The Benefits of Divided Community:

A Perspective on Diversity versus Integration at Milligan College

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Abstract

Diversity is a complicated issue. At Milligan College in East Tennessee, relatively new diversity initiatives are often misinterpreted or misrepresented, causing unnecessary tensions. This paper is an attempt to provide a helpful perspective on diversity issues at Milligan. Most prevalently, I defend the minority social groups sometimes seen as exclusive on campus. I explain that these groups are a form of support for their members, and are not truly exclusive. I also relay sociological theories and studies on diversity and community to help provide a better understanding of how diversity should function on a small, protestant college campus.

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It is easy to idealize diversity. It is a highly complex and multifaceted idea, yet it is so ingrained into conversations about politics and education that the idea often is reduced to mean merely integration. Popular children's television shows from the 90's such as *Power Rangers* and *The Magic School Bus* instill this view by depicting a group where each member represents a different ethnicity. While these attempts at celebrating diverse friendships are laudable, they are also highly romanticized. However, especially on the campuses of colleges and universities, this romanticized version of diversity is perpetuated. Multiethnic photos litter the pages of brochures and mailing packages. Many professors, textbooks, and lectures present social equality and tolerance as if they were the easiest, most natural things on earth. This simply is not true. The steely reality is that diversity causes tension. Human nature is to stratify, not unite. Seeing some group as 'other' to oneself is the cause of problems at every level of society - from political wars to junior high drama. This is precisely why diversity within academic settings, is so desirable. It teaches people how to relate to those who are different from themselves. Most universities generally encourage diversity as a crucial part of education.

Milligan College is no exception. Like most institutions of higher education, Milligan recognizes that a diverse campus will better prepare students for life after graduation; Milligan also cites its central protestant faith as a reason to diversify. In the past decade, the school has grown significantly more diverse in no small part due to the creation of the Betty Goah Scholarship, which provides substantial financial aid to nearly eighty students each year who will promote diversity and cultural understanding on campus. With this

growth comes stratification. Just as sports teams or clubs create close-knit groups within the larger Milligan community, minority students also develop close ties, which are sometimes interpreted as cliques. From this phenomenon springs one of the most prevalent frustrations with diversity programs at a university setting. Thinking that diversity and integration are synonymous, many, even several social scientists, feel that these 'cliques' are a representation of failure to truly diversify. They believe that stratification hinders the potential benefits of diversity. I contend that these social circles are necessary in order to fulfill the academic purposes of diversity. This is especially true in communities like Milligan College, where a common faith presents a unifying banner under which diversity can flourish. In small, faith based, academic communities, social stratification among varied cultural groups will allow members to feel secure and supported in their differences, which can lead to a more healthily diverse campus atmosphere.

Why Diversity?

Advocating for diversity in colleges and universities is not merely an idealistic venture; there are practical benefits to having a culturally diverse campus. Ukpokodu's 2010 study on sustainable diversity curriculums in higher education points out that there is an increasing number of minority students who plan on attending college. From this perspective, it is a smart business decision on the part of universities to attract more minority students (p. 27). But a diverse campus atmosphere has proven to benefit students as well. In addition to the idealistic goal of improving inter-racial ties, researchers have linked diversity to increased student confidence both academically and socially (Yancey, 2010, p. 18-19). Ukpokodu (2010) also argues that a background in diversity is greatly

beneficial to students upon entering the workforce. He sees diversity providing "a range of competencies, including cultural understandings, open-mindedness, higher-order thinking, and relational skills for negotiating and navigating diverse cultural, social, and political contexts" (p. 27). Therefore, if colleges are to prepare students to deal with situations involving multiple races and cultures, the focus of diversity initiatives should first indeed be to diversify the campus, but it cannot stop there.

An ethnically diverse campus, looking at strictly population, does not guarantee true "diversity." One particularly convincing article, found in the *Harvard Law Review*, is a legal analysis on the diversity policies of universities that use affirmative action in their admissions policies. These universities are typically larger state schools that would choose to admit students based on race in order to maintain the racial proportions they desired (Educational, 2010, p.577-578). The writers contend that universities should be legally obligated to form policies that create inter-racial interactions. The argument is based in the assumption that without coerced interaction among different cultural groups (races in particular), diversity falls short of its goals. The writers go so far as to claim that without integrative policies, diversity will have a negative impact on the students at a given university (p.584). The writers see that increased diversity also increases social tensions within a community, and studies have proven this true. Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston (2008) examined the effects of diversity on trust; they claim that, "ethnic and racial differences discourage the reliance on the behavior of one's neighbors, friends and colleagues, thereby reducing levels of interpersonal trust, the capacity for cooperation and support for collective action" (p. 59). In this light, universities should realize that merely admitting more minority students is not enough to make their institutions "diverse." Diversity, from

an educational perspective, requires a proactive approach from the administration to create an environment where diverse groups interact in a positive, formative way.

