism*, by contrast, posits a natural equality between all groups, maintaining that with a certain measure of reform everyone would be able to compete equally. Nevertheless, the legitimising norms are identified with white cultural and political communities. It largely ignores the workings of established power and privilege, and universalises the privileged white subject.

In its commitment to bringing about equitable education in the context of a historical legacy of unequal distribution of privilege and power, much of the thinking which gives impetus to the transformation of the national education system is informed by what can be called *critical multiculturalism* (Chisholm 2001; Labusi 2001; Ministry of Education 2001). The strength of this position is that it does not present itself as value-free but

rather declares its social agenda upfront. In brief, this particular stance towards diversity:

- departs from a profound commitment to the values of democracy, social justice, equity and empowerment;
- recognises that incorporation of those once marginalised involves not assimilation, but a transformation of the cultural milieu to bring about new meanings and representations;
- rejects essentialised notions of identity, naturalised notions of race, gender, etc, and discourses which reify homogeneity; and
- stresses that identity and difference are constructed within specific historical, cultural and power relations (Goldberg 1994; Giroux 1992).

In other words, critical multiculturalism can be distinguished from both conservative and liberal multiculturalism through its refusal to (re)stabilise centred whiteness, and to maintain systems of unequal power and influence while (and through) tampering with the margins. While this analysis has focused on the debates within multiculturalism, a similar line of argument needs to posit a *critical diversity*<sup>5</sup> approach to issues of all marginalised groups, not merely focused on “culture”.

#### **DIVERSITY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE**

International thinking on human rights increasingly recognises diversity as a human rights issue: Valuing diversity is seen to be a counter measure to racist, fascist, imperial and colonial ideologies. The declaration of the World Conference against Racism, held in Durban in 2001, is headed *Tolerance and Diversity: A vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. It unequivocally identifies a new attitude towards diversity as holding the key to the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

Instead of allowing diversity of race and culture to become a limiting factor in human exchange and development, we must refocus our understanding, discern in such diversity the potential for mutual enrichment . . . For too long such diversity has been treated as threat rather than gift. And too often that threat has been expressed in racial contempt and conflict, in exclusion, discrimination and intolerance (WCAR Declaration 2001).

The failure to create an equitable environment for the diverse groups that live, work, study, and play in any social context constitutes a form of human rights abuse. This is, of course, crucial in the context of South African education which is struggling to overcome the legacy of injustice it has inherited. An education system as the primary system responsible for cultural and ideological reproduction (Freire 1972; Giroux 1992) is invariably implicated in the social ambitions of governments. For example, segregated education, with the express intention of preserving white social and political supremacy, was introduced to Cape Education by Langham Dale in 1893. The

education of white youth was to be on a par with that of their peers in Europe, while Coloureds and Africans were to be educated for a subordinate position in society.

Attempting to entrench the historical advantage people of European descent had attained, the apartheid government organised society to maintain the exclusionary privileges of a white minority. Many inequities were enforced and maintained by law, others operated on intangible processes of exclusion. It firmed up the white supremacist impetus in the education system with the introduction of Christian National Education, the principles of which were formulated in 1939. South African youth came through a strictly divided and fragmented education system, characterised by gross inequity in terms of investment per child, syllabi, resources, linguistic fit of tuition and every other aspect of education.

In line with the political aspirations of the postapartheid society, the new constitution enshrines rights like equal access to equal education, and protects and supports diversity. Subsequent to 1994, the new government had passed a series of laws such as the Higher Education Act of 1997, and the Employment Equity Act of 1988. These acts seek to integrate education, and create a more equitable and accessible education system for staff and students through addressing previously entrenched disparities. However, social inclusion, as Cele and Menon (2006) point out, is “a radical paradigm that advocates the transformation of societal values through its institutional frameworks and arrangements in a manner that transcends policy assertions” (Cele & Menon 2006). It goes to the heart of how we do our daily business, including our attitudes and approaches within the lecture hall, the content of the curriculum and our levels of self-awareness generally as social actors. Narsee (2004: 87) states pertinently that “because our identities are constructed through dialogue, the failure to respect and recognise diversity in our students can be a form of oppression”.

### **DIVERSITY AS A HALLMARK OF EXCELLENCE**

In an attempt to persuade universities to play a pivotal role in social transformation the state has placed equity and redress imperatives at the core of the general university activity (teaching, research and community service). Because this does, in fact, emanate from an external political agenda, the emphasis on diversity may be seen as violating traditional academic values such as academic freedom<sup>6</sup>, compromising the academic integrity of the university. That is a separate issue, and needs to be debated on its own merit. Nevertheless, there are other reasons, intrinsic to the nature of higher education, that urge us to take diversity seriously. Internationally there has been a shift in how diversity is viewed. Far from being a liability to an excellent monocultural hegemonic educational system, conceded only because of legal equity requirements, diversity is recognised as a *key indicator of excellence and integral to the “business case”* of the university as an institution of learning, teaching and research.

