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Universities and Democratic Culture
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Societal Fault Lines and Democratic Community

We live in a time of paradoxes and contrasts that have considerable consequences for the health of our democratic community. Consider the following:

- As the demographic landscape of this country becomes less and less white, patterns of residential segregation have not lessened appreciably, and, according to data gathered by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, we are increasingly confronted in our cities with “apartheid public schools.”¹
- As the returns from education skyrocket in a knowledge economy so, too, does poverty increasingly constitute an obstacle to access, closing off the traditional route to upward social mobility in our country.
- As the destructive influence of ethnic and religious inter-cultural conflict bursts forth around the globe, we face ever more resistance at home to the peaceful integration of Islamic and other non-Western traditions, and see mounting inter-cultural tensions with Christians and Jews, splintering the traditional basis for an inclusive community.
- As the call for intellectual diversity as a foundation for democracy deepens, the public will for working through difference in civil dialogue weakens, reduced often to simplistic exercises in counting and balance.

¹ Erica Frankenberg, Chungmei Lee, Gary Orfield, “A Multiracial Society With Segregated Schools: Are We Losing the Dream?” The Civil Rights Project, Harvard University, <http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu>, 28.

In this context, higher education (private as well as public) has a critical—one might say, urgent—role to play as a public good. In many cases, college will be the *first* and *best* opportunity for young women and men (not to mention their faculty) to learn to affirm—rather than fear and privilege—difference, and to confront our common fates.

Universities and Building Democratic Culture

My comments today will focus on the tremendous importance of universities in shaping and keeping a democratic culture—starting on campus and spreading beyond.

Embedded in our nation’s founding documents—along with freedom, justice and the pursuit of happiness—are notions of freedom of speech, expression and association that seek to assure for every individual the benefits of participation in groups with like-minded others.

Yet, a hallmark of democratic culture is that difference can be respected and tolerated², and universities certainly have a special role to play in educating about difference and facilitating all kinds of vigorous *inter-group* exchanges.³

If universities are going to build democratic cultures that make the most of newly achieved access to opportunity for diverse students, faculty and staff, we will have to understand better than we do how to embrace the principles of healthy group dynamics.

An understanding of these principles is also critical to society if we are to open up our institutions (and the power within them and conferred by them) and transcend the destructive fault lines of our society, thereby building capacity for—and trust in—a democratic culture beyond the campus.⁴

² Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, edited by Henry Hardy. New York: Vintage Books, 1992, pp. 18-19.

³ Gurin, P., Nagda, R., and Lopez, G. (2004). The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship. *Journal of Social Issues*, 60(1), 17-34.

⁴ Gurin, P., Dey, E., Hurtado, S., & Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education: Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(3), 330-366. Also, Cantor, N. Higher education policy-making in the melting pot of stakeholder voices: The Michigan affirmative action cases. *IGPA Policy Forum*, 17(2), 2004.

Balancing Intra-Group and Inter-Group Commitments

Before considering some specific programmatic ways to build democratic culture on campus, I want to underscore a foundational assumption in my view of democratic culture. Democratic culture is built on the constructive co-existence (and absence of contradiction) between the affirmation of many groups and the necessity for healthy inter-group relations.

A strong democratic culture thrives on the strength and resilience of its many cultures and groups. And, as social psychologists have long noted, individuals also derive considerable personal well-being and strength from the feelings of social connection, belongingness and commitments to others with shared values and life experiences that characterize group life.⁵ Actively taking part in the valued tasks of one's group is a good predictor of health, productivity and happiness.⁶

Therefore, I would posit that democratic culture rests on the opportunities provided for individuals to identify with and derive affirmation from their own group commitments.

By the same token, it also strongly depends on the freedom to explore and cross boundaries of all kinds—intellectual, social and cultural.⁷

Therefore, when groups become insular and serve as barriers to exploration, then both individual and societal growth and resilience are thwarted. There is nothing more stultifying for individuals or institutions than insularity, and democratic culture thrives on openness. As Richard Florida noted, the “creative class” is attracted to communities built on openness.⁸

⁵ Brickman, P., & Coates, D. (1987). Commitment and mental health. In P. Brickman (Ed.), *Commitment, conflict, and caring* (pp.222-309). Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall. Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.

