ABSTRACT

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY
A Community Built on Mentoring and Support

A Presentation to the USC Mellon Mentoring Forum
March 28, 2013

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In our ever more complex, pluralistic and interdependent global society, American colleges and universities are finding it necessary to create new forms of community that are significantly different from those that have characterized campus life for decades. The presence of large numbers of international students coupled with the increasing representation of persons from different races, socio-economic classes, sexual preferences, faiths and physical abilities require our higher education institutions to change in order to meet their needs for an affirming and welcoming learning environment. But creating community in such an environment is not easy. It requires hard work over a sustained period of time. It calls for attempting to achieve a goal of wholeness that incorporates diversity. It demands a base of shared values; a high level of caring, trust and teamwork; a commitment to communication, participation and affirmation by all; the presence of a set of strong linkages that extend beyond the community; the inclusion and development of the younger members of the group; a positive and forward-looking vision of the future; and, importantly, institutional arrangements that assure the maintenance and permanence of the community that results. Without these elements in place, a community, especially an academic community, can neither be constructed nor preserved. In such a community, mentoring is a task undertaken by all and serves to bind the members of the community including its students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni into one with shared purposes and goals. It is this vision we should pursue.
I always suffer a bit of trepidation when I am asked to address a group of persons who are for more knowledgeable and learned about the topic I am planning to discuss. Such is the case today. My only salvation is that I have learned a few things over a long career in the private sector, government and academe some of which I would like to share with you today.

I must admit that I have had a hard time deciding exactly what I would say in this presentation. Although I was looking forward to attending, I did not immediately understand that I was deemed to be the “entertainment” today so I had to think fast and hard about my subject. I liken myself to Charley Brown who with Lucy and Linus went on a picnic. They climbed a high hill where they spread out their picnic lunch. After they had eaten they all lay back and looked at the sky, which was particularly beautiful that day. It was a day with large, billowy cumulus clouds that seemed to reach to the very heavens.

Lucy spoke saying, “Aren’t the clouds beautiful? They look like big balls of cotton. They are so majestic. If you use your imagination you can see things in the cloud formations. What do you see, Linus?”

Linus gazed thoughtfully for a few seconds and then replied. “Well, those clouds up there remind me of a map of the British Honduras in the Caribbean, and that cloud up there looks a little like Thomas Eakins, the famous sculptor and painter, and that group of clouds over there reminds me of the stoning of Stephen. I can see the apostle Paul standing over there to one side.”

Linus was going to go on describing what he saw but Lucy interrupted him by saying, “That’s very good Linus. What do you see Charley Brown?”

Charley shifted around nervously, furrowed his brow and then said, “Well, I was going to say I saw a ducky and a horsie but I’ve changed my mind.”

Well, I’ve changed my mind several times in deciding about my remarks today. I have been talking a lot recently about faculty diversity and I was tempted to talk about that today. I believe that the paucity of women and minorities on our nation’s research universities’ faculties is an embarrassment; no it is unconscionable, especially in the
sciences and engineering. But I have concluded that what I really want to talk with you about today is what I believe is the first step to an undeniably excellent university—the creation of an inclusive academic community. Such a community is one in which there is a culture of mentoring, as my Rossier Mentoring Committee colleagues describe it, a community in which mentoring is valued and rewarded and in which there is an undergirding belief that I am my brother’s keeper and my sister’s protector and source of support.

A few weeks ago I had an enjoyable lunch with Beth Meyerowitz, Varun Soni and Oliver Mayer. Among the issues we discussed was that of micro-aggressions, those non-violent but potentially damaging actions, attitudes and behaviors directed toward individuals or groups because of their race, gender, class, ability, sexual preference or any other feature that differentiates one from another. These micro-aggressions often stem from negative stereotypes and can produce dehumanizing or, at least, marginalizing effects on the person or group toward which they are addressed. The amazing thing is that often they are unintentional; they can be caused by ignorance, lack of knowledge, lack of sensitivity, and/or lack of understanding. They are often expressed by good people who have been conditioned by their backgrounds and by their experiences and who have not made an effort to overcome the ignorance or the fear that their comments or actions suggest.

With your permission, I would like to share some personal experiences which will give you some idea of the circumstances under which such stereotypes can occur.

Shortly after I had received my doctorate, while I was living in San Diego, UCLA offered an extension course there in electronic circuits theory and they needed someone to teach it. I was asked whether I would be available to teach the course and after considering the request I agreed to do so. I was asked to fly to Los Angeles to meet with several people at UCLA about teaching the course. I remember flying to L.A., being met at the airport, and being driven to the home in Westwood of the person who had written the textbook I was to use. He and I spent a very enjoyable two hours in his study during which we talked about the text and what I would be teaching. He agreed that it was a perfect fit for me, and suggested that I go over to the campus to meet with the person who was responsible for hiring the faculty for this purpose.

