

Regional Campuses: The Future Of Higher Education—Challenges As We Face That Future

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Making The Mosaic Work

Diversity has become a very important issue on college campuses, especially on regional campuses today. As our society becomes more and more of a mosaic of Americans from different roots, it is our responsibility as educators to ease our transformation in population as smoothly as possible. More and more the faces of returning students, both women and men, appear in the classroom. African Americans, both men and women, are taking advantage of higher education in greater numbers. The greatest challenge of all, however, is the large number of immigrants from virtually all countries of the world who find their way to regional campuses. If we want these newcomers to our society to become productive citizens, we must do all we can to prepare them for the role of citizens in a culture so entirely different from the one from which they came.

Anomaly And Success

I was a returning woman student in the late 1970s, and I was pretty much of an anomaly. There were not that many women who had decided to return to school after many years away from the classroom, but the picture is quite different today. The average age of the student on campus today is 28. Both traditional students and faculty on the Hamilton Campus of Miami University personally received me very well, but I was not welcomed with glee by the students on the Oxford Campus. Today the picture has changed—and for the better. Whereas some greeted me with hostility and I was a surrogate parent for others, there is today an acceptance of returning students as equals and actually comrades.

Even outside of the classroom, traditional and nontraditional students develop camaraderie.

What motivates these adult people to return to the work and competition of the classroom? One returning student told me that she was an aide in a local hospital. She realized that her status was very low on the hospital totem pole, and so she wanted very much to improve her position in the hospital and in society. She was a good student with an excellent work ethic, and I was able to watch her grow. She was admitted to the nursing program (not an easy task on our campus), and she is now an RN working at the same hospital where she had once cleaned rooms. When I see her at work, I am proud that I had been able to touch her life.

Returning Problems

Other situations do not always go quite so smoothly. Some husbands really become threatened when their wives return to school. The educational experience and exposure causes the women to become independent and more of their own person. Some husbands cannot deal with it, and they behave in shocking ways. They tear up homework, fail to relay messages, and even take a part out of the wife's automobile so that she cannot attend classes. I saw this behavior occur with one of my students, who, by the way, had two small children. Going to school was very difficult for her, but she was determined to pursue higher education. Her stand for independence exploded at home, and, unfortunately, it ended up in divorce. This sequence of events, of course, is not the norm. Most husbands, especially today, are supportive of their wives' desire to grow as persons. My husband was especially so.

Nontraditional men students are also making their appearance on the college campus. The longer that they have been away from the classroom, the more difficult it is for them to return.

Several years ago, a major factory (General Motors) closed its facility in the Butler County area, leaving many men without jobs. Some of these former factory workers enrolled at our campus. They had little educational experience, no study skills (their jobs had been routine—no thinking), and no classroom experience with an understanding of the competition involved. Some of these men had the perseverance to

stay with the program; others did not. But they had been given all of the help and attention they would not have received at a large state university.

There are men who have been discharged from the service who have decided, after eye-opening experiences, that they would like to have a formal education. Obviously, the place for this individual is the regional campus. One former student who had been in the United States Navy is about to graduate with a degree in elementary education, and he will be teaching students in the elementary schools. Another student fought in the invasion of Grenada and is pursuing higher education. These men are now part of the diversity that makes up the college enrollment. And the college community provides the support and intimacy that help to lead these nontraditional students to success.

Multicultural Microcosm

More and more African-American students are taking advantage of the opportunities for higher education. On our campus, I work in the Multicultural Center where all students are made to feel comfortable. In December, we have a combined Chanukah-Kwanzaa program, which is always well attended and enjoyed by people of all races and religions. Our Multicultural Center is a microcosm of the world today as it really is and will be. Many African-American students find their way there, and for them it is a home away from home. Having similar problems, they hang out together and give each other support. There is not, however, exclusivity; the situation is the most natural blending of all races and religions. When I am in the office and I see them helping one another with papers or projects, it gives me a good feeling about possibilities for the future.

For African-American students, it is important for them to see black faces in positions of authority. Our executive director has made great strides in that area. We have a bright enthusiastic faculty member who teaches black studies and anthropology. She is a wonderful role model for African-American students. Other African Americans are finding their way into faculty and staff positions. Miami University—Oxford now has an African-American provost. Great advances have been made, especially on our campus, to make these students feel that they are truly

a part of the student body of the campus. The director of the Multicultural Center does much to give students a sense of pride in themselves, and he is always there to encourage them. He does a fine job obtaining speakers who let the students know that African Americans can, indeed, be successful.

