

BUZZWORDS

Thoughts on SUIQ from

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Just as SUIQ has evolved, so has this publication. While the focus remains on continuous improvement, the areas we must deal with to bring about that improvement have broadened.

Thus, I'm pleased to be able to make use of *BuzzWords* as a vehicle to talk about an issue that is not only high on my personal agenda, but also a key component of true academic excellence.

The issue is diversity. And, though I know there are many ways people define themselves—by gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, and so on—I'm concentrating here on the areas of race and ethnicity. Certainly these are sensitive areas—often ones we prefer not to discuss for fear of offending others. But I believe we must if we mean to improve the University and its capacity to prepare leaders for tomorrow. We must if we are to be enriched by the diversity of this community or impoverished because we refuse to appreciate the contributions made by all members of this learning environment.

Here, then, is my position on ways we can deal with race and ethnicity for mutual benefit. I start with four principles ranked in order of the ease with which improvements can be achieved. While the focus of this issue is on race and ethnicity, these four principles are easily applied to any of the other ways in which our diversity is expressed.

1. Discrimination

This is the act of providing or withholding goods or services based on the race or ethnic origin of the recipient. Sadly, it is woven into the history of this country. Today, though, national and state laws prohibit this practice. Here at SU, discrimination of this type is intolerable and is barred through institutional policy as expressed in a number of ways, including the statement of student rights and responsibilities printed in the *Student Handbook*: "Students have the right not to be discriminated against by any agent or organization of Syracuse University for reasons of age, creed, ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, marital status, political or social affiliation, race, religion, or sexual orientation." Yet, I know our laws and policies do not always protect those among us from discrimination through such cowardly acts as graffiti or hate mail sent through the Internet. We must, however, make every effort to eradicate discrimination.

2. Institutional Barriers

This often is a well-intentioned practice that has consequences that don't support diversity. For example, SU has long housed new students according to their building preferences. This method has resulted in both a real and perceived segregation by race in our residence halls. That is why Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of Student Relations Barry L. Wells and his staff are developing a new policy that allows for random housing assignments. Thus our first-year students will have the advantage of experiencing a living and learning environment that exemplifies the value the institution places on diversity. This is just one example of an institutional barrier; all of us should be on the lookout for similar barriers and work toward removing them in the future.

3. Tolerance

This is the ability to respect the differences and similarities of those with whom we work and live. A sign of an educated person is his or her ability to "do business" with anyone anytime. I don't mean that educated people must always like the people they work with—that's an impossible goal. But they must be able to carry on the business at hand with civility and respect for all parties. We must practice tolerance and model it for our students.

4. Appreciation

This is the highest level, one at which we sincerely appreciate the uniqueness of each person with whom we work and live. Rarely achieved in the fullest sense, appreciation is the capacity to find value in everyone and capitalize on it for the common good. Tolerance evolves into appreciation through repeated encounters with diverse groups of people, particularly those which require us to work together to accomplish tasks or reach consensus. The more often we can come together through activities ranging from sports to the arts to community service as well as through our daily work, the greater the chance we can achieve this highest level of diversity.

Of course, I know this is an imperfect world inhabited by billions of imperfect people. That's not an excuse, though, to avoid our responsibilities for diversity: eliminating discrimination, removing institutional barriers, reaching toward tolerance, and aiming for appreciation.

The next four issues of *BuzzWords* will deal with each of these principles separately.

The Issue Is Diversity