I remember going in to her outer office, introducing myself to her secretary, and hearing the secretary say, "Oh, yes, the Dean is very anxious to meet you." She spoke into the intercom on her desk and said, "Dr. Slaughter is here," and I could hear the response on the other end, "Oh good, I'll be right out; I'm anxious to meet him." And, sure enough, the door swung open, she rushed through it, saw me standing there, pushed me aside, and said, "Where's Dr. Slaughter?"

I thought about that sometime later when I was Director of the National Science Foundation. The Deputy Director was Don Langenburg, a highly-respected physicist who is white. Don and I would get a big kick out of an experience that occurred nearly every time we were visited by dignitaries from foreign countries. They would be
escorted to the Director’s office to meet me and, even though I would be standing closest to the door, they would invariably rush by me and extend their hands to Don who they assumed to be the Director of the National Science Foundation. There was always this moment of embarrassment when he would take their hands and redirect them toward me. It happened so often and we got so much fun out of it that we would even create barriers for them to get to Don. We would place large chairs and tables between Don and the door but, inevitably, they would find a way to get to him first. I could tell you a lot of hilarious stories similar to that, even some involving African Americans.

When I first went to the University of Maryland as Chancellor, shortly after I took the position I was invited by the Division of Arts and Humanities to what they called an “Encounter” with the new Chancellor. As I was being escorted to this meeting, I was told how upset some members of that faculty were about the fact that the new Chancellor of the University was an engineer. They were unhappy that the President of the system was a physicist and that my predecessor had been a physicist and that the Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs was a mathematician. They felt that their concerns about so many non-humanists being in charge had not been recognized at all by those responsible for choosing the new Chancellor. Hiring an engineer was heaping insult to injury, and they feared that I would have an orientation which would not be supportive of the arts and the humanities.

So when I got up to say hello to them and, having been forewarned that this was their view, I pointed out to them that I was an engineer who could quote Geoffrey Chaucer’s prologue to the Canterbury Tales in Medieval English. I went on then to describe some other things about my background, and after about 15 minutes, when I asked for questions, a professor sitting down in front, the noted historian Ira Berlin, put up his hand. I said, “Yes, sir,” and he said, “Let me hear you quote Geoffrey Chaucer’s prologue to the Canterbury Tales?” And so I smiled and said,

“When that Aprille with its shoures soote,
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veyne with swich licour.
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth”

At this point he interrupted me and said, “That's enough!” I'm glad I didn't have to go much further. I never had any problem with that division throughout my tenure at Maryland and Ira Berlin became one of my staunchest supporters.

This is another example of stereotypes. The persons in that division were convinced that the arts and humanities were not areas for which an engineer would have any interest.

I think that a very good example of this kind of stereotypical thinking is what happened at Occidental College one spring. I had asked Ann Reynolds, then Chancellor of the California State University, to be our commencement speaker. I was besieged with
requests from students and some parents to withdraw the invitation because of the publicity surrounding some alleged management problems in the CSU system for which Ann was being held responsible. The press had made her out to be the kind of person that our students did not want as their commencement speaker.

At their request, I held a meeting with a group of the graduating seniors during which I said, "The amazing thing to me is that if Ann Reynolds were a man, instead of a woman, she would be described as smart and decisive and a person with strong leadership characteristics, rather than a person who is brash, arrogant and arbitrary in her management style." I think, to some extent, that my words at that time had an impact on most of the students who stopped to realize that we do, unfortunately, see things through lenses that change depending upon our view of a person's race, color or gender. Ann gave a great commencement address, which the student enjoyed immensely.

Now let me turn to the topic of building community and the role of mentoring in creating and sustaining it.

In the early 1990s, the late Ernest L. Boyer, then President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, directed a research project that led to the publication of an amazing little pamphlet entitled "Campus Life: In Search of Community." The booklet states with a tone of urgency that "In our hard-edged competitive world, more humane, more integrative purposes must be defined." It went on to say, "And perhaps it is not too much to hope that as colleges and universities affirm a new vision of community on campus, they may also promote the common good in the neighborhood, the nation, and the world. Higher education has an important obligation not only to celebrate diversity but also to define larger, more inspired goals and in so doing serve as a model for the nation and the world."

Boyer called for the creation of communities that are "purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative."

First of all, he insisted, a college community must be an educationally purposeful place. It is a place where faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus. Purposeful!

