Equity-Focused Distinctive Organizational Analysis of the University of New Mexico

University of Dayton

EDU 992: Organizational Change and Development

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For my Equity-Focused, Distinctive Organization analysis I chose the University of New Mexico. I attended the University of New Mexico (UNM) from 2010 to 2015 and obtained my Bachelor's of Arts in History while studying there. As a student at UNM, it was almost impossible to not notice two glaring aspects regarding the organization's culture: first, that Hispanic and Indigenous heritage is intertwined with the institution's founding framework, and second, there is an institutional problem regarding student retention and enrollment. In thinking of an organization for this assignment, I immediately thought of the University of New Mexico and wondered if as an institution, it still struggled with enrollment and retention and if so, how diversity, equity, and inclusion factored into it. I chose the University of New Mexico because I was interested to see if there was a connection between these factors and how the University was combatting any problems in initiating and fulfilling structural change via its organizational saga.

The University of New Mexico is an exemplar of a distinctive, diverse, equity-oriented organization. The school itself sits on the Pueblo of Sandia in New Mexico, a site that historically served as the homelands for the Pueblo, Navajo, and Apache peoples (The University of New Mexico, 2021). Further, New Mexico is home to over 22 indigenous tribes and since the Spanish Colonial era, has been permeated with Spanish influence (The University of New Mexico, 2021). Hispanic and Indigenous culture as result has been woven into the fabric of both the state of New Mexico and the structure of the University. From the traditional adobe classrooms and faculty office buildings to the expansive list of multi-cultural studies and the creation of community-based, minority student support programs, the University of New Mexico boasts the importance of its diversity and appreciation of culture.

In 2007, UNM created the *Division of Institutional Diversity* to develop an institution-wide plan for creating better solutions to problems regarding diversity, equity, and

inclusion. The Division name was later changed to the *Division of Equity and Inclusion* in 2008 and currently functions today as a means to strengthen organizational capacity to better serve and support UNM's 43% and New Mexico's 58% minority populations (University of New Mexico Higher Education, 2021). The University of New Mexico is a compelling institution for further examination as a distinctive equity-oriented organization because of its commitment to not only its students but also its surrounding community. It seeks to combine community cultural practices with the UNM mission, promoting diversity as an asset, and maintaining equitable practices that build sustainable partnerships and foster inclusive excellence and advocate for social justice (University of New Mexico Higher Education, 2021).

Despite the creation of the *Division of Equity and Inclusion* and the mission to develop more equitable and inclusive practices, enrollment and retention of students at UNM have dwindled. In September 2019, the University of New Mexico reported a 6.7% decrease in student enrollment, with roughly 1,600 fewer students enrolled for the coming fall term than the previous year (Boetel, 2019). Similarly, in 2018 the University saw a 7% decline in student enrollment numbers, with an overall decrease of 18% since 2015. It was also reported that 4-year graduation rates were a dismal 44% for the 2018-2019 year (Boetel, 2019). The student population groups that were reported to suffer the most in enrollment decline and retention were African American, American Indian, and Hispanic student groups (Boetel, 2019). In response to the decline, UNM Provost James Holloway commented that this enrollment rate has been steadily decreasing since 2012 and that a variety of reasons for this trend were to blame, including potential students choosing community college over UNM for cost purposes or potential students deciding to go straight into the workforce rather than enroll in college (Boetel, 2019).

Initiation of the Saga

In September 2019, The University of New Mexico can be identified via its revolutionary context, presenting as an established organization that is in a crisis of decay (Clark, 1972). UNM leaders called upon its *Division of Enrollment Management* to come up with a collaborative plan to increase student enrollment and target student retention. The outcome was the creation of a new committee called the *Enrollment Task Force* that was comprised of individuals from the State Legislature, University staff, and faculty, current UNM students, UNM alumni, the *Divison of Equity and Inclusion*, American Indian Student Services, African American Student Services, and *El Centro de la Raza*, the University's group serving Hispanic students (Brown, 2019). Those in charge at the University of New Mexico saw that after years of attempting incremental adjustments, they must finally give up established ways and initiate equity-based collaboration to create impactful and meaningful change (Clark, 1972).

The *Enrollment Task Force* came up with a list of annual goals designed to redefine the University of New Mexico as the University *for* New Mexico, aiming to specifically restructure recruitment practices to be more inclusive and community-oriented (University of New Mexico Higher Education, 2021). In-person and media campaigning were done to target lower-socio-economic areas, recruitment and donation call centers were set up and stationed by personable UNM students, out-reach programs with New Mexico high schools and family services were created, admission processes were consolidated and expedited, more work-study programs and programs that provide licensure were created, the tuition and fee schedule was restructured to be more straightforward, and lastly, petitioning for grants was done to obtain financing for improved resources that target and improve student quality of life and prosperity (University of New Mexico Higher Education, 2021). Legislative Finance Committee

Chairwoman Rep. Patricia Lundstrom took a specific interest in making these goals happen, as she was able to improve organization efficiency by establishing further processes whereby department productivity is measured, monitored, and rewarded, and new sources of revenue are sought on a continuing basis (Brown, 2021). The goals set by the *Enrollment Task Force* were simple, first, stabilize enrollment, then increase enrollment and retention by redesigning old practices and replacing them with updated, community-oriented, and equity-based methods that meet the needs and expectations of students with diverse backgrounds and priorities.