⁶ Cantor, N., & Sanderson, C. (1999). Life task participation and well-being: The importance of taking part in daily life. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, and N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology*(pp.230-243). New York: The Russell Sage Foundation. Also Sen, Amartya, *On Ethics & Economics*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994, 43-45, The distinction and interdependence of agency and well-being.

⁷ Cantor, N., Kimmelmeier, M., Basten, J., & Prentice, D. (2002). Life task pursuit in social groups: Balancing self exploration and social integration. In C. Morf & W. Mischel (Eds.), Special Issue, *Self and Identity*, 1, 177-184.

⁸ Florida, Richard. *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Of course, with openness sometimes comes conflict, and managing difference is a continual task of a healthy democracy. If we are to reap the real benefits of diversity, then we must be willing to tolerate difference, not sweep it under the rug. Therefore, attention must be paid to skillfully working through conflicts.

Empathy and Conflict

At the heart, then, of democratic culture and individual well-being is this delicate balance between strong group identification and vibrant inter-group exchange. And it is a delicate balance indeed. Psychologically, what makes our group identities so self-fulfilling—that is, the reinforcing nature of our shared values, opinions, experiences and aesthetics—is often what makes us unappreciative of other groups and resistant to seeing things from their perspectives. Without even realizing it, we become defensive, closing off or undermining constructive inter-group relations.

Let me give a brief example that happens to come from my experience at the University of Illinois, but that can and does happen in one way or another on every campus. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has an “Indian” mascot/symbol, Chief Illiniwek, who brings tears to the eyes of thousands of students, alums and friends as he dances at half-time, and tears to the eyes of countless other students, faculty, and friends who feel devalued and offended by the same dance/symbol.

The debate surrounding the Chief is fierce, seemingly endless, and sometimes brutally off-putting. Nothing seems to work in this debate.

Proponents of the Chief see no reason to distinguish their experience of the Chief—as uplifting and exciting and honoring something—from the experiences of those who perceive the Chief differently. And, more to the point, because the Chief, in their eyes, is not *intended* to be hurtful, they feel no need to analyze the impact it has on others.

What is that impact? It varies certainly from person to person, and proponents and opponents each point to their definitive source. But here is what one member of the American Indian Center in Chicago had to say when he came to campus: “We are not mascots. We are people. There’s a hurt there that people don’t feel or see. They’re falsifying our traditions. We don’t do this stuff for entertainment.”

What is fundamental to healthy inter-group relations (and therefore to democratic culture) is that we understand the gap between (honorable) intentions and (negative) impacts. And, just as important, that we each take responsibility for the *possibility* that others have an experience different from the one we cherish.

Supporters of the Chief are not evil people, they aren't unusual, and they don't even hold differing views from many of the opposition on other issues. In fact, there is nothing more perplexing and more commonplace in Illinois than the compartmentalization of attitudes about the Chief from individuals' other views. I met time and again staunch supporters of the Chief who also saw themselves as and even demonstrated themselves to be equally staunch activists on diversity. It just so happens that the Chief supporters grew up loving something that is very hurtful to some others, and they do not see why. Unfortunately, however, there is no one more righteous (on any and all sides) than a person with *good intentions* encouraged by like-minded others, and so this debate rages on, seemingly inoculated from any other ostensibly relevant questions of diversity and inter-group relations.

It is precisely the ubiquity of this experience that makes it so important. We must realize that even our best intentions may cause someone else's worst nightmares.

And, as good as we are at privileging our own intentions (over their impacts on others), we often fail miserably to acknowledge the "good intentions" of others when there are hurtful impacts on us. We expect the world to forgive our well-intentioned "mistakes," but we are rather unforgiving of others, especially those we fear or do not know.

These patterns of inter-group relations make it difficult to build democratic cultures in diverse settings. They constitute a "natural" set of defensive barriers that education must neutralize.

How then do we learn to lower the barriers, de-center from our own intentions and to gain empathy for others'?

Understanding Difference

As Pat Gurin has recently argued, the traditional approach of trying to mute inter-group differences and build over-arching common identities across boundaries is neither effective nor desirable.⁹ While the aim must still be to encourage perceptions of *common fate* and *interdependence* across groups, the path toward healthy inter-group relations cannot be built by denying difference.

Individuals, and the democratic cultures in which we hope to live, must feel affirmed in their own groups in order to begin to lower those defensive barriers and embrace inter-group exchange. It's hard to trust others without a secure "place" to which to return periodically. This is particularly true in a world in which the fault lines between groups have increased, and inter-group familiarity has continually eroded. When we don't live together, ignorance arises as another barrier to interaction.

