

Professional Book Review

Garcia, J. E., & Hoelscher, K. J. (2008). *Managing Diversity Flashpoints in Higher Education*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers. 160 pp., ISBN: 978-027598904 (hc) \$49.95.

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Supported by the American Council on Education (ACE), the authors of *Managing Diversity Flashpoints in Higher Education* bring together their research, teaching, administrative, and leadership experience to deliver timely suggestions for individuals working with college and university populations. Specifically, the text is designed to help college and university faculty members, staff persons, and administrators develop and implement effective strategies for addressing diversity-related issues and occurrences on their campuses. These suggestions are founded on the premise that the audience for this work, namely higher education faculty members, staff persons, and administrators, have not been trained to understand the psycho-social effects that difficult diversity situations have on their entire campus communities. Garcia and Hoelscher state that, while there is emotional support for taking action related to difficult diversity situations, either inappropriate or ineffective action is often attempted.

The authors add to the existing literature by educating readers on the current diversity trends as related to higher education. They clearly define diversity in language that encompasses race, ethnicity, nationality, gender and gender identity, ability, economic status, sexual preference, lifestyle choices, and any of the other points at which individuals can identify difference. These “identity differences” are described using vignettes to establish their context within the higher education environment in both potentially negative and positive ways. Garcia and Hoelscher are intentional in their use of the term “diversity flashpoints” to describe difficult diversity situations that, when ignored or inappropriately attended to, can become explosive and interfere with teaching and learning. They provide clear examples of individuals who have experienced identity challenges and describe higher education institutions that have been recognized for their commitment to improving the climate as related to diversity on their campuses.

Rather than simply presenting a series of sample vignettes followed by campus success stories, the authors provide chapters on learning and communication designed to encourage the reader to examine his/her own level of skill development, motivation, and confidence when dealing with uncomfortable, difficult, or challenging identity situations. These chapters set the stage for the ones that follow, which assist the reader in understanding flashpoint situations and applying the understanding to his/her own campus environment. The “Going Local” chapter presents clear instructions to the reader on how to gather vignettes from his/her campus community, how to identify

appropriate sources for vignettes (for example, the authors distinguish between working with people who are trusted by students versus contacting individuals who discount or distort information shared by students), how to conduct interviews, and finally how to categorize the collected data and develop locally-based scenarios that can be used within the reader's higher education community for diversity flashpoint professional development. The final chapter of the book prepares the reader for the potential obstacles that may develop when a professional development series on diversity flashpoints is introduced to the campus. Garcia and Hoelscher confirm what they suggest early in the text: that faculty members, staff persons, and administrators most often have a desire to address or "fix" identity-related problem situations on their campuses but are unskilled at recognizing or responding when the particular identity of the person involved is different than their own. The authors reiterate the motivation for their work and frame it within a model of awareness that they then use to encourage the reader toward action. They identify five principles for building a community that operates across identity differences. Finally the text is closed with a section on developing linkages across campus between administrators and other members of institutional leadership, between staff and faculty members, and between these groups and the student population.

Garcia and Hoelscher complete the book by providing materials that can be used for professional development related to diversity flashpoints. The appendixes concisely bring together the information from all eight chapters in practical application form. A workshop timeline, objectives, and purposes are provided, along with 24 vignettes gathered and prepared by the authors, teaching notes, and discussion questions that are to be used in connection with the reader's locally-produced examples of difficult identity situations. Handouts for small group discussions and workshop feedback forms are also provided. *Managing Diversity Flashpoints in Higher Education* is appropriate for use at both public and private colleges and universities that are at the beginning of their journey toward identity equity as well as those institutions that have an emerging or established plan for addressing difficult diversity and identity issues. The concepts, data collection, and research discussions are presented in language that is understandable to readers at all levels of higher education practice. Further, these concepts can be implemented by members of campus communities serving in capacities that range from those in Equal Opportunity or TRIO offices, campus ministry offices, faculty chairpersons and department heads, members of diversity leadership, as well as others who may not traditionally work with or identify themselves as working with student, faculty, or staff identity issues.