A college community must be an open community. It must be a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed. Open!

It must be a just community. It is a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued. Just!

It must be a disciplined community. It is a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good. Disciplined!
It must be a caring community. It is a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged. Caring!

And finally, it should be a celebrative community. It is a place where the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared. Celebrative!

Purposeful! Open! Just! Disciplined! Caring! Celebrative! Such a community is a place that understands that quality in education is a balance between cognitive knowledge and affective thinking, between competence and compassion, between a concern for excellence and a concern for equity. That's the kind of community that I wish to be a part of. I think it's the kind of community that you wish to be a part of. And I think it's the kind of community that our students wish to be a part of -- and deserve.

In a speech at the University of Illinois, Sandy Astin, who retired a few years ago as head of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, and had always been, in my opinion, one of the foremost researchers and clearest thinkers on the higher education scene, reported a telling discovery. He described a study of 445 higher education institutions, public and private, for which the commitment of each of the institutions to the concept of building community was assessed. I have no idea whether USC was one of the 445, but of the fifty colleges and universities that gave the highest priority to developing community, none, it is important to note, were research universities.

It is difficult to achieve a sense of community in large universities with their highly complex environments of undergraduate education, graduate education, state-of-the-art, world-class research and public service. But even the largest university is too small and interdependent to sustain the presence of factions, jealousies and divisiveness. No college or university can fulfill its mission unless it strives to create a community that embraces all of its constituents, not just students, faculty, administrators and alumni but physical plant employees, food service workers and support staff as well as individuals, families, businesses and organizations in the neighborhoods surrounding the institution. There can be no sense of unity if anyone is made to feel excluded or unappreciated.

As E. Grady Bogue and Robert Saunders pointed out in their 1992 book, The Evidence for Quality, caring that leads to a vision of quality based upon truth, service, human growth and dignity "call[s] students and colleagues from the poverty of the commonplace, through higher standards, consistent encouragement, active compassion, respect for diversity, and renewed dedication to the highest standards." The authors reminded us that, "There can be no quality in an educational enterprise without caring, and there can be no caring without community." I am reminded of this when I recall the words of former UC Santa Cruz Chancellor, Robert Stevens, who said: "The Yale motto is written in Hebrew. At one time, anyone who could read it could not study there." During that period of Yale's history there was little it could say about community or caring or, for that matter, quality, in my opinion.
Caring is what Goethe refers to as "the golden chain by which society is held together." Creating and sustaining the presence of caring communities continues to be one of higher education’s greatest challenges. And that is where mentoring plays an important role. My definition of mentoring is that it is caring put to work; it is caring put into action.

Sandy Astin, who I referred to a few minutes ago, said that the faculty of most higher education institutions is a collection of scholars rather than a community of scholars. Where this is true, he contended, there is an under appreciation of "good colleagueship," an expression he used to characterize an individual’s service to the community and the beneficial effect it can have on others. Under such circumstances the community of scholars remains more an ideal than a reality.

Good colleagues, in this sense, are practicing what Cicero meant when he wrote, "Let those be ashamed who so busy themselves in books that they offer nothing for the common good," or what Albert Einstein meant when he said, "Only a life lived for others is worth living." Where this is not rewarded, community can never be achieved.

(When I think of Albert Einstein I am reminded of his response when asked what he thought was the greatest invention known to mankind. Einstein’s reply, “Compound Interest.”)

I agree with Sandy Astin that one of the barriers to creating a sense of community in higher education is one of values. He pointed out very emphatically that competitiveness, individualism and materialism are given more worth than values that support and nurture a sense of community on our campuses. He goes on to say that these three principles are ones that Americans prize but that they must be balanced by another set of values, ones that mitigate their effects. Among these are generosity, fairness, social responsibility and respect for the rights of others. The absence of these civilizing characteristics can be damaging in an institution intent on achieving a sense of community.

For more than three decades, John Gardner provided our nation with a beacon to guide us to higher levels of excellence and integrity. Gardner, founder of Common Cause, warned us that building community requires hard work over a sustained period of time. It calls for attempting to achieve a goal of wholeness that incorporates diversity. It demands a base of shared values; a high level of caring, trust and teamwork; a commitment to communication, participation and affirmation by all; the presence of a set of strong linkages that extend beyond the community; the inclusion and development of the younger members of the group; a positive and forward-looking vision of the future; and, importantly, institutional arrangements that assure the maintenance and permanence of the community that results. Without these elements in place, a community can neither be constructed nor preserved.