The standard reasoning behind muting difference is that conflict is to be avoided at all costs, and focusing on difference tends to bring forth tension and conflict. But there must be another way, and the inter-group dialogue curriculum that Pat Gurin and her University of Michigan colleagues have pioneered is built on the assumption that intra-group affirmation and inter-group-appreciation can go hand in hand.

As I will discuss in a bit more detail later, the inter-group dialogue addresses group differences not in debate, with winners and losers, but in a conversation that is revelatory for everyone involved.

The inter-group dialogue process brings us back to the intertwining of empathy and conflict, and to finding ways to tolerate both. For example, one of the thorniest aspects of inter-group dialogue is getting people to acknowledge that the world is not a level playing field—in fact, that it is un-level on many dimensions. Those discussions are essential to building genuine empathy of mind for (out) groups, but they raise defensiveness from (in) groups.

⁹ Patricia Gurin, *Educational Benefits of Intergroup Dialogue, unpublished grant proposal*, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, August 2004.

The answer is not to pretend that we live in a group-less, color-blind or equitable society, but rather to find a way for everyone to express their resentments while acknowledging that others also have vulnerabilities. The basis for conflict, if handled well, can become the path toward empathy. Regardless of how hard this is to accomplish in a world as divided as ours, I do not see a path toward empathy that does not air conflicts, so all can learn about perceptions and experiences that otherwise remain hidden and/or defended against. Opportunities to build these “difficult dialogues”¹⁰ across the divisive fault lines of our world are very rare, but universities can create them. In so doing, we can and should take a lesson from the cultural expressions that come into our daily lives through the arts—through movies, photography, theater, dance and all kinds of music.

A powerful example of the ability of the arts to create new dialogues and draw us in, across history and in the most unlikely places, was reported last spring in *The New York Times* by Jodi Wilgoren as she described a production of “King Lear” at the Racine Correctional Institution in Wisconsin.¹¹

The 17 actor-inmates, who were doing time for kidnapping, homicide, drug dealing and other crimes, called themselves the Muddy Flower Theater Troup, acknowledging that beautiful things can grow in unlikely places.

One of the inmates, who played Lear’s counselor Kent expressed it this way: “There are no walls now. I’m in medieval England.” Although the prisoners could not use swords and performed in a large room—not really a stage—they found their experience to be transforming. Some found themselves crying in front of others for the first time in their lives. In the prison yard they started calling each other Cornwall and Oswald and Goneril.

Universities are an ideal place for the arts to serve as the medium, not just the reflection, of inter-group dialogue. Art offers an escape from the silencing that tends to come in “normal” society, making it possible to face highly charged and even taboo subjects. And everyone has some “standing” in the “conversation” that ensues.

¹⁰ Ford Foundation call for proposals: “Difficult Dialogues Initiative: Promoting Pluralism and Academic Freedom on Campus,” July, 2005.

¹¹ Jodi Wilgoren, “In One Prison, Murder, Betrayal, and High Prose,” *The New York Times*, Friday, April 29, 2005, Section A, 16.

Somehow, we can confront even the most searing of inter-group and inter-cultural experiences with relatively little group defensiveness and more honesty in the context of the literary, visual, and performing arts. We accord more (human) standing to our “enemies” in the arts, exhibiting far more empathy of mind than is usually the case. We see the universality of vulnerabilities and of differences more clearly through the artistic lens and in so doing manage to affirm multiple groups and traditions.

Khalid Hosseini’s recent novel *The Kite Runner* is an outstanding example of the power of the story-teller to astonish us by putting his readers—and his own characters—in the shoes of others, even those they think they know. The novel tells the story of Amir, the son of a wealthy Pashtun businessman in modern Afghanistan, and Hassan, the son of his family’s Hazara servant. Both boys have lost their mothers at birth, and they play together almost like brothers, although Amir goes to school and Hassan does not. Amir takes the social distance between them for granted—until he opens one of his mother’s old books and is “stunned to find an entire chapter of Hazara history.”¹²

“In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had ‘quelled them with unspeakable violence.’ The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said that part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi’a. The book said a lot of things I didn’t know, things my teachers hadn’t mentioned. It also said some things I did know, like that people called Hazaras *mice-eating*, *flat-nosed*, *load-carrying donkeys*. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan.”¹³

The following week, when Amir shows the chapter to his teacher, “he skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. ‘That’s the one thing Shi’a people do well,’ he said, picking up his papers, ‘passing themselves as martyrs.’ He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi’a, like it was some kind of disease.”¹⁴ Although Amir remembers

¹² Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, New York: Riverhead Books, 2004, 9.