Diversity on college campuses is not always an easy goal to attain, however. In his book, *Neither Jew nor Gentile: Exploring Issues of Racial Diversity on Protestant College Campuses*, George Yancey (2010), outlines some of the reasons for this difficulty. He draws attention to many of the challenges minority students face that do not affect those in the majority, such as a lack of representation among the faculty, a feeling of estrangement among the students, and a risk of encountering racism on campus (p.19-20). Colleges and universities must make intentional strides to become more sensitive to their minority students' needs and create "a welcoming racial atmosphere for students of color" (Yancey, 2010, p.25). Yancey's challenge should be the ultimate goal of college diversity programming. If institutions of higher learning are to prepare students for a diverse world full of cultural tensions, they must make the campus a place where these tensions can be examined and dealt with in as safe and healthy an environment as they can provide.

University Models

By this time in the United States, most colleges and universities have implemented programs and initiatives to accommodate for a more diverse campus. Despite having a common goal, there is much discrepancy concerning the best way to achieve an environment that fosters diverse relations. Ukpokodu (2010), advocates for one type of diversity program called "curriculum transformation" implemented at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. This program focuses on creating a more culturally sensitive academic environment by drawing attention to minority voices in all of its classes, broadening its subject matter, and highlighting how cultural assumptions and biases come

about (p. 28).   Gavino, Eber, and Bell discuss the implementation of another type of diversity program in their 2010 study, the MCOD or Multicultural Organizational Development model. This model looks at diversity from more of a social justice angle. The goal in this model is to move in progressive stages toward the eradication of prejudice and oppression and create an equal environment for all students (para. 9). These two models demonstrate two distinct approaches to promoting diversity. The curriculum transformation model is institutional, attempting to promote diversity within the academic setting itself. MCOD is more environmental, attempting to create a more holistic atmosphere of diversity.

Milligan College and Diversity

Milligan College, in its diversity initiatives, leans more towards an environmental rather than institutional approach. The goals of the program focus heavily on student organizations and campus life as opposed to curriculum and administration. In fact, in a report outlining its 3-5 year goals, only one of its four main goals, "increase multiculturalism in the classroom," is institutionally geared. The other three, "increase diverse social interaction, increase the welcoming nature of our campus for students of ethnic/cultural diversity, and prepare students to engage a diverse world in a Christ-like manner" reveal that the diversity office sees itself as primarily as a component of student life and development (p.1). However, it does not follow the MCOD model either. While social justice and equality are considered important – one goal under "social interaction" involves "challeng[ing] ignorance and hostility regarding diversity" (p. 1) - the report's language is closer to that of community development as opposed to social justice. According to Ernesto Villarreal, the Director of Diversity Services at Milligan College, the

central theme of Milligan's goals concerning diversity is "building an appreciation of diversity on campus." In his mind, "appreciation" is much more than simply spreading awareness, but involves engaging Milligan's campus on every level in a comprehensive way. This is also evident in the outline and implementation of the Betty Goah Scholarship Program.

The Betty Goah Scholarship Program intends to increase diversity, but it is not a minority scholarship, strictly speaking. The point of the scholarship is to bring in students with diverse backgrounds and experiences who will intentionally involve themselves in campus and community life. The board that awards the scholarships does not interpret "diverse" as strictly "minority." While most of the students under the Goah scholarship are minority students, there are a few Caucasian Goah scholars who have had substantial experiences in foreign cultures or other experiences that the board feels qualifies them to be advocates of diversity on campus. In the same way, simply being from a minority background will not earn a student the Goah scholarship. According to Villarreal, "The Goah scholarship is looking for students who will be an asset to Milligan's campus by articulating their diverse experiences to the community." Goah scholars, during their time at Milligan, must complete community service hours, be involved in campus activities, and maintain certain academic standards. The entire scholarship is set up to further Milligan's diversity goals in a communal, relational way.

Of course, as can be expected from any new program, Milligan's diversity initiatives face many challenges, not the least of which is rooted in tension with the student body. Many students misunderstand the goals and intentions of the diversity office and Goah scholarship. In part, some of the student body sees the scholarship as merely a minority

scholarship. This, as I have shown, is not at all the intent or reality of the Goah scholarship.

