



the TUTOR



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Beyond the Looking Glass

Another glance at diversity

by Eloísa M. Pope

As Americans approaching the twenty-first century, our nascent awareness of ourselves as a multicultural society is spurring both excitement about and resistance to our emerging identity. This transformation has fueled myriad debates and brought to fruition a continuing dialogue through which we are challenged to redefine our present reality and our vision of the future. So too, the university's role in an increasingly pluralistic society is being challenged and redefined.

If we could hold a mirror up to our institution what would we see? Is our campus profile a varied one, or is our group portrait that of a fairly homogeneous student body? Currently, the latter seems to be the case, despite some valiant efforts by students and educators alike to diversify CU-Boulder. Realistically, is there anything we as educators can do to create a campus that reflects our colorful society?

As TAs and GPTIs, you can effect some important changes. In order to support and enhance current efforts to diversify our campus portrait, along with the Graduate Teacher Program's Diversity Plan, *The Tutor* is highlighting the work of two professors who continue to challenge CU-Boulder to re-envision its approach to multiculturalism in academia. *The Tutor* interviewed Ray Chávez, Associate Professor of Journalism and the Director of Journalism's Office of Student Diversity and Alphonse Keasley, the Assistant Director for the University Learning Center — two educators whose daily challenge is to help CU-Boulder's students of color make a smooth transition into the predominantly white Boulder campus life. Both Chávez and Keasley have presented insightful and provocative viewpoints in GTP workshops. Therefore, we asked them to respond to a question foremost on many educators' minds today: "How do we change our university — the teachers, students, administrators, and curricula — to reflect our society more accurately?"

Looking Out

"Schools that fail to meet the challenges of and to embrace the benefits within a multi-ethnic society will not thrive," asserts Chávez. While "multiculturalism" is all too often bandied about as an ideological position — a buzzword for the politically correct — its more compelling face is a very human one. Unfortunately, what is obscured too often in academia is this human side of the issue. Keasley, notes that while "Everyone is talking about the idealized version of multiculturalism, there is no obvious practical application coming out. Faculty and administrators want to talk about multicultural education, but we need to give our [multicultural] students a space."

How do we change our university—the teachers, the students, the administration, and curricula—to reflect our society more accurately?

Chávez agrees. He notes that while graduate school tends to be stressful in general, for minority graduate students it is even more so. "Boulder is a ninety- to ninety-five percent white community. There is no sense of community if you aren't from the area. You always feel like an outsider," Chávez adds.

While there is a tendency within the university to focus on numbers — increasing the percentage of graduate students who are multi-ethnic — the most important attributes for attracting and retaining minority graduate students are campus climate and support. Chávez maintains that unfortunately, CU-Boulder's current environment is not conducive to attracting and retaining minority students. Furthermore, Boulder itself, while ostensibly a liberal community, seems to be

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afflicted with pseudoliberalism at times. Chávez defines a pseudoliberal position as one with which you agree in principal but not in practice.

Furthermore, an oppressive atmosphere is not always overtly racist. In her study, "The Campus Racial Climate: Contexts of Conflict" (*Journal of Higher Education*, 63:5), Sylvia Hurtado revealed that, "... approximately one in four students at all four-year institutions perceive considerable racial conflict; however, this proportion is higher (approximately one in three students) in university settings" (551). As instructors within a university community (and a uniquely homogeneous one at that), we have the unique opportunity to identify and to confront any oppressive factors in our academic environment.

Looking In

How can we as CU-Boulder instructors aid in transforming the campus atmosphere? How might we enlist those with a multi-ethnic perspective to lead us in creating a more inclusive academic climate and encourage them to enter the academic dialogue? Chávez and Keasley both value the utility of writing. Both instituted publications to provide a supportive and productive environment in which minority students can articulate their unique perspectives.

"The central experience for all students is in the classroom. Thus faculty are key. . . professors' unconscious assumptions . . . may become self-fulfilling prophecies." Madeleine Green

In order to give the University Learning Center's students a voice and to locate those voices within a professional context, Alphonse Keasley created *Belonging* — an impressive journal of students' writing that offers a broad spectrum of multi-ethnic perspectives. The publication includes: an essay on the Gulf War written by a native survivor of the War in Vietnam; an examination of stereotypes applied to Latino men; and an African American man's impassioned exposé of biases in our classrooms. Through *Belonging*, the ULC has encouraged multi-ethnic students to persevere along the rocky passage from journaling to academic essay writing. The student publication also is a concrete example of how an effective approach to writing aids in the production of some wonderful pieces by students. These students with multi-ethnic backgrounds learned to articulate their ideas, life experiences, and concerns in a professional context. *Belonging* is a tangible demonstration of how the riches of diverse voices empower us all.