Internationally, universities have found that attention to diversity is healthy self-interest, and that it should be seen to be such by all members of the university body. An institution that wishes to maintain competitive advantage needs to put diversity very

high on its agenda (American Council of Education 2000; American Council of Education & American Association of University Professors 2000; Anderson *et al.* 2000; The Diversity Coalition 2002; Maruyama & Moreno 2000).

Cassim (2005: 655-656) refers to three imperatives that may motivate equity activities: the legislative imperative, the strategic imperative and the moral imperative. Taking the legislative imperative as a given, and having made some comments on the moral imperative, I argue that those institutions that wish to lead the way in institutionalising diversity in their campuses should integrate diversity into the core activities of the university as an imperative determined by the search for excellence. I argue that there are at least three pillars on which the excellence driver in higher education rests: the *academic* imperative, which identifies diversity as a factor in the quality of academic output, to the point that the ability to use the benefits of diverse perspectives becomes one of the primary indicators and determiners of excellent outputs; the *pedagogical* imperative, which affirms that infusing diversity practices into the teaching environment, materials, curricula, etc. makes for a superior educational outcomes; the *social* imperative, which reinforces the need to consciously understand the diversity in our increasingly complex and global societies, and to prepare students for citizenship in this world, and to integrate this consciousness into our knowledge production.

These imperatives point us back to the centrality of institutional culture, and the need to examine the attitudes, values and beliefs that inform the dominant ways of going about things, and the need to “surface” the assumptions that secure the sedimented “common sense” inherited from our diversity-averse histories, and which continue to shape our mindsets. As Narsee (2004: 89) reminds us:

Valuing differences should go beyond seeking to reduce conflict and maintaining harmony. Interactions among diverse understandings, perceptions, histories and discourses must engender opportunities for continuous critical examination of dominant cultures and core values both in the organization and in the curricula (Narsee 2004: 89).

In the following section, I draw on the research conducted at two HWUs to identify a few assumptions shaping some institutional cultural responses to diversity, and working against the direction of critical multiculturalism/diversity.

## **CHALLENGING EMBEDDED ASSUMPTIONS**

### **Assumption: Increased diversity compromises excellence**

On the contrary, diversity is essential to excellence — universities need to be able to draw on the widest possible pool of talent, incorporate a rich repertoire of perspectives and experience, and invite challenges to otherwise unproblematised lines of thinking. Increasingly, we will be ill-equipped in our pursuit of excellence without a multi-perspectival approach (Duster 1993; Marin 2000). As Hall puts it:

Universities with established high rankings in international league tables are invariably those that attract talent from a wide, often global catchment. Leading US

research universities would not be what they are if they had not succeeded in recruiting excellent students and faculty from India and China, and both countries are now benefiting enormously from the reverse flow of expertise (Hall 2007: 9).

One of our greatest challenges is to counter the lingering ethnocentrism and even racism that avers that difference will “pull down” the university, and that “others” need to learn, but have little to contribute.

**Assumption: Diversity is an add-on, it is not part of the core business of the university**

In South Africa, the notion is not widespread that bringing diversity into the curriculum is not just simple political correctness, but can strengthen scholarship (Cross 2004: 393). Well-managed diversity in the university makes for good teaching, good learning, and good research (Gurin 2002; Hurtado 2003; Marin 2000). In a diverse academic environment different perspectives need to be considered and incorporated, assumptions are challenged, thinking becomes more complex, and people skills are developed, to name only a few of the ways in which people are more stretched. Diversity should consciously be part of all our core activities, a precious resource not wasted through poor management of differences, or implicit norms that inhibit full participation of all and create undue levels of comfort for some and discomfort for others. At the very least, students need to be prepared for the complex and heterogeneous world they are entering, and we need to teach and produce knowledge applicable to that world.

**Assumption: Diversity is only an issue because of the political situation in SA**

Internationally, there is recognition that the internal demographics of nation states are becoming increasingly complex and heterogeneous, and that this is happening within an increasingly interconnected world. One of the effects of globalisation and its countercurrents is that the need to understand, produce knowledge about, and cater for diversity is becoming one of the more widespread pressures on higher education generally (Humphreys 1997). The pressure is linked to the perceived competencies required for graduates, generally<sup>7</sup>, and also the need for universities to remain relevant to their societies. South Africa offers one of the most instructive sites at which one can learn these lessons, and, ironically, a person who does not wish to acquire such capacity here is likely to be poorly equipped for the diversity challenges of any society.