Another tension comes from the communal nature of Milligan's diversity goals. Some

majority students feel that the Goah students are exclusive; they seem to group together

and create a separate entity from the rest of campus. Exclusivity would truly be a failure of

Milligan's goals concerning diversity. The tension here, however, lies in differing

fundamental understandings of how diversity works within a community context. Some

view integration as the only true measure of diversity, others have a more tempered,

multifaceted view. The clash between these views comes out at Milligan particularly

because there is such a strong community ideal on Milligan's campus.

Community and the Goah Scholarship

Community, specifically the hope for a unified community, is a priority among

Milligan's students and faculty. Since Milligan as a whole holds to a central protestant faith

and supports a commonality of beliefs, a common understanding of the term "community"

is essential in order to make a claim about diversity at Milligan. In order to better

understand communities and how they function best, McMillan (1996) developed a theory

called "Sense of Community." This theory defines a community by developing four

"elements" which establish the ways in which a community functions. The first element is

labeled spirit. Communities begin with a spirit of friendship or connection; members must

feel that they belong to the group. This group then develops trust, the second element, in

some authority system, some central body, figure, or guidelines that dictate the community

values and expected behaviors. The third element, trade, involves the expectation that

members will take part in a mutually beneficial give and take relationship. The fourth

element is art: the building of a community story or history that is maintained through

traditions and artistic expressions. The idea is that one fosters a sense, or feeling, of community by attending to and caring for these elements.

The problem felt with the Goah program should, then, be able to be articulated using the language of "Sense of Community." Any exclusive group isolates itself from give and take with the larger community, which means students are not engaging in trade, the third element. Most students choose freely whether or not to participate with the Milligan community in this way, but Goah scholars are given their scholarships with the expectation that they will engage their fellow students in precisely this manner. Where there is truly a problem of exclusion among Goahs, it should be dealt with. However, just because students form a close group, does not mean that the group is exclusive.

The Necessity of Groups

Unless they are miniscule, communities tend to subdivide off into small, closer-knit social groups. These groups are necessary for individual stability and growth. In her study on the nature of community within a diverse academic program, Johnson (2011) concludes that healthy academic environments must accommodate each student's need to express themselves without fear of shame. She later qualifies that the shame she is referring to is long-term and rooted in identity, not merely a fear of embarrassment at a silly mistake or bad grade. She argues that this kind of long-term shame inhibits the ability to respond to pressures effectively (p. 166). The opposite of this shame is a sense of belonging. An environment where students feel they belong, then, is an ideal environment for development and growth. Johnson sees belonging and growth linked as well, in her discussion of McMillan's element "trust" she says as much: "The result [of a trusting community] is an open space in which the students feel they can let down their defenses,

explore their own strengths and weaknesses, and negotiate the conditions they need to grow" (p. 158). Most people cannot "Let down their defenses" in a large group setting, they need a smaller, more intimate group. Such groups serve as a support system that allow members to engage the larger community with confidence.

These groups nearly always share common values and interests as well. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in order to establish the level of trust needed to open up within such a group (Stolle et. al., 2008, p. 58-59). Obviously, a shared racial or cultural background is not required for such a group to form, but it can be a starting place. After all, people want to communicate with those who understand them, especially when their experiences are markedly different from the majority of the community.

A Personal Comparison

In a small town in Central Java, Indonesia, another small, faith-based school is also concerned with issues of diversity and racial clustering. I attended Mountainview International Christian School (MICS), during the 2008-09 and 2009-10 academic years. The school was an English speaking elementary and high school for the children of businessmen and missionaries living in the area. During my time there, MICS was approximately 45 percent American and 40 percent Korean with the remainder from multiple other nationalities. My graduating class of 30 students represented 11 countries. In some ways, Mountainview's situation is nearly opposite of Milligan. Milligan is only beginning to diversify, while MICS functions with rather extreme diversity as an established norm. Despite this, both had similar problems with trying to create and maintain an environment that is both diverse and healthy. Mountianview was concerned with students grouping off based on ethnicity just like Milligan; in their case, subdivision

occurred particularly among the American and Korean students. However, teachers and administrators at MICS realized that these groups were not excluding one another. In the words of Laura Armstrong, the elementary principal at MICS, "the students still have a huge respect for one another and certainly understand one another's need to be with people who speak their own language and understand their own culture."

At MICS there seemed to be an intuitive understanding about why these groups occurred. This understanding is not present at Milligan and is the cause of unnecessary tension. At Mountainview, this understanding becomes easier to see because nearly every member of the community is an outsider. Very few of the students or faculty are Indonesian, so most of the school's population is estranged form the dominant culture of the area. When in an environment alien to one's own culture or background, one becomes more acutely aware of the innate need to be understood. Sometimes, when in the majority, it is easy to forget that need. To a similar degree, minority students at Milligan need to be a part of a group that understands and supports them. When Milligan sees that racial stratification is not an attempt at exclusion, but the building of a support system, then perhaps some of the defensiveness surrounding this issue will resolve.

