



## **The Role of Diversity and Global Education**

Wednesday November 12, 2008

*Excerpts from F. Dominic Dottavio speech ....*

Dialogue on Diversity Luncheon

It is my pleasure to be part of today's Dialogue on Diversity.

I'd like to begin by framing my comments in the context of the four strategic goals of the university. Shortly after arriving at Tarleton, I reviewed the University's Strategic Plan and concluded that the strategic goals needed to be consolidated so that we could more effectively integrate actions across departments. I restated the key points of the plan into four strategic goals:

- Excel in Scholarship, Teaching, and Learning.
- Expand Our Horizons.
- Encourage Leadership, Service and Student Success.
- Extend Our Reach

Of these four goals, the one of importance to us today is, "Expand Our Horizons." The focus of my comments when discussing this goal at the General Assembly was to emphasize that in a richly diverse community, we create a climate for personal growth and academic success. I also pointed out that to prepare our graduates for the global economy, we must expand cultural competence and foster a

curriculum, programs, and a learning environment that value diversity and a global education within the student body, faculty, and staff. The fundamental question I posed was: How can we be more strategic and more successful as a diverse and globally-oriented university?

Part of the answer to that question is to understand that it is clearly the role and responsibility of higher education to provide a broad-based educational



experience for our students; to challenge our students to learn about different, even “wrong” points of view; and to offer opportunities for students to understand and to experience different cultures and communities.

Diversity is a topic that has been on the lips of political pundits and commentators for the past two years. In the campaign, on both sides of the major party tickets, there was much discussion of the importance and meaning of race, of global understanding, and a world view. Many analyzed the outcome of the election as a measuring stick of our national commitment to social justice and equality of opportunity.

The election of Barack Obama does not signal the end to racism in our society. But, it does greatly encourage our continued efforts to prepare educated women and men for leadership. In a world made smaller by technology and more interconnected by common economic and political interests, a global perspective is required for success.

Our commitment to diversity and providing a global education for our students is not measured only by a chart of enrollment statistics. We must also ensure access to a Tarleton education to students from a wide range of ethnicities, religions, cultures, and life experiences. In



many ways this is what prompted John Tarleton to create the college. He wanted to provide access to those economically excluded from existing institutions.

A present-day example of Tarleton's efforts to provide access to more students from a wider range of ethnicities and cultures is the PICOS Project. PICOS is the acronym for "Program to Increase College Opportunities and Successes." We just completed the start-up year for this project, which is led by Dr. Denise Martinez and funded by a \$600,000 grant from the National Science Foundation. PICOS is directed at providing financial aid and academic support to first generation Hispanic students who declare majors in mathematics, chemistry, engineering or engineering technology.



As we bring a more diverse group of students, faculty, and staff into the Tarleton family, we must ensure that each student has a quality-of-life on campus that supports his or her heritage, beliefs and culture. Fostering a learning environment that values an understanding of world cultures and views within the student body, faculty, and staff isn't a matter of the law. But it is a moral imperative. And, it is just plain smart.

If we are to prepare our graduates for success in their careers, we must expand cultural competence and global awareness. In the curriculum and in our campus programs, in the civility of our community and in the breadth of our discussions, we each must be moved beyond our known world to that we have yet to experience. Whether you become a classroom teacher, an agri-business leader, banking executive, health care professional – whatever the field, if you are very lucky your colleagues and customers will not all be just like you.





We are in the midst of International Week at Tarleton, celebrating the many ways that this campus is enriched by students from some 25 different nations. This week reminds me that I am an enthusiastic advocate for a sort of “reserve diversity” if you will. We can bring the world to Stephenville by having large numbers of international students on our campus and by hosting lectures, performances, exhibits, and discussion.

We should be committed to bringing eye-opening cultural experiences to our students. We should also send our students to distant shores whenever possible. Our daughter participated in 5 study-abroad experiences while in college and high school. In part, I suppose, to get away from mom and dad. She was deeply affected by each of these experiences. The lens through which she viewed her life was changed. These were pivotal parts of her education. I hope that we can make these kinds of experiences possible for more Tarleton students.

But culturally enriching experiences can be found in other ways: internships, community service activities, alternative spring break trips to engage in service, attending an unfamiliar opera, play, concert or film, or simply talking with others about today’s headlines over a meal at the dining hall.

What is the role of diversity and global education at a university? It provides the context and content for many of our courses and extra-curricular programs. And what is the role of higher education in diversity? We should be developing and sharing new knowledge and greater understanding of differences – both in our collective past and for our future.



My hope for each of you is that you use your Tarleton years as the foundation for life-long learning. Remain curious. Keep studying. Observe. Listen. Seek diverse experiences. Broaden your circle of friends and acquaintances. Know more. To do so is to gain a greater understanding of the person you are.

I feel blessed to be a Tarleton Texan. But, for this guy of Italian heritage from Ohio, who spent significant parts of his career in New England and the Deep South, the learning curve has been steep. Steers and rodeo. Music and menus. Riding a horse in the homecoming parade.



I am energized by learning more about the culture of Texas. Or, I should say, the cultures of Texas – for this is a very diverse state. If you make this kind of learning a habit in your lives, we will have met our goal to Expand Our Horizons and to prepare students to be leaders in their careers and communities.

Thank you for caring about this important issue and allowing me to share my thoughts with you.

*Photos provided by Tarleton Media Relations and Web Services Staff*