¹³ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid, 9-10.

this moment later in life, his new knowledge of history produces no change in his treatment of his friend Hassan.

The Kite Runner shows, in ways far more intimate than most journalistic accounts, how the ethos of a dominant culture can combine with ordinary emotions such as jealousy, fear or love to paralyze some people from intervening to stop acts of unspeakable cruelty, even when these people know or even care deeply about the victims.

Moreover, there are, as is often the case in our volatile world, multiple layers of inter-group hostilities in contemporary Afghanistan—with both the (oppressed) Hazara and the (dominant) Pashtun sharing a fierce enmity for the marauding Taliban. What *Kite Runner* therefore manages to do in the most pressing of ways is to complicate greatly the American's monolithic post 9/11 view of all Afghans as members of an (out)-group of potential terrorists. The novel allows us to enter the minds of people living in and battling each other in a world unknown to many of us, except in the most simplified and stereotyped of ways. Hosseini also give us an empathetic view of the lives of Afghan refugees in our own country, post-9/11, as they struggle not only with the destruction of their homeland and life as they knew it, but with our (homogenizing) out-group enmity toward them.

It is hard to imagine a clearer, more penetrating portrayal of the complexity of inter-group hostility and the difficulties that all peoples have in appreciating difference, finding common ground, and acknowledging enmities that divide and destroy peace for everyone. The novel is full of conflict living side by side with empathy, and the experience of reading it forces one to consider how to stretch empathy to reach across the blinding barriers of inter-group defenses.

How can we address this complexity, these fault lines, on our campuses? How can we develop the empathetic skills of our students and university community more broadly?

Building Democratic Cultures: Inter-Group Dialogues and Mentoring

There are two arenas of university life—inter-group dialogue curriculum and faculty mentoring programs—I believe serve as good illustrations of opportunities on campuses to build democratic culture. In each arena, there are opportunities to simultaneously affirm groups and encourage inter-group

exchange in ways that build trust. When this happens, the institution becomes more open and transparent, and participants, including those previously under-represented in the mainstream of university life, see opportunities for sharing power and leadership, thus spreading more inclusively the sense of ownership of the institution.

Inter-Group Dialogue Curriculum:

Not surprisingly, as universities become more diverse, pervasive inter-group fault lines in our society are reflected more and more on campuses, leading many people to wonder about the value of diversity if students self-segregate by class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and culture, anyway. Some even argue that the inter-group conflicts—ever-present just below the surface in our campus (and non-campus) communities—are harmfully exacerbated by emphasizing diversity.¹⁵

No one should be surprised to find these fault lines replicated, nor should we blame students if they want to hang out with others just like them. After all, students come to campus with very little experience of inter-group interaction. In this country, their neighborhoods and their schools tend to be clustered by religion, culture, class, race and ethnicity.¹⁶

Students from all kinds of backgrounds—majority and minority alike—feel some degree of vulnerability around others not just like them. And these perceived vulnerabilities and fears of difference are often hidden under expressions of inter-group conflict, tension and—occasionally—overt hostility.

As Claude Steele and his colleagues have elegantly demonstrated, these inter-group dynamics are not only disruptive to the atmosphere on campus, they also constitute barriers to student achievement.¹⁷

¹⁵ Nancy Cantor, op-ed in *Chicago Sun Times*, June 22, 2003, responding to Chetly Zarko, “The Evidence of Things Not Seen,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 16, 2003; Nat Hentoff, “Affirmative Action’s Discord,” a column that appeared May 28, 2003; and Arthur Levine and Jeanette Cureton, *When Hope and Fear Collide: A Portrait of Today’s College Students*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.

¹⁶ Derek V. Price and Jill K. Wohlford, “Equity in Educational Attainment; Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Inequality in the 50 States,” *Higher Education and the Color Line*, ed. Gary Orfield, Patricia Marin, and Catherine L. Horn. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2005, 65.