Intergroup Contact

Just because Milligan exists with clustered racial groups does not mean that these groups are not influencing one another. Evidence suggests that racial or cultural groups as a whole can shape one another positively. Eller and Abrams, in their 2004 dual study on Anglo-French and Mexican-American contact, give a brief history of intergroup contact models, which have been studied and discussed for over fifty years. Intergroup contact is the study of how, within a specific context or location, distinct groups influence one

another as self-contained entities. Eller and Abrams explain many of the significant

advancements and changes in the theories, but the idea that remains fairly consistent is

that given certain conditions such racial groups will affect one another in a positive

manner. These conditions dictate that the members of each group are granted, "equal

status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and support of the

authorities" (p. 230). Milligan meets or strives to meet each of these categories, therefore

the distinct social groups of Milligan have great potential shape one another positively

much like the Biblical image of "iron sharpening iron." Eller and Abrams (2004) further

support intergroup contact as an effective means of spreading diversity in their discussion

of CIIM or Common Ingroup Identity Model. This model relies heavily on the ideal of

forming a "dual-identity." Communities form a dual-identity when groups within them hold

both separate group identities and a greater identity that unifies them all (p. 230). This is

already a reality at Milligan. Despite someone's race or major, cultural background or year

in school, students and faculty are all "Buffs." But more than this, Milligan is united under

belief in the figure of Jesus Christ. Since, then, Milligan has a common faith, which is the key

piece of its communal identity, members hold the "dual-identity" of Christian above any

segregator. Based on this discussion of intergroup contact theories, Milligan seems to be a

prime location for groups to interact in a beneficial way. But Milligan's interactions are not

limited to a group-on-group method of contact.

Individual Responsibility

These intergroup contact models never provide an excuse for segregation, but

typically provide a language for discussing diversity in communities that are too large for

personal contact to be practical. Milligan is a rather exceptional place when it comes to

issues of diversity and clustering simply because it is so small. When critics call for greater interaction among races in universities, they cite problems at large universities that do not affect Milligan, such as segregated dorms (Educational, 2010, p. 583). Larger universities must work harder at fostering interaction because it is possible to miss any intercultural interactions nearly on accident. At Milligan, students would have to go out of their way to avoid such interaction. They eat, study and live with one another every day, eight months a year. The community is already highly integrated just by being so small.

This does not mean Milligan has already arrived at some state of racial harmony, just that the campus is uniquely situated for such. Community and diversity are not naturally compatible ideas. Most studies do not show a positive correlation between diversity and communal trust – especially on the white majority members; however, in 2008 Stolle et. al. took this examination deeper to look at individual levels of trust in diverse communities. Their study showed that "individuals who regularly talk with their neighbors are less influenced by the racial and ethnic character of their surroundings than people who lack such social interaction" (p. 71). These findings suggest that problems created by diversity are more strongly felt by those with less diverse interaction. In other words, in the study, those who felt mistrust truly only had themselves to blame. It is difficult to trust a person you have never worked to know. In this light, it is up to each individual to benefit from diversity by being bold enough to go out and meet people who are not like themselves. Relationships are messy, and interactions with people of other backgrounds will cause problems of their own. But real relational problems are more easily solved than the specters created by fear. Fear causes isolation and stagnates growth, the only solution for this is to engage with others.

Fear is the real enemy of any community, diverse or not. Fear keeps people in ignorance by stopping them from trying to relate to one another. Diversity only causes more tension and mistrust because it adds another layer to the fear that is always present when forming a new relationship. Milligan is on the right track to creating an environment that encourages interaction and assuages fears. This is one of the purposes of the Goah program and the office of diversity services. In fact, whoever titled Ernesto Villarreal's position, Director of Diversity Services, made an astute insight into how Milligan ought to view diversity. Milligan as an institution has taken up its responsibility to diversify the campus, but it offers this diversity as a service, an opportunity for its students to interact with one another and gain new insights and skills. It does this with the hope that Milligan's community will, in the words of Ernesto, "reflect the diverse kingdom of God." But Milligan as an institution is not ultimately responsible for successful diversity and growth. It is the responsibility of each Milligan student to decide whether or not to engage. All students, whether they are Goah scholars or not, must realize that they carry the responsibility to make the potential Milligan has to be a truly diverse community a reality.

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