

**Miami University**  
**STRIVE: A Vision for Academic Excellence Through Inclusion**  
**Action Plan**  
September 2003

**Introduction**

In April 2003, Provost Ronald A. Crutcher invited a team of five Miami University faculty and staff members to attend the Association for American Colleges and University's third annual "Greater Expectations" institute in Denver, Colorado. The team consisted of

Yildirim Dilek (Geology);  
Carolyn Haynes (team leader, Honors, School of Interdisciplinary Studies);  
Rodrigo Lazo (English);  
Peter Magolda (Educational Leadership); and  
Denny Roberts (Student Affairs).

The AAC&U institute provided teams the opportunity to create an action plan designed to address a particular issue or problem existing on its campus. Under the advisement of Dr. Richard Nault, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Dr. Mary Woodworth, Senior Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, the Miami team elected to work on the issue of how to advance academic excellence through a broadly construed conception of diversity.

This report briefly describes the current Miami University context, proposes a vision for the University, recommends a process for transformation, and identifies a set of action steps.

**Our Context: Existing Strengths and Challenges**

In 2000, President James A. Garland presented his "First in 2009" plan that calls for Miami University to transform its existing and historic strengths in order to accommodate the realities of a complex new century. In addition to setting high expectations for learning, Miami's strengths include: a highly capable student body, close interaction between students and faculty, faculty excellence in scholarship and teaching, a synergy between graduate and undergraduate programs, and rich and challenging learning experiences that occur inside and outside the classroom. Through its emphasis on liberal education and intellectual inquiry, the University aims to cultivate in its students a passion for learning and the ability to think critically, understand cultural, social and historical contexts, collaborate with others similar to and different from themselves, and reflect and act on the most critical issues and problems of U.S. society and the world.

Despite these strengths, Miami has room for improvement, particularly in the area of inclusion. Not only has the institution historically encountered difficulty enrolling minority and international students and recruiting minority, international and women faculty, but a 2001 campus climate survey conducted by University of Michigan's Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education (CSHPE) suggests that minority as well as gay and lesbian groups do not always feel valued by the larger University community and are not likely to recommend that their family members or friends attend Miami.

In addition to the challenges specifically related to the issue of inclusion, Miami faces some organizational challenges which are important to consider when devising an action plan. Financial constraints in recent years have caused departments and other units to increase workload with minimal increases in fiscal support. Several recent and ongoing all-university

initiatives ( e.g., accreditation, benchmarking, liberal education reform, first-year experience) have required time and energy from numerous faculty and staff. Moreover, a number of persistent tensions exist between: teaching and scholarship, liberal education and professional or specialized disciplinary education; “town” and “gown” relations, and the Oxford and regional campuses.

Despite these challenges, there are reasons for considerable optimism. The CSHPE climate survey as well as findings from the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) suggest that the vast majority of Miami faculty, staff and students have identified inclusion as a desirable and important goal for our institution and that the University has improved the campus climate for diversity during the past ten years. For example, in 1997, Miami created a comprehensive plan for institutional diversity that included an impressive array of curricular, co-curricular, faculty and staff development, recruitment and retention, and assessment initiatives. More recently, the University opened a Center for American and World Cultures (CAWC) and hired a new director, created a highly active University Multicultural Council (UMC), invited Edgar Beckham from AAC&U to serve as a long-term diversity consultant, instituted a new “U.S. Cultures” curricular requirement, appointed a coordinator for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered issues, and sponsored numerous lectures, programs, and activities relating to inclusion. Thus, a commitment to diversity as well as many “pockets” of high-quality learning experiences and opportunities centering on diversity already exist on our campuses.

Such a wide array of activities and initiatives underscore the commitment of the Miami community to inclusion. However, absent from this impressive array of efforts is a means of coordinating or unifying them and of aligning them carefully with the “First in 2009” goals.

### **Action Plan: “STRIVE” for Academic Excellence Through Inclusion**

We propose that Miami University commit and align its educational mission to the simple but powerful notion that inclusion leads to academic excellence. By inclusion, we have in mind the ability to:

- **A**ttract, support and value individuals with diverse beliefs and backgrounds;
- **B**uild an intercultural community that fosters public, democratic discourse;
- **C**ultivate reflective and engaged global citizens (adapted from Tatum 2000).

Research affirms the importance of placing inclusion as the centerpiece of education (Hurtado 1999). Social psychologist Pat Gurin concluded that students who encounter the most diversity inside and outside the classroom show the deepest engagement in active thinking processes, growth in intellectual engagement and motivation and development of academic skills (1999). The recent Supreme Court decision on the University of Michigan’s admission plan to create a diverse learning environment suggests that this view is widely held not only by universities but also by the military and business world.

By increasing and deepening inclusion on Miami’s campuses, we will advance the eight goals outlined in President Garland’s “First in 2009” plan. In addition, we believe that a unifying vision of greater inclusion will help us to create coherence in our diversity efforts. We have generated a unifying vision using the acronym, “STRIVE.” The word, “strive,” has two major connotations which suit our present purposes well. It means “to exert much effort or energy” as well as “to struggle and contend.” Through this unifying vision, we hope the entire

University will adopt a commitment to academic excellence through inclusion, and we hope that it will also be willing to contend with controversial and complicated issues relating to inclusion in a healthy spirit of debate and problem-solving. The “STRIVE” vision encompasses the goals of the First in 2009 plan and promotes inclusion as the means to academic excellence.

**S**tudents, faculty and staff who are highly qualified, diverse and capable of leadership in a global community (Goals 1 and 5)—Breadth of experience and perspective enhances the learning for all.