Also a firm believer in the power of writing, Chávez created the Multi-Ethnic Media Organization (MEMO) for the School of Journalism's multi-ethnic graduate students and facilitated the publication of "Cultural Currents" a news insert carrying articles of interest to and by students of color. This gives Journalism's multi-ethnic graduate students a forum for their writings and a vehicle for publication credits. As Keasley says, "First, students' voices have to be privileged and then they have to be shaped by academic standards."

We need to nurture, lead, and direct students, to "invite

Equity and Excellence Award Winners 1994

Chung-Hui K. Cheng
Teaching Assistant
Oriental Languages

Debra T. L. Hawker
Lead Graduate Teacher
Chemical Engineering

and to expose students to dialogue in the university community, and we have to make a space for students to contribute to that dialogue," Keasley entreats. He wants to make sure that we create opportunities for students of color to express themselves in public discussions of professional goals and issues, as well as in campus social groups, and publications. "We must invite them to the dialogue," he says.

Keasley and Bonnie Richards, his writing program as-

stant, often discuss ways in which we can familiarize ourselves with and really get to know people from diverse societies. One way to do this is to participate in multicultural student groups or to become involved in minority community activities and to learn as much as possible through immersion in those communities. Before we approach this task however, we must keep in mind our openness to diversity as instructors. While student's voices and diverse perspectives need to be heard and recognized, teachers must be willing to hear them.

Two essential points emerge when contemplating ways of enjoining multicultural students to enter the academic dialogue. First of all, "standards" need to be examined continually to make sure we aren't privileging some voices or certain types of academic discourse over others. Second,

allowing multicultural students a voice in the classroom may mean reexamining our own approaches to academic forms of discourse and, indeed, pedagogy itself.

Madeleine Green writes in "Minorities on Campus: A Handbook for Diversity" (Washington: *American Council on Education*, 1989) that, "Faculty are responsible for the climate in their classrooms. Campus climate is closely tied to the teaching and learning process; the larger institutional climate cannot be separated from what happens in individual classrooms" (120-121).

Classroom climate is crucial to the transformation of the typical university atmosphere. Chávez posits that "We need to look at our faculty and our biases. The difficult part is working with and convincing a group of teachers that they need to change their approach. Change is threatening." When Chávez works with faculty, he encourages them to become involved by saying, "I'm not going to do this by myself; you need to do this too." Chávez says, "I have to point out sometimes, that some students will hold back in class

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because they don't feel that their views will be welcomed." When students hold back their perspectives out of fear or isolation, we are all deprived in no small measure. Green writes that "The central experience for all students is in the classroom. Thus faculty are key . . . professors' unconscious assumptions that minority students are unable to perform up to par may become self-fulfilling prophecies. [We have to ask ourselves questions such as whether or not] professors value student papers that address ethnic or racial issues as much as others" (116). At least part of this dilemma is promulgated by our understanding of university "standards."

"However, our deans' offices identify themselves as the standard bearers," and standards are often set up on the basis of whether or not work is "scholarly," notes Keasley. These standards are created by and reflect a traditional line of assumptions that haven't been reexamined adequately in the modern era. Keasley gives the following example:

Malinowitz said that even the most liberal writing program works against authentic ways of writing. If a woman wanted to write about issues of child care, most professors would say it wasn't scholarly. Women are now challenging that; whereas thirty years ago they wouldn't have. Women have been clear that women's thinking is unique (equal pay for comparable work), that there is a power issue steeped in male assumptions. Men don't understand what women are saying or what they've been doing in the work place, but women did not stop talking.

According to Keasley, not only do these standards remain unexamined in graduate and undergraduate courses, but teachers aren't prepared well enough to identify the needs and potential of their multi-ethnic students. He believes that, "We need to focus more on students and their needs. The research cycle moves people away from service. We need to be more student-service oriented." For those multicultural students already members of the university community, it is critically important that they see others move successfully through the de-

gree cycle. In order to effect this we may have to shift our concern from students meeting uniform criteria to reforming our teaching methodology. Multicultural, nontraditional, and other students can help us determine how they can develop a sophisticated approach to the subject within the parameters of course requirements and CU-Boulder's standards.