**Assumption: Diversity is primarily about changing numbers**

Diversity should be understood in qualitative as well as quantitative terms. It concerns our response to difference, as such. Changing the representation of groups where there is imbalance is essential — at the very least it is part of what makes a more welcoming place for all and develops visible critical masses — but on its own adjusting numbers and bringing people into the same pedagogical space does not necessarily bring about mutual learning or better attitudes, though it may do so to an extent. A liberal academic environment often tends to be individualistic, competitive and elitist, with the result that differences tend to be constructed into hierarchies. Yet the crux of turning

difference into the resource it should be centres on creating a caring, supportive environment for all who work and study on campus. Successful diversity management would be concerned to support difference in its many forms, and to cater for the most vulnerable and marginalised; such an environment enables all to contribute their best. The rub is that it requires conscious work on the part of the university community, a commitment to building an ethos of care, and willingness to confront prejudices, stereotypes, assumptions, and blind spots.

**Assumption: Increasing diversity at a formerly white institution is for the sake of the disadvantaged**

It is not uncommon for people to talk as if white students are being compromised by increased diversity, whereas the benefit flows unilaterally to those who would not have had access unless special measures were instituted to “bring them in”. This assimilationist model deprives those students who often stand to gain the most from interaction. Learning to function competently in settings characterised by difference is necessary for the mainstream—for whites, males, heterosexuals, the able-bodied, etc. Research has shown that such students are likely to benefit in innumerable ways, not only through intellectual and emotional challenge, but also through developing better attitudes towards citizenship and improved preparation for democratic approaches and increased racial and cultural understanding. They are also more able to engage in life-long learning, to mention only a few gains (Chang & Astin 1997; Gurin 2002; Marin 2000; Narsee 2004).

**Assumption: Diversity is primarily for the sake of the student body**

Some staff may recognise the value of difference for student development, but do not consider that they themselves need to be exposed to, and challenged by, difference for the sake of developing their *own* competencies and for their *own* growth. Yet it is clear that many staff members are not prepared for the diverse classrooms, tearooms, meeting spaces and payrolls that they are now encountering. Confinement to homogeneous environments stunts exactly such preparation, preserving limitations without recognising them for what they are (Gudeman 2000). At the very least, contemporary university staff should be exposed to opportunities to enhance teaching skills and classroom management of diverse groups, in order to hone their skills for the new environment in which they teach (The Diversity Coalition 2002).

**Assumption: If most people are satisfied with how diversity is handled, then it must be a “good environment”**

There is asymmetry in the way different groups are affected by prevailing norms and customs, and therefore in their perceptions and experiences of the same environment (Erasmus & De Wet 2003; Humphreys 1997). Generally, black people carry the major burden of race and racism, and it is the same for other marginal positions (women, disabled, homosexual, etc). One of the greatest difficulties in moving forward is the indifference that characterises dominant positions, such as whiteness. To name only one effect of this indifference: it tends to close down the dialogue that is essential to the development of mutual understanding.

**Assumption: Diversity is the university administration's problem**

While it is true that diversity intervention has to be driven from the most senior positions in the university if it is to be taken seriously, it also has to be seen to be, and taken on as everyone's problem. The adoption of values of inclusiveness, mutual concern, supportiveness, a sense of the responsibility to right wrongs of an inequitable legacy, and to bring the best out in all members of the campus community must be part of the work we all do energetically. The willingness to dialogue, listen and learn must become part of a university's ethos.

**Assumption: Change will happen best if it is left to happen gradually, naturally. It does not need to be driven, monitored, etc.**

Inertia, subconscious resistance or fear, the weight of practice, benefits from the status quo, perhaps the unrecognised extent to which we are invested in way things have been done in the past, lack of acknowledgement of privilege — these and many more factors result in the fact that change actually doesn't happen unless accountability is built into every node of an organisation's operations. In embracing diversity as a core value for excellence, universities would need to concentrate on doing business as *unusual*.

In line with best practice elsewhere, countering the tendency to reproduce the familiar entails drawing up *a detailed, multifaceted action plan* that assigns objectives, actions, and accountability, specifically focused on diversity, to specific people/posts, *all the way across the university* (Smith 2003). There are many examples of such action plans (see, for example, Anderson *et al.* 2000; The Diversity Coalition 2002). The plan should include procedures for systematic evaluation, so that the capacity to learn from our progress is built into the strategic thinking (Clayton-Pederen, Parker & Smith 2003; Washington 2003). It is essential that in this process the voices of those who are underrepresented on campus should be given the chance to influence the core business of the organisation, rather than to be tangential to the process (Smith 2003). Funding needs to be earmarked specifically for ensuring that the objectives of an action plan can be met.