¹⁷ Expert Report of Claude M. Steele, *Gratz and Grutter*, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

As difficult as it may be to penetrate these inter-group dynamics, there is little that is more important to accomplish on our campuses today. Our mandate is to reap the full educational benefits of diversity and adequately prepare all students for living and working in a multi-cultural world, and to ensure that our minority students persevere.

To do this, we must do on campus what we rarely do outside—that is, build a democratic culture of healthy interaction within and across the many groups of our increasingly diverse communities. If we can do this, then, as Patricia Gurin frequently notes, diversity becomes an educational resource embedded throughout the institution, like books in a library or faculty of quality, benefiting not only students’ intellectual growth, but also better preparing them for citizenship.¹⁸

But we cannot hope to do this by ignoring the societal fault lines we find on our campuses. We must tackle them with at least as much effort as we routinely put into teaching theoretical physics or music composition. Building a healthy democratic campus culture is no less labor intensive, but also no less rewarding.

Gurin and her colleagues at Michigan, who have pioneered an inter-group relations curriculum that paves the way for trust between groups,¹⁹ are preparing for a ten-institution evaluation of its effectiveness in building democratic culture—a project which Syracuse is proud to join this fall.

The approach:

- adopts an explicitly inter-group focus by bringing together members of groups that rarely interact in meaningful ways or may even be at odds;
- acknowledges that these groups often occupy different positions in society, thereby uncovering patterns of structural inequality or cultural dominance that remain but often still go unnoticed; and

¹⁸ Patricia Gurin, *Educational Benefits of Intergroup Dialogue*, unpublished grant proposal, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, August 2004.

¹⁹ Thompson, M. C., Brett, T. G., & Behling, C. (2001). Educating for social justice: The program on intergroup relations, conflict, and community at the University of Michigan. In D. Schoem & S. Hurtado (Eds.), *Intergroup Dialogue: Deliberative Democracy in School, College, Community, and Workplace* (pp.99-114). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

- affords balance in representation of each group in the dialogue, so as to provide intra-group security and comfort as inter-group conflicts and differences are aired.

With this structure as the basic model, trained facilitators, who also benefit from the experience, can guide a *dialogue*—not a *debate*—in which participants are encouraged to explore similarities, differences and conflicts within and between groups.

The dialogues are supplemented with readings and reflections on structural inequalities and inter-cultural conflicts, both historical and contemporary. The goal is not to lay blame but to build empathy and understanding, including appreciation for vulnerabilities in the “dominant” group that frequently go unseen.

The goal of this form of dialogic thinking and interaction is to “normalize” conflict as part of life in a diverse society that can be managed with mutual respect and healthy interaction. Accordingly, the balancing of group representation is not an end in itself, intended to give each group an equal shot at persuasion, as seems to be the objective in recent public calls for an “Academic Bill of Rights” on campuses.²⁰ Instead, by affirming groups both individually and in relation to others, and seeing how much people differ even within a group, some of the monolithic thinking about groups breaks down and the ground is laid for building common cause.

At Syracuse, in addition to the structured course curriculum on race/ethnicity and gender as part of the Michigan consortium, we are also pursuing these inter-group dialogues in residence halls, in collaborations in local schools with the Inter-Religious Council of Central New York’s Community-Wide Dialogues on Race, through the work of our Program on Religion and Society in creating “difficult dialogues on religious pluralism,” in the context of our student-lead Team Against Bias (that arose some time ago after several bias incidents involving racism and homophobia), and we hope to extend support for dialogues on diversity each year for the next several years.²¹ There is much work to be done in building a democratic culture on campus and with our community through dialogue.

²⁰ Horowitz, David, “In Defense of Intellectual Diversity,” *The Chronicle Review*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Feb. 13, 2004.

²¹ For more information on Syracuse University’s inter-group dialogue programs contact: Gretchen Lopez, Rebecca Kantrowitz, or James Duah-Agyeman, Division of Student Affairs and Undergraduate Studies.

Faculty Mentoring Programs:

As we consider the landscape of inter-group relations and tensions for students on campuses today, it is also critical that we tackle similar issues for the faculty. Though the faculty and other leaders of our universities likely have more experience with diversity, they are certainly not immune to difficulties with the same fault lines that divide students. Frequently, though not always, differences fall out according to seniority, both professional and in terms of historical representation in the discipline.