In summary, creating and maintaining a space for our multicultural students is long overdue. However, Keasley sees the greatest potential for change in the graduate student teachers, the professoriate of the future. While peer support, a more inviting campus climate, different standards and the opportunity to express oneself are invaluable, retention also depends on financial aid and financial support. Chávez explicitly focuses on helping our future faculty find the dollars they need to stay in graduate school. He has created one scholarship form which all Journalism graduate students may fill out. Chávez then tries to match the scholarships, which have three categories: minorities only, minorities preferred, and general—with the student. This procedure seems to work very well and Chávez's solution could serve as a prototype for diversity offices in other departments. The positive attitudes of CU-Boulder's current TAs and GPTIs, who are eager to learn more about working with multiculturalism in the classroom, bodes well for the CU-Boulder campus environment. Chávez notes that while faculty members can serve as role models for minority graduate students, they aren't as effective as peers. "Graduate students need other graduate students as role models," says Chávez.

Looking Forward

The Graduate Teacher Program is committed to the diversification of our campus, classrooms, teaching methodologies, and outlook. Its staff knows that we need to examine critically our own biases toward and reactions to multiculturalism before we can attempt to create an open climate in the classroom. In accordance with the Chancellor's edict, the GTP now has its own seven-year diversity plan to increase its commitment. The GTP will be expanding its annual workshops on cultural and gender bias in the classroom. Workshops on belligerence, resistance, and the denial dynamic in the classroom will also be incorporated. These forums should broaden our self reflection since, when students are resistant to diversity issues, our reaction

Words from the Wise



"Quality education should have long term orientation. I am not only your professor for one semester, but also willing to be your friend, your network, and your resource for a lifetime."

Winson B. Lee
University of Colorado at Denver

"A good teacher is a strong person who cares deeply about a difficult topic."

Norman Maclean
A River Runs Through It

" . . . good teaching involves *sensitivity*. . . We are not good teachers if we have only one forward gear, if we cannot adjust our sensitivity and our pedagogy to the many different students and their equally diverse learning styles. . . it is our challenge, duty, responsibility, and joyful privilege to initiate [students] into the mysteries of our academic disciplines."

Michael Flachmann
California State University, Bakersfield

"A teacher, whether by accident or design is more to students than a content expert. The teacher is a model of all that it means to be a scholar. The teacher is also a model of what it means to be a thinking person. We teach not only what we know but what we are."

Marilla Svinicki
University of Texas at Austin

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as teachers may polarize rather than expand their perspectives.

Furthermore, since Lead Graduate Teachers occupy the most departmentally influential graduate positions, the GTP plans to ask all Lead Graduate Teachers to formulate their own discipline-specific diversity plans. The Leads will also be asked to share those plans with their fellow graduate teachers. In addition, Leads will hold two multicultural workshops per academic year related to multicultural issues within their disciplines.

Along with these projects to promote an understanding of multi-ethnic perspectives and a more inviting classroom climate, the GTP will be conducting a survey. The three-part survey, performed over a period of six years, will address minority graduate teachers' concerns, perceptions of campus climate, and academic experiences. We plan to share the results of our study with other departments and administrators to facilitate cooperation and to come up with plans for allaying some of the isolation inherent in these professional students' experiences at CU-Boulder.

In conjunction with the survey, under the direction of Dr. Laura Border, the GTP will create an informal forum for peer grouping to give minority instructors and new instructors, visible and personal support. Experienced TAs and GPTIs who wish to participate in the program will be able to enroll prior to and during the Fall Intensive in August. Beginning graduate teachers who are interested in obtaining a peer mentor will pair up with the more experienced graduate student volunteers. It is hoped that this system (already in

place at predominantly white campuses such as Dartmouth) will alleviate some of the stress facing minority and other beginning graduate students and instructors. At the very least it should open a space for more expansive discussions on campus climate and standards.

Also, Keasley is encouraging graduate teachers to move away from the lecture mode and to find a more balanced, holistic approach to teaching. As ULC writing teachers instruct their bright, young, multicultural contributors to *Belonging*, we must all ask our students to revise their ideas and their writings over and over again, so that we may begin to understand not only who they are, but also what their potential contribution to society may one day be. As well as listening to our multicultural students, we need to take a closer look. As Keasley has so eloquently stated, "My colleagues have to see the faces of people of color beautifully displayed with all of their enigmatic grace." By offering teachers and students alike the tools and support necessary to change our campus complexion, the GTP looks forward to helping frame a very special portrait — that of a diverse and colorful body of students and scholars. Ω

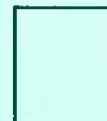
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