Recent Challenge

But the most recent challenge to the regional campus is the flood of immigrants arriving in our communities. Meeting the needs of the diverse population must begin with the educational process, and it requires the effort and cooperation of many people. Recent immigrants are in a struggle for survival. Their inability to use the English language is anxiety-provoking. How can a non-English speaker function in an environment of English speakers? Imagine the problems of being almost functionally illiterate in your environment. We, as educators, must be there for these newcomers as they learn the language and the mores of their chosen country.

Now the greatest influx of students seems to be Hispanic—especially Mexican. In addition to my regular ESL classes, I was asked to be a consultant for a program organized by the city to help Mexicans arriving in our community to get a command of the English language so that they can function in our culture. Help is available to them from many quarters. However, Mexico is not the only country from which these Latin-American students come. Last semester, I had students from a number of Spanish speaking countries: Panama, Chile, Dominican Republic, Peru, and Colombia. I also taught several students (including a mother and daughter) from Brazil, where Portuguese is spoken. There were three students from Russia, a woman and two bright young men from Estonia (a part of Russia). A couple from Bangladesh have been my students, but the problem is that the wife has become a better student than her husband. The same situation prevails with a couple from Kuwait. I have also had students from the Far East: Taiwan and Japan.

Involvement And Resources

It is nearly impossible to teach and mentor these students without becoming personally involved in their lives. The couple from Bangladesh are a case in point. The husband called me on the telephone to ask for help.

He works in computers and had a job at that time in Cincinnati. A part of his job was to write memos about the work that he had accomplished. His memos were a disaster of improper English. He was warned that if his language skills did not improve in three weeks, he would lose his job. He was desperate for help. In addition to helping him in my class, I helped him several days a week at my home. He came with his wife and daughter on Tuesday and Thursday evenings for a kind of crash course. Both he and his wife made good progress. I tried to teach them the things they needed to know about the American culture. I do this with all of my students. And I learned about some aspects of the culture of Bangladesh. They took off their shoes upon entering the house, and the wife continued to wear her saris. Their four-year-old daughter is learning both Bengali and English; she will be bilingual. I learn much from my students.

Now that the diversity of the students on the regional campuses is a reality, we must have the tools to help them. Incoming students to our office are given as a gift a copy of *Practice with Idioms* by Ronald Feare. This very helpful book can also be studied by the student at home in his own time. Also, at our initial meeting, my students take The Townsend Press English Test to establish their competence in English. We have several copies of *The American Heritage English as a Second Language Dictionary*, and I encourage students to purchase their own copies. The dictionary contains very good definitions plus sentences to explain the word usage. We have several workbooks available to students: *English Brushup* by Kent Smith and Janet Goldstein and *English on Call—Levels Two And Three* by Victoria Kimbrough and Marjorie Vai. Cassettes are available for the students' use. We have *Clear Speech Pronunciation And Listening: Comprehension In North American English* by Judy B. Gilbert, second edition.

Pronunciation is a major problem with some ESL students. I have a student from Japan now who has a great deal of trouble pronouncing "l" and "r" in English. She is taking speech therapy on the Oxford Campus, but it is difficult because her tongue has not been trained to make these sounds.

We have specialized help for Spanish speakers: *Practical English for Spanish Speakers*—two audiocassettes and a book. I also make my students aware that English translators are available at Radio Shack. For

Hispanic students, I recommend Cassell's *Spanish-English Dictionary*; it is a good choice and is now available in paperback. We have several videos for our students: *The Perfect Sentence* which handles sentence fragments and run-on sentences. There is also a new edition for parts of speech and parts of the sentence; it has been well received.

Occasionally, I run a professional film that is relevant to ESL problems: *Educating Rita* with Michael Caine is an excellent movie about a returning woman student (a hairdresser) in England who is trying to find out who she is. Another fine film is *Conrack*, an adaptation of the book *The Water is Wide* by Pat Conroy. The movie features Jon Voight as a Southern white schoolteacher who went to teach all black students on an island off the South Carolina coast. Hispanic students really appreciate *Stand and Deliver*, a film about an Hispanic teacher, played by Edward James Almos, who teaches Hispanic students in a high school in California. The students respond well to all of these movies, and the films can be rented at a video store.

The Instructor

But the most important tool for an ESL student is the instructor. When students know that the teacher understands and is responding to their problems, they tend to make progress. I have found that gatherings in my home or meetings in a restaurant are very good morale builders.

I never resent any time or effort that I spend with my ESL students. I want them to become comfortable in their chosen country, and I want them to become contributing members of society. Returning students, both men and women, can do much to improve their lives. With a college education, African Americans can aspire to better jobs and a more complete life-style. And the newcomers to America can be helped and encouraged to achieve the American Dream.

Biography

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