Junior faculty, faculty of color, and women in under-represented fields feel relatively less secure, less embedded in the mainstream of departmental and university life. And just as this leads to group affiliations and some inter-group tensions for students, so, too, may it emerge in the faculty, though perhaps “disguised” as differences of opinion, lifestyle or scholarly preferences.

To make this concrete, consider the number of “debates” that we have all witnessed in which senior faculty (often quite distinguished) bemoan how junior faculty simply don’t appreciate excellence anymore. On the other side, many junior faculty feel that their senior colleagues do not fully appreciate (or perhaps fairly value) scholarship that crosses the line to practical engagement or that crosses disciplinary boundaries.

These conversations sometimes unfold in the debate rather than dialogue mode—with one side upholding standards and the other side perceiving the institution as unresponsive at best and run by dinosaurs at worst.

These debates in turn impede the integration of our newer faculty—new by seniority or access—into the mainstream of departmental and university life. And, the retention and development of these scholars is critical for the health of their disciplines and fields of study.²²

One solution could be changing the way we mentor junior faculty and staff. Traditionally, we emphasize the transmission of information within the established hierarchy of departmental life: a senior faculty member tells a

²² American Council on Education, Office of Women in Higher Education Report, “An Agenda for Excellence: Creating Flexibility in Tenure-Track Faculty Careers, February 2005.

junior colleague how best to run his or her career. This faculty member may also have some considerable role in evaluating that junior colleague's record.

From an instrumental perspective, this makes a great deal of sense. If the senior faculty member is conscientious, he or she can impart some very helpful "wisdom" about how things run and work in the institution—such as which committees to serve on and which to avoid, or how to get institutional research funds or teaching assistants.

However, this kind of mentoring is far from complete if we want to build a democratic culture in which at least part of the goal is to open up the system to new scrutiny from and engagement with junior colleagues with potentially alternative ways of leading a career and/or doing scholarship.²³

For example, departments are unlikely to figure out ways to support junior faculty doing interdisciplinary work or scholarship in collaboration with practitioners if the "received wisdom" of senior faculty prevails: that junior faculty who become "overly" involved in complicated interdisciplinary or activist scholarship jeopardize their quest for tenure.

It is extremely hard for any of us to appreciate that the way we did it might not work for others. In a one-on-one asymmetrical mentoring relationship, it is too easy for the powerful voice (of wisdom) to feel challenged, for the (powerless) voice (of naiveté) to feel vulnerable, and for both sides to feel under-appreciated—a recipe for inter-group conflict.

When this situation is matched with a role for the senior person in the evaluation of the junior person it is bound to exacerbate tensions and resentments from both parties. The senior mentor will then be prone to resolve the tension by de-valuing the junior person (and perhaps even generalizing to this "new generation"), and the junior person will not only feel unwelcome in the department, but he or she will likely perceive a no-win situation that may be immobilizing.

However, these pitfalls might well be overcome if we were to acknowledge structural inequalities from the start and redesign mentoring relationships to

²³ Julie Ellison, Director's Column, *Imagining America Newsletter*, Summer, 2004. Also, Cantor, N., "Valuing Public Scholarship," *The Presidency: The American Council on Education Magazine for Higher Education Leaders*, Spring, 2005, 35-37.

include groups and to take advantage of Gurin's recommendations for structuring "safe" dialogues, with:

- relatively balanced groups in terms of numbers of senior and junior faculty (and if possible a critical mass of junior faculty who are from backgrounds under-represented in the discipline or department);
- mentoring groups (rather than only one-one) that allow for intra-group consensus and affirmation, and inter-group differences (in perspectives, lifestyles, opinions) to emerge; and
- sufficient variability within each group so as to break down the notion that each group is monolithic (in opinions) and thereby serve as a basis for building appreciation of inter-group similarity and common cause.

Although some departments may consider themselves too small to constitute such groups, there is nothing to stop them from coming together to form mentoring groups. In fact, in light of the inter-disciplinary trends in many fields from the arts to the sciences, this may be especially useful. And what would be the benefits?

- The same instrumental passing on of advice could be achieved, but this time it might be received more as a revelation about how things have worked, than as a demand for conformity going forward.
- The consensus support coming to the junior faculty from sharing their experiences with other colleagues in similar positions may be very affirming.
- Defensive barriers on both sides may erode, especially if faculty evaluation is separated from the inter-group mentoring dialogues, building the basis for common cause.