Fulfillment of the Saga

The result within three years of the initiation of the saga via the creation of *The Enrollment Task Force* was impressive. Data from fall 2021 enrollment numbers showed that incoming freshmen at the University of New Mexico had increased by 7.5% and 4-year graduation rates for 2020 had climbed to 54%. (Brown, 2021) Within the targeted minority populations, the numbers were even more positive, as the result of the concentrated campus and community-wide efforts overall reflected program success. American Indian student enrollment and retention increased by 10.79%, African American students by 15.45%, and Hispanic students by 3.54% (Brown, 2021). "Our current enrollment and retention rates, especially in traditionally underrepresented and underserved student populations, show that we are succeeding in our efforts...but there is still more to be done," said UNM Provost James Holloway (Jiron, 2021).

The *Enrollment Task Force* via implementation of its goals brought the UNM community together to solve the decay of the school. Not only UNM and State leaders were brought in to help but also staff, faculty, students, parents of students, alumni, and other New Mexican community members were utilized in the creation and attainment of goals. Information was gathered from all parties and was transformed into ideas on how to create equitable and

meaningful change. This establishes the University of New Mexico as a further distinctive, equity-based organization that seeks to extend higher education to more populations in New Mexico, and further support its students until they graduate. Clark's five factors of Saga Fulfillment were met: Personnel, Program, Social Base, Student Subculture, and Imagery (Clark, 1972). Staff and faculty were committed (to the Task Force) and remain committed and visible practices with which claims of distinctiveness are supported via the special methods of community outreach that were initiated (Clark, 1972). All stakeholders were called upon in the achievement of the saga and all stakeholders involved upheld the mission, as the success of the program would, in turn, benefit all.

Operational Definition and Conceptual Framework

Frameworks consisting of the Critical Theory of Love and Theory of Change based on funds of knowledge can be identified through UNM's organizational saga. Furthermore, UNM presents an understanding of the definition of organizational change. This definition centers on being able to create equity and inclusivity-oriented solutions that understand and account for underlying oppressive and institutionalized problems that might exist, while also being dedicated to creating impactful, meaningful development, grounded in mission and purpose. The University of New Mexico sought to do just that with the creation of its *Enrollment Task Force.*

The Critical Theory of Love can be identified as a framework present in the creation of the *Enrollment Task Force.* The basis of the framework argues that some aspect of love must be present in the creation of equitable change. Policymakers and designers of goals that are engaged in caring and loving practices create the best learning and growing environments and students who feel heard, protected, and cared for, are going to be more inclined to learn, participate, and succeed (Brooks, 2017). UNM created the Task Force to better listen to the needs of their

students, where needs were not being met, and how they could better create change so that the

needs and unique priorities of potential and future students were not overlooked. Love is a

human need and it is thus one of the deepest and most intense motivational forces (Matias and

Allen, 2016). Students who do not learn via love are ultimately exposed to love's opposite,

aloneness, and are at further risk of dropping out of higher education institutions or just not

attending them at all. UNM sought to understand how to better motivate students to attend the

University and further how to keep them there until graduation through the initiation of love

within the saga.

　　　The Theory of Change based on funds of knowledge can also be seen in the University of

New Mexico's initiation of change through the *Enrollment Task Force*. Theory of Change via

funds of knowledge focuses primarily on the knowledge and behaviors of practitioners within

educational institutions but also on the pre-knowledge and skillsets of minority students.

(Bensimon, 2012). In the application of the framework to change, the funds of knowledge

approach argues that change in practitioner thinking must occur via reframing the problem from

having to do with what's wrong with the student to one having to do with the inadequacy of

practices and curriculum (Bensimon, 2012). The University of New Mexico sought to remedy its

policies that may have not previously accounted for the inherent complexities and priorities of its

Hispanic and American-Indian students. With New Mexico being a minority/majority state, there

needed to be special attention given to the variety of skills, pieces of knowledge, and

competencies forged in minority lives and community history (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2016).

One of UNM's goals in the creation of their Task Force was to reach out to community and

family members of potential and current students in order to better assess the needs, priorities,

and expectations of their minority student groups. Family input was key as it gauged their value

for education in nondominant forms and was beneficial in pointing the *Enrollment Task Force*

towards more equitable recruitment and retention policies (Marquez Kiyama, 2011).

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