

The Lacking Auditory and Visual Racial Representation on Longwood Campus Tours

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Introduction / Summary

Campus tours can be a very important part of a college student's first impression of a university. At Longwood, campus tours aim to show a variety buildings and traditions to give prospective students and their families an idea of what makes this school stand out from other universities. While these tours attempt to appeal to all families, a lack of racially inclusive measures can cause families belonging to minority groups to feel left out and as if they don't belong at Longwood. Many campus tour guides, or Longwood Ambassadors, do not mention the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, and the Ambassadors often direct their group's attention to the pictures along the fence outside the construction of the Upchurch Center, which does not truly represent the ethnic demographics of Longwood's student population. With mentioning the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and switching out the pictures on the fence to more accurately represent the minority groups presence on campus, the university could better appeal to a wider range of students.

Background / Problem

On a campus tour, a Longwood Ambassador showcases various aspects of Longwood's campus that could lead a prospective student or family to make conclusions about the level of diversity and inclusion Longwood possesses. The Ambassador follows a script designed by the Admissions Office which includes descriptions of buildings, traditions, and organizations on campus. The tour aims to be as inclusive as possible to entice a wide variety of families from different backgrounds, but often times the guide does not mention the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and their efforts to further incorporate all students in campus activities. If a group hears

about some of the traditions or events the University has but cannot see themselves taking part in these activities, the omission could create large gaps in the social atmosphere the school is attempting to present.

Visually, one of the aspects of a campus tour that can be very misleading to prospective families is the blue fence surrounding the construction of the new Upchurch Center. The fence includes pictures of many traditions and events including New Lancer Days, Colors Wars, and graduation. Longwood attempts to showcase ethnic variety by including Caucasian, African American, and Asian students participating in these activities. The issue with the pictures lies within the ratio of diversity they present. The images suggest that Caucasians make up fifty-six percent of campus students, African Americans make up thirty-six percent, and Asians make up eight percent. This is far from the actual numbers, where minority groups only make up about fifteen percent of the campus's student population (Longwood University, n.d.). This misrepresentation is an issue nationwide and has been for some time. The University of Wisconsin- Madison attempted to create a more diverse representation of their student body in 2000 by photoshopping an African American man onto the cover of the university magazine (Prichep, 2013). This controversy made universities question how far was too far. Could they overestimate my ten percent? Twenty percent? Many universities use this strategy to entice more minority group students to attend their university, but in reality, they could be deceiving many prospective students and families. While not the only issues Longwood University tours have, the lack of attention toward the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's efforts and the misrepresentation on the blue fence are both racial points of interest that the University should address.

Theoretically Informed Recommendation

Based on the problems above, I recommend a revision to the Longwood Ambassador tour training that aims to promote inclusion on campus and different pictures showcasing accurate representations of the diversity on campus during the previous academic year that will be posted on the blue fence surrounding the Upchurch Center. One backing for these recommendations is the concept that identities are dynamic. This characteristic of identity refers to the understanding of an identity altering with time (Martin & Nakayama, 2008). Throughout history, minority groups have been extremely underrepresented in various settings including universities. For Longwood University, minority group representation has improved in recent decades, but it is not at the level the university displays on its blue fence. The dynamic dialectic explains that Longwood is attempting to address the changing times and anticipate the further inclusion the minorities will hopefully experience as times continue to change.

Along with the previous characteristic, the dialectical approach to communication proposes a connection between history-past and present-future. As challenges occur and pass, new balances between majority and minority groups are altered. These alterations require careful consideration as to not disregard the past and where people have been and what they've gone through, but there is also a need to move forward and break new ground in terms of intercultural communication (Martin, Nakayama, & Flores, 2008). In order to show their efforts in making campus a more inclusive place, a tour should have information on the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's work in making campus a more open place. This information will give families an idea of how Longwood is inspiring students to become a more inclusive school in the future.

When potential students and their families see Longwood University without a more diverse representation, it can negatively affect their view of the college and its campus. Unfortunately, Longwood is not the only school that has this problem, and if a minority group constantly tours schools that have this lack of portrayal it can begin to negatively affect their idea of colleges as a whole. This concept was proposed by Dr. Maura Cullen as the Pile-On-Principle, which explains the negative feelings a person can have when they feel they have been offended or disappointed repeatedly. Many small adverse interactions can build over time and cause strong reactions that would not normally have occurred (Cullen, 2008). If more campus tours would showcase the school's efforts to diversify the college experience for its students, it may be able to prevent being another instance where a minority groups felt marginalized.

Conclusion

Adjusting some of the subtleties in Longwood's campus tours could have a large impact on the types of students Longwood appeals to, and it can lead to a more diverse student body and a wider variety of campus activities. Mentioning the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and changing the pictures on the Upchurch Center fence will help in these inclusive efforts.

References

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