The democratic culture built on intra-group affirmation and healthy inter-group exchange opens everyone up to healthy self-examination and constructive exploration. The university benefits from new voices and perspectives, and the newer entrants into the professoriate get more transparent access to the pathways to power and longevity in the institution.

Connecting Universities and Communities in Democratic Culture

In practical ways, universities are good places to build democratic cultures because the freedoms of the academy allow for the airing of difference and conflicts in relatively civil settings. This doesn't mean that universities are immune to societal disparities and divisions, but it does suggest that they allow for more than the usual experimentation with "difficult dialogues."

However, universities are also at risk of stultifying insularity and the self-righteousness it breeds if they do not open themselves up to—and look out at—the world beyond the campus.²⁴ Of course, building democratic culture between campus and community is no easier than it is on campus, although just as important.

In my view, for these efforts at engagement to be authentic, the issues and partnerships and dialogues should arise "organically" from the specific intellectual, cultural and historical landscape common to both campus and community. In other words, it works best when it "belongs" at least somewhat to the identity/culture of both "groups."

I made this argument when analyzing the success of the University of Michigan in waging its defense of affirmative action.²⁵ Defending diversity grew somewhat organically out of the historical and contemporary landscape of this great public institution. The University had a long and storied (if not always peaceful) history of activism around issues of race, inter-group dynamics, and social research. Its location near Detroit, a Northern icon in the struggle for civil rights and a contemporary reminder of the ills of White flight, provided authenticity to the urgency of its fight. As did the competitive concerns (for educating a diverse and culturally-competent workforce) on the part of the major industrial and labor organizations of this big-three dominated state. No wonder there was a surprisingly strong (though nowhere near uniform) appetite for taking on this nationally contentious issue in a protracted and expensive defense of affirmative action in college admissions.

²⁴ Cantor, N., & Schomberg, S. (March/April 2003). Poised between two worlds: The university as monastery and marketplace, *Educause Review*, 38(2), 12-21.

²⁵ Cantor, N. (2004). Introduction to: *Defending diversity affirmative action at the University of Michigan*. P. Gurin, J. Lehman, & E. Lewis (Eds. (pp.1-16). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

The same can be said for some of the best work that Syracuse University is pursuing today. Syracuse, New York, and its surrounding region have a historic legacy as an arena in the struggle for the rights of women, slaves and Native Americans.

As the author Charles C. Mann noted last month in the Fourth of July edition of *The New York Times*,²⁶ our region is the ancestral home of the Onondaga Nation and the capital of the historic Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which was “probably the greatest indigenous polity north of the Rio Grande in the two centuries before Columbus and definitely the greatest in the two centuries after.”

“Haudenosaunee” means “People of the Longhouse.”²⁷ Their alliance was governed by a constitution, the Great Law of Peace, which established the league’s Great Council, with 50 male religious-political leaders, each of whom represented the female-led clans of its member nations. According to ethnographer Lewis Henry Morgan, the Great Law sought to avoid the concentration of power in the Council as much as it gave it authority, and it also sought to prevent power from falling into the hands of any single individual.²⁸

As Mann observed in his Fourth of July opinion piece, the indigenous government was predicated on the consent of the governed and “compared to the despotisms that were the norm in Europe and Asia, the societies encountered by British colonists were a libertarian dream.” Many European settlers found in them a “deeply attractive vision of human possibility,” and such authors as Locke, Hume, Rousseau and Thomas Paine took from them many of their examples of liberty. Even the suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, who lived in the Finger Lakes region, were inspired by the Great Law’s legal protections to women.²⁹

Although Syracuse University was situated in the capital of this great and ancient confederacy, the university’s relations with the Haudenosaunee have largely been distant, with two memorable exceptions, one shameful and one proud. There was the never-forgotten moment in the late 19th century when

²⁶ Charles C. Mann, “The Founding Sachems,” op ed in *The New York Times*, July 4, 2005, A-13.

²⁷ The term “Iroquois,” by which most of us know this confederacy, was concocted by the French as an insult meaning “black snake.”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid

Syracuse University Chancellor Charles N. Sims chaired a state committee to eliminate New York State's "Indian Problem."

On the plus side we would put the accomplishments of Huston Smith, the Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion and Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at SU. Smith recently narrated a documentary on native struggles for religious freedom, "A Seat at the Table," in which he says that his 10 years at Syracuse "in the shade of the Onondaga" transformed his views of indigenous religions. This transformation occurred *after* a 55-year career in which he was considered one of the world's experts on comparative religions.

