

Framing Diversity: Multiculturalism in College and University Student Handbooks

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Linfield College Humanities and Creative Projects Symposium
Spring 2013

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how student handbooks from four private liberal arts colleges and universities located in Oregon's Willamette Valley communicate to students that their campuses provide a safe and comfortable environment for diverse students. Content analysis is used to examine the welcoming nature of the language, the intergroup opportunities and the opportunity for students to provide feedback about diversity as represented within each handbook. Building on a foundation of scholarly work from the past, the research finds that diversity is best encouraged in purpose statements that acknowledge and validate the worth of all students.

Research Focus

- Higher education's accommodation for diverse students
- Extent to which small colleges embrace diversity based on the messages found in student handbooks

Method

Content Analysis

Developed by Alfred R. Lindesmith, 1931 and Klaus Krippendorff, 1980

- Developed to critique media in concrete forms, such as newspapers, movies, televisions, radio, speeches and textbooks. As media grew, content analysis was used to check validity and review themes
- General Questions
 - What data is being analyzed?
 - How is it defined?
 - Which population is the work for?
 - Is the context relative?
 - What are the boundaries?
 - Who is the target market?

Method continued

Steps in Content Analysis

- Determine a theme—an interest, question or hypothesis (Neuendorf 14)
- Generate a unit of analysis
- Analyze each variable and deduce what the messages are inferring on a surface level as well as a deeper level (Kyngas et al. 12)
- Examine the deductions to produce general conclusions, followed by broader implications about the big question: why is this important?

Artifacts: Student Handbooks

- One of the primary documents available for students
- Describe the values and policies of the institution
- Easily accessible online via college and university websites
- Criteria analyzed
 - **Ability to communicate a safe and welcoming environment**
 - Policies, Values, Zero-tolerance rules
 - **Mention of Intergroup opportunities & programs**
 - International Students
 - Variety of Clubs and Resources
 - Diverse events

Institutions Analyzed

College and Universities

- George Fox University
- Linfield College
- Pacific University
- Willamette University

Commonalities

- Mission statements based on community enhancement
- Residential institutions
- 1,600 – 2,200 undergraduates
- Private
- Oregon

Analysis

George Fox University

- Policies and lifestyle standards
- Large presence of scriptures and Christian references
- Personalized, encouraging language

Linfield College

- Student life, resources, and policies
- Emphasis on campus opportunities
- Large number of intergroup programs

Analysis

Pacific University

- Life on campus, personal behavior, resources
- “You have the *right*...”
- “You have the *responsibility*.”
- Opportunity for feedback and policy changes

Willamette University

- Campus life, campus resources ,learning enhancement resources
- Religious diversity
- Value “The Dignity and Worth of all Individuals”

Conclusions and Implications

Successful communication of safe environments included:

- Emphasis on value of each student rather than each intergroup
- Feedback and Opportunity
 - Groups and Resources
 - Your opinion matters, you matter
- Accommodation
 - Recognize personal needs that aren't being met

“Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.”

-Desmond Tutu

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