

## **Best Fitting Diversity**

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**One size does not fit all. I'm a big man, so I know this in a very personal way. When a t-shirt size is "one size fits all," I know that to be false because it won't fit me. Likewise, one size does not fit all issues, circumstances, organizations, or timeframes where diversity must be managed. That is why our struggles about how to manage diversity at NCSU have been struggles over best philosophy and model for enhancing diversity. Yet it is also important to understand that this is not a struggle unique to NCSU.**

**Last April I was in Ithaca, NY, at Cornell University, by invitation of the College of Human Ecology, to give the 2002 Flemma Kittrell Lecture. I was also there as NCSU's Vice Provost for Diversity and African American Affairs. So my itinerary of meetings was full. Each meeting was set up for the group to use me as a sounding board. Like other universities in our nation, Cornell is struggling to find the right model for managing diversity. During all the meetings I asked questions to diagnose the institution to base my suggestions for an appropriate diversity model for them. One must, you see, do situational diagnosis to develop a diversity model to best fit the particular organization.**

**When I became NCSU's Vice Provost and set out to create an agenda for diversity, I did diversity diagnosis. I looked at how NCSU had tried to manage diversity. Here was a major problem. In the past, responsibility was put on the shoulders of "one poor slob." This "one poor slob" model set up one person to "take**

care of those racial issues.” At a university this large and complex, everybody, Chancellor, Provost, Deans, unrealistically funneled their diversity “problems” through the “one poor slob.” This was a poor model because it allowed the core administration to abdicate responsibility for diversity because “that office” was handling “that racial stuff.” No surprise, then, that the “one poor slob” model led to internal segregation of diversity efforts.

With this working diagnosis, I set out to make our diversity efforts vine-like, reaching out into the university in four ways. One, diversity is not an all or none matter. It is not blacks versus whites, and it is not a choice of focusing on race or “the rest”; diversity is about race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation. Two, diversity is central to the core mission of the university. A diversity of people is what makes a diversity of opinions and viewpoints possible. To mature as a university, we must work to have a mix of people from as many different societal groups as are represented in our state and nation. Three, diversity is the responsibility of each unit of the university. Each administrative unit should develop a diversity agenda to fit its circumstances and show efforts to reach the goals of that agenda. Deans, the Provost, Department Heads, the Chancellor each have independent staffs to handle their different and independent responsibilities. Each should set up a team (not “one poor slob”) that keeps the diversity agenda on their table for discussion and action. Four, the engine of authentic diversity is dialogue. At NCSU, there has been silence on matters of diversity. “Just talk to the one poor slob,” has been the implied directive. I argued that to actively engage diversity, NCSU must move from silence to dialogue.

**I am no longer the Vice Provost for Diversity and African American Affairs. Even so these four branches of the vine of diversity should be nurtured at NCSU; a multiple group focus, diversity linked to the core mission, unit responsibility, diversity dialogue. So I challenge students, staff, and faculty to raise your voices to call and push for a model of diversity that keeps these four shoots of the vine as priorities for the diversity movement. Ask the Deans, Provost and Chancellor about their independent diversity management teams. And be sure to ask how their teams are shaping the diversity agenda to fit within their responsibilities to the university. Remember, fit matters, and one diversity size does not fit all.**