Also on the positive side of the ledger are 250 SU graduates who are indigenous, among them Robert Odawi Porter, a citizen of the Seneca Nation (Heron Clan), who earned his undergraduate degree from SU's College of Arts and Sciences. After graduating from Harvard Law School, he entered private practice, became the first attorney general of the Seneca Nation and the first chief justice of the Sac & Fox Nation of Missouri. He came to Syracuse as a professor of law and Dean's Research Scholar and became the founding director of our Center for Indigenous Law, Governance and Citizenship, a research-based law and policy institute focused on indigenous nations, their development and their interaction with the U.S. and Canadian governments.

With Porter's encouragement and help, we were able to persuade Sid Hill, the head of the historic Haudenosaunee confederacy, to speak last fall at my inauguration as Chancellor. He addressed this gathering in his native language. Just as important, he was accompanied in the academic procession by a number of the clan mothers.

In the spring, the university and the Onondaga appointed representatives to collaborate on a new, mutually beneficial and sustainable relationship, including full scholarships and expenses for indigenous freshmen admitted to SU while living in one of the Nations. We are committed to this relationship for the long term, and we hope for a wide range of collaborations that are organic not only in proximity and the history of our region, but also in our scholarly and educational interests, including our Religion and Society and Women's Studies programs, and such shared environmental interests as cleaning up Onondaga Lake and improving the urban eco-system of our region.

Authenticity—that is, committing to things that are organic to one’s group or institution or community—is, in my view, at the core of success in building democratic culture, on campus and with connected communities beyond. Such engagements have immediate credibility and potential for broader societal impact, lending support to the role of universities, private as well as public, as public goods.

Moving Closer; Crossing Boundaries

I began this discussion by noting the many, often paralyzing, fault lines that divide peoples in today’s world, keeping us socially and intellectually apart and stymieing access to opportunity and mobility for those who fall on the wrong side of one or other line. In an increasingly diverse world, we must recognize that groups will not go away, nor should they, as they provide not only the richness of a multi-cultural world but a healthy sense of place and affirmation for individuals.

By the same token, however, we must do the work to understand differences and foster trusting and open inter-group exchange, if we are to reap the full benefits of diversity. That is the work of building democratic culture.

In a very real sense, this work involves crossing those fault lines and moving together, rather than further apart. So, in addition to the programmatic efforts, like inter-group dialogue curriculum, faculty mentoring and campus-community collaborations that are so vital to building democratic culture, we also have to constantly be vigilant about the physical landscape of our activities—the places and spaces in which we do our work and the freedom we feel to cross boundaries and explore.

We have to ask in very concrete terms whether we are *moving together*. A large part of why the inter-group work is so hard is that most of us have precious little experience living and working and going to school together. That is why the Harvard Civil Rights Project has cemented so much of its analysis in explicating patterns of residential segregation, for example.³⁰ And, that is why Syracuse University, a campus quite literally poised on a hill and divided by Interstate 81 from the city’s quite remarkable cultural offerings and its resilient inner city neighborhoods, is investing heavily in property downtown for some of our best academic programs.

³⁰ *Higher Education and the Color Line*, ed. Gary Orfield, Patricia Marin, and Catherine L. Horn. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2005, 65.

We are renovating an old warehouse for programs in architecture, design and communications; we are building jointly with business and local and federal support, a “connective corridor” to move people and ideas up and down and around our city and campus. We are setting up entrepreneurship centers and a community geographer and education centers in the neighborhoods, especially in the South Side of Syracuse. We are leading a multi-institution, university-industry consortium on environmental systems and energy, with a state-funded headquarters down from University Hill, adjacent to where the old Erie Canal served as the engine for innovation in an earlier era. At the same time, we are thinking of ways to open up our campus on the hill to our neighbors, as moving together needs to be a two-way process.

Universities around the country are engaging with their connected communities as we are, and these efforts, especially when they involve the best academic programs and derive authentically from the expertise and concerns of the campus and the community, are only likely to increase. As this happens, and if it is sustained and complemented by recruitment on campuses of diverse faculties and student bodies, then people and ideas may well traverse those otherwise impermeable fault lines of inter-group relations, on campus and beyond. If so, then we can say that democratic culture is taking hold.