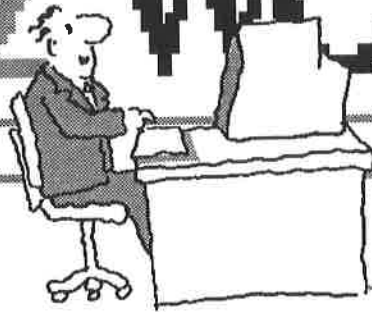


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# BUZZWORDS

Thoughts on SUIQ from

Chancellor Kenneth A. Shaw



For the third in this series of *BuzzWords* on diversity, I turn to the topic of institutional barriers. These are official policies, procedures, or actions with unintended consequences that limit diversity on campus. They often become so much a part of daily operations that we don't stop to analyze them or discover ways to change them.

For example, it is a fact that a higher percentage of first-year students in the Brewster-Boland residence hall complex are people of color (22 percent in fall 1999) than on the "Mount" in Flint and Day halls (9 percent). The rest of the residence halls are somewhere in between. And since people of color represent 17 percent of the new class, you can see that this is an uneven distribution. This has been a topic of discussion and debate since I arrived on campus in 1991. Rumors surface from time to time hinting that there is an administrative effort to steer new students of color into one hall or another.

That's not true.

But if there is no official plan, how does this unevenness in the residence halls happen?

It's a result of a University policy allowing new students to choose their residence halls. It has been assumed that the uneven distribution came from the first-come, first-served practice that enabled students making early deposits for room and board to have first choice. Thus, students who needed significant financial assistance had to wait longer than others to make a deposit and had fewer opportunities to get their first choice. And, since students of color have a greater representation among those needing aid, the

reasoning goes, they would tend to miss out.

We made an effort to address this assumption by extending the time limit for making both a deposit and a choice. But the uneven distribution issue remained. We discovered that this was a result of word-of-mouth influences on student choices. In other words, current students or parents of current students told incoming students where the "best" residence halls were. White people tended to influence those like them; people of color did the same.

Our system of choice, then, was the institutional barrier. Thus, in the interest of providing our new students with the opportunity to live and work with a variety of people, we have instituted a change. Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Student Relations Barry L. Wells and his staff have devised a method of random assignment to the residence halls that, combined with a number of new theme-floor living/learning situations, we

believe will more fully support the value of diversity. This new policy may cause some conflict at first, but we are determined to stay the course.

This is one institutional barrier and one approach. There are others. Some will be amenable to quick change; others will require time and careful planning. Still others cannot be removed to everyone's satisfaction. Nevertheless, we are duty bound to uncover such barriers and give them due attention. We begin by being willing to talk about barriers. Do you know of some? Please let me know by writing to me or by sending an e-mail via [kelee@syr.edu](mailto:kelee@syr.edu).

In the next *BuzzWords*, I'll talk about tolerance.

## Institutional Barriers

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