This article does not make specific suggestions for the content of such an action plan, but it should include creating dedicated spaces that bring together the many efforts that are being made on campus and make them visible, as well as spaces for dialogue and encouraging service/experiential learning. It should put in place the measures to encourage pedagogical techniques that promote developing awareness of different perspectives (Duster 1993) and "retooling" staff, and also for recognising and assisting students at risk. And importantly, it also requires that we re-examine our curricula to ensure that we develop inclusive curricula that "accurately reflect the experiences, voices, struggles, victories, and defeats of all racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and other social groups" (Cross 2004: 403) and that institutional sites are nurtured where critical diversity scholarship is undertaken. It should ensure that diversity objectives are "hardwired" into the structures and procedures, and it should be a public, living document. Such visibility goes a long way towards communicating that an institution

is serious about its commitment to its diverse and diversely talented community, both actual and still potential.

However, as this article has argued, something more is required. It is a commitment to understand the new demands placed upon higher education in the new times, to change with them, and to develop knowledge which reflects that understanding. And because of our situated knowledge as a place of great diversity which needs to be put on a different footing, Cross (2004) is surely correct when he says that it falls upon South African academics to develop diversity theory which integrates “the need for integrating the politics of cultural and identity recognition with the politics of social justice and equity, which represents a key strength in South African diversity discourse (Cross 2004: 407).

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### *Endnotes*

<sup>1</sup> In this article, equity is understood to be concerned with fair treatment and equality of opportunity, whereas diversity is regarded as “acknowledging and managing differences to attain multicultural institutions in which there is no form of discrimination” (Cassim 2006: 420). As will become clear from the discussion in the article, it is not possible to achieve diversity in this sense without ensuring equity and addressing the power imbalances that obstruct the full expression of those differences which are compatible with social justice.

<sup>2</sup> Since the recent merging of universities the distinction between historically white and historically black institutions is no longer clear-cut. Nevertheless, those universities that were established as “whites only” still continue to deal with the legacy of their whiteness, and thus for the purposes of this article, the acronym HWU will be used.

<sup>3</sup> Following the DOE report, “black” includes black African, Coloured and Indian.

<sup>4</sup> Institutional culture is the “sum total” effect of the values, attitudes, styles of interaction, collective memories — the “way of life” of the university, known by those who work and study in the university environment through their lived experience. One is therefore addressing many layers of practices, norms and attitudes, some of which are more tangible than others.

<sup>5</sup> Adapting Winddance Twine’s (2006) concept of *Racial Literacy*, I define *Diversity Literacy* as:

“*Diversity literacy*” is a set of practices. It can best be characterised as a “reading practice” — a way of perceiving and responding to the social climate and prevalent structures of oppression. The analytical criteria employed to evaluate the presence of diversity literacy include the following: 1) a recognition of the symbolic and material value of hegemonic identities, such as whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity, able-bodiedness, etc.; 2) analytic skill at unpacking how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other; 3) the definition of oppressive systems such as racism as current social problems rather than a historical legacy; 4) an understanding that social identities are learned and an outcome of social practices; 5) the possession of a diversity grammar and a vocabulary that facilitates a discussion of race, racism, and anti-racism, and the parallel concepts employed in the analysis of other forms of oppression; 6) the ability to translate (interpret) coded hegemonic practices; 7) an analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are mediated by class inequality; and 8) an engagement with issues

of transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening democracy in all levels of social organisation.

<sup>6</sup> See the debate on academic freedom and the autonomy of the university in SAJHE 20(3). Martin Hall (2006) sums up the issue well:

In a way, this current debate completes a circle with T. B. Davie's formulation of academic freedom half a century ago. Then, the university was a homogenous community (overwhelmingly white, predominantly male, English speaking, economically privileged) facing outwards to a highly unequal society in which discrimination by race was being enforced and enshrined in law. Now, the university is a diverse community (increasingly black, increasingly representative by gender, multilingual, and with students from a wide range of economic backgrounds) looking inwards at the challenges of achieving and maintaining social justice within itself. In this context, the issue of whether academic freedom is an absolute right or a conditional privilege remains unresolved (Hall 2006: 14).

<sup>7</sup> For example, the Fortune 500 companies regard the ability to work in diverse teams as a core competence for the graduates they employ. Readers may wish to consult <http://diversityinc.com> for similar information.

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