**T**eaching that promotes deep learning (Goal 3)—Interdisciplinary, experiential, technology- and inquiry-based, service- and collaborative learning, team-taught, writing-intensive courses and a challenging co-curriculum deepen the learning for all students.

**R**esources and support for faculty and staff (Goals 2, 6 and 7)—Faculty and staff will expand their ability to reach a greater diversity of learners through increased resources and support (revenue, enhanced facilities and professional development).

**I**nclusive community and campus life (Goals 4 and 5)—Various groups working to create a climate of inclusion will challenge our students to think in new ways and foster a shared commitment to social responsibility.

**V**alues that promote intercultural understanding and a healthy public, democratic discourse (Goals 3 and 4).

**E**valuation and assessment in the form of best practices and benchmarking (Goal 8)—Data can help us to continually improve the ways that we enrich the learning communities on our four campuses.

We recognize that achieving full inclusion and academic excellence on our campuses is ambitious. Not only will this vision necessitate ample fiscal resources, but it will also demand considerable perseverance, time, creativity as well as broad-ranging input and collaboration to address it fully. Moreover, it is a goal which will never be fully attained but must be an ongoing concern for every unit at our University.

### **Action Process**

Miami has typically adopted the model of change that entails creating a structure (e.g., committee or task force) and asking people to join and/or support the centralized coordinating body. Often these governing bodies sponsor ready-made programs for community members to attend or set initiatives for units on campus to adopt. In our proposed action process we purposefully deviated from this implementation strategy. Instead, we assert that individuals and groups on our campuses, building on the unifying “STRIVE” vision, can generate their own forms of change by using existing structures or tapping into their own creative expertise. In short, we propose a “grass-roots” model of change that is unified through a common vision and sustained through support from central administrators as well as better communication and coordination with other units. Our hope is to broaden the commitment to inclusion beyond the

usual partners and deepen the existing inclusion efforts through a coherent vision of academic excellence through inclusion. Toward that end, we will follow these process principles:

1. Identify potential stakeholders, allies and partners across our campuses and community.
2. Use informal conversations to involve as many members of our community as we can in the ongoing process of transforming our campuses. At these conversation sessions, we will invite them to respond and shape the “STRIVE” vision and to generate ideas for how they might be able to further that vision.
3. Build on the creative and smart ideas, expertise and current and potential programs that reside in our current faculty, staff and student body by providing them with resources and other forms of support. We would like to use a pool of “STRIVE” funds to provide support to faculty, staff and students with ideas for making lasting change that will promote the common good.
4. As much as possible, encourage individuals seeking to participate in the STRIVE vision to use and enhance existing structures to effect change.
5. Purposefully coordinate the various, discrete programs and services related to inclusion. Build relationships, rather than new committees and structures.
6. Ensure that adequate support and rewards for all changes are in place.
7. Use ongoing assessment efforts for continual improvement.

### Action Strategies

When?	What?	By Whom?
July 3, 2003	Share action plan with University Multicultural Steering Committee; seek feedback.	Carolyn Haynes
September 1, 2003	Create draft of vision statement about inclusion at Miami as well as a call for proposals for greater inclusion. Generate additional material for use in campus-wide small-group conversations.	Greater Expectations Team
September 10, 2003	Coordinating Council meets. They are introduced to the new STRIVE vision statement and call for proposals. They offer feedback, participate in a conversation session and identify key individuals and groups for future small-group conversations which they will lead.	Led by Carolyn Haynes and Greater Expectations Team
September-November	Conversation sessions held with key individuals and groups. Short summaries of conversation sessions due by November 1. Open Forum on University of Michigan case, September-October. Open forum on socioeconomic status in November. CC meets on November 12, shares initial findings of conversation sessions and generates ideas for cross-departmental conversations, connections and socializing.	2009 Coordinating Council, Student Ambassadors (conversations)  Univ. Multicultural Council, CAWC (open forums)  2009 CC
December	Progress reports of relevant committees submitted to CC Chair on December 8.	CC, UMC steering committees (reports)

	GLBT working paper completed. Mid-year planning retreat held in which summaries, reports are shared and feedback sought.	UMC (paper) COAD/CC/UMC (retreat)
January 2004	STRIVE proposals reviewed by January 15.	Faculty, staff; received by CC, UMC
February-March 2004	Open forum on GLBT issues in February.  Responses to STRIVE proposers sent by end of March.	UMC, CAWC (forum)  UMC, CC (review)
April –May 2004	Progress reports submitted to 2009 Chair. Planning retreat held on May 5	CC, COAD, UMC
June 2004	Annual First in 2009 update to Board of Trustees on June 25	CC, UMC Chairs

## Assessment

We will use existing national and local data to assess and monitor the progress made on campus-wide inclusion and to formulate ideas for improvement. Two instruments (one national and one local) will serve as the foundation for our ongoing assessment: the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) as well as a survey (known as “Dashboard Indicators of Diversity”) created and administered by Miami’s University Multicultural Council. The former survey centers on students, and the latter focuses on students, faculty and staff. Our hope is that the University will experience an increase in the amount of students, faculty and staff taking part in diversity opportunities, feeling a greater sense of belonging in our community, and engaging in deeper learning experiences.

At the end of the first year, the University Multicultural Council, the Council of Academic Deans and the First in 2009 Coordinating Council will participate in a half-day retreat to review the survey findings as well as the summaries of all committee work (including conversation sessions) and to create additional plans for greater inclusion.

## Works Cited

- Gurin, P. 1999. Expert report of Patricia Gurin. In, *The compelling need for diversity in higher education*, presented in *Gratz, et al v. Bollinger, et al. and Grutter, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.* Washington, DC: Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering.
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- Tatum, B. D. 2000. The ABC approach to creating climates of engagement on diverse campuses. *Liberal Education*. 86 (4): 23-29.