To date, a diverse, equitable and multicultural American community has not been created and sustained. But such communities will be needed if America is to fulfill its promise. Our colleges and universities must show the way. To do so requires that we
move far beyond the goals of achieving and celebrating the diversity of our students to the higher, common ground of inclusivity and equity throughout our institutions, especially in our faculties.

The late Jean Mayer, former president of Tufts University, said that the major deterrent to the presence of communication is the illusion that it already exists. I have paraphrased Jean's comments to say that the major deterrent to the presence of community is the illusion that it already exists. Community must be built. It is not present simply because we deem it to be.

There are those who conceive of community in the context of the relatively homogeneous society of our college campuses in the 1940's and 50's where nearly everyone looked, thought and acted alike. But this is today. The participants, the values, the attitudes and the behaviors are different——whether we like it or not. While the feeling of nostalgia for that "kinder and gentler" bygone era may be strong for some, it is necessary for us all to understand that the present requires us to shape new forms of community by building bridges of understanding and cooperation that can traverse our differences. It is certain that the future will demand this of us. I am always reminded of the wisdom of my father at times like this. He was a man with only a third-grade formal education but was the wisest person I have ever known. He once said that "the main reason why the good old days seem good to some people is that they have bad memories."

In May, 1988, I was privileged to be the commencement speaker at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. You know it as a university for the hearing impaired and the deaf. Students and faculty had protested what they saw as gross insensitivity on the part of governing board and succeeded in overturning the decision of the trustees to appoint a hearing person as president. Their actions produced the first deaf president in the history of the institution. The principal lesson to be learned from the events at Gallaudet was that every individual has the right to full participation in our society and that the only barriers that remain are ignorance and lack of access.

In my speech to those graduates, I shared with them my view that ". . . the human ability to communicate -- to share our ideas, our beliefs, our values -- to nurture one another -- to build our communities - this ability is an attribute of the mind and spirit, not the vocal chords and auditory system. It is a capability more complex and sophisticated than any computer our technology has developed and more profound and glorious than the great poetry of any tradition. This capacity is so strong and so urgent in all human beings that it surmounts virtually any barrier placed in its path. The biggest barriers to communication are prejudice and ignorance. We cannot respond to the beauty and wisdom of another culture's language unless we are educated to value diversity and to look beyond ourselves and our own community for insights and perspectives. I went on to say, "This is an exciting time for America, and we are fortunate -- no, we are blessed -- by having the opportunity to contribute to it. Now is certainly not the time for defeatism and pessimism; it is a time for leadership and involvement. It is a time for all of us to invest in the process of using our diversity to strengthen rather than fragment
our society . . . ."

I offer the same words to our community at USC.

Thank you very much!
Dr. John Brooks Slaughter joined the Rossier School of Education in January, 2010 as Professor of Education, with a joint appointment at the Viterbi School of Engineering. Slaughter has had remarkably distinguished career, which began as an electrical engineer and includes leading two universities and heading the National Science Foundation (NSF) as its first African American director, among many other accomplishments.

In 1956, Slaughter began his career as an engineer at General Dynamics Convair, which he left in 1960 to work as a civilian at the United States Naval Electronics Laboratory Center in San Diego. He worked for the Navy for 15 years, becoming director of the Information Systems Technology Department. Slaughter went on to become director of the Applied Physics Laboratory, a research and development facility at the University of Washington in Seattle, until his appointment as assistant director of the Astronomical, Atmospheric, Earth and Ocean Sciences directorate of the NSF in Washington, D.C. in 1977.

In 1979, Slaughter became academic vice president and provost of Washington State University, but left for his historic appointment in 1980 as the first African American to direct the National Science Foundation (NSF). He returned to higher education in 1982 as chancellor of the University of Maryland, where he made major advancements in the recruitment and retention of African American students and faculty.

Slaughter took the job of president of Occidental College in 1988, and transformed the school during his 11-year tenure into the most diverse liberal arts college in America. He taught courses in diversity and leadership for one year as Irving R. Melbo Professor of Leadership Education at USC before accepting the position of president and CEO of the National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering (NACME), whose mission is to increase the number of engineers of color, in 2000.

Slaughter holds honorary degrees from more than 25 institutions, and has received numerous awards, including the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Award in 1997; UCLA Medal of Excellence in 1989; the first U.S. Black Engineer of the Year award in 1987; the NAE Arthur M. Bueche Award in 2004; UCLA Distinguished Alumnus of the Year in 1978; NSF Distinguished Service Award in 1979, among many others.

Slaughter holds a Ph.D. in engineering science from the University of California, San Diego (1971), a M.S. in engineering from the University of California, Los Angeles (1961), and a B.S. in Computer Sciences from Kansas State University (1956).