Book review

Williams, Damon A. (2013). *Strategic diversity leadership: Activating change and transformation in higher education.* Sterling, Virginia: Stylus
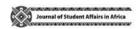
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Worldwide, the composition of the student population in higher education has over the past two decades changed dramatically. With larger numbers of previously underserved groups gaining access to higher education, universities and colleges have become more diverse, creating new challenges for management and administration of these institutions. In South Africa, increasing participation by historically disadvantaged population groups has over the past twenty years similarly changed the 'face' of higher education. Yet, equal access has not resulted in equal success, as illustrated by the difference in throughput rates between African (16%), Coloured (22%), Indian (24%) and White (44%) students (CHE, 2012, p. 51). In addition, allegations of racial discrimination at several institutions led to the appointment of a ministerial committee on transformation and social cohesion and the elimination of discrimination in public higher education institutions by the previous minister of education in 2008, and the appointment of a transformation oversight committee by the current minister of higher education and training in 2013. Managing diversity in South African higher education institutions is clearly presenting huge challenges.

Even though the diversity challenges at higher education institutions in other African countries may not exactly mirror those of South Africa, these institutions too are grappling with challenges arising from student populations that are becoming more diverse, with more women, mature students and members of various ethnic groups entering higher education.

Against this backdrop, *Strategic Diversity Leadership: Activating change and transformation in higher education* by Damon Williams is a welcome contribution. The author is the vice provost and chief diversity officer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and his experience 'at the coalface' comes across clearly in this publication.

This is an authoritative and encompassing text. Even though it is written from and for the US context, much of it is relevant for every higher education institution facing

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challenges around diversity, not least African higher education institutions. Importantly, the author's definition of diversity includes not only race, but also gender, sexual preference, disability and other matters related to identity.

The publication addresses two challenges simultaneously and in an integrated manner, namely engaging profoundly with the theoretical issues concerning diversity, and secondly, providing practical advice on mechanisms and tools that higher education institutions can adopt and employ to manage diversity more strategically and effectively. The text is organised around three major questions:

- Why is diversity important in the new millennium?
- What is diversity from an individual, organisation and administrative capabilities perspective?
- What is strategic diversity leadership?

This publication has a companion volume by the same author, co-authored with Katrina Wade-Golden, called *The chief diversity officer*. The latter publication focuses on questions of diversity leadership and management, particularly on the emerging role of the chief diversity officer in universities and colleges.

Both publications are underpinned by a mixed methodology research study that was undertaken into diversity policies and programmes in US higher education, as well as the diversity leaders implementing these policies and programmes.

Part I explores the reasons why diversity is important in the new millennium. Although the well-known arguments around the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, changing demographics, persistent societal and educational disparities and political and legal dynamics emerge, the author also makes a strong educational and business case for diversity, particularly with regard to the need for higher education to produce culturally competent graduates. This is both refreshing and useful.

Part II, on a 21st century definition of diversity, offers arguments around what the author terms the *diversity idea*. For Williams, the diversity idea framework should help campus leaders to develop the type of cultural intelligence needed to become strategic diversity leaders. In this section the author also discusses three models of organisational diversity: the affirmative action and equity model, the multicultural and inclusion model and the learning, diversity and research model. He identifies the drivers, dynamics and strategy of change of each of the models, and looks critically at the limitations of each model. He also provides an analytical and useful comparison of the three models.

The last section of the publication – Part III: What is strategic diversity leadership? – is, in my opinion, the most intriguing part. It contains chapters on why diversity efforts fail, the artful science of strategic diversity leadership, being accountable, developing and implementing successful diversity plans, activating the diversity change journey and diversity committees. In this section, the author's own experience of diversity leadership and those of colleagues from whose inputs he draws, is expertly illuminated. The organisation planning expertise of the author is particularly apparent in the very useful chapters on

being accountable and on developing and implementing diversity plans. The chapter on diversity plans is one of the best that I have come across, and should be compulsory reading not only for diversity officers, but also for every higher education leader and manager who is interested in building excellence in his/her institution in an inclusive manner.

The order in which chapters are presented in this section may have been more logical if the planning chapter came before the accountability one, and the chapter on diversity committees before the one on the diversity change journey. That said, this is a small point of criticism.

The text is interspersed with boxes containing vignettes of practical examples to illustrate the relevant theoretical exposition. There are also a considerable number of tables and figures which provide useful summaries and overviews of the main points discussed in the text.

Even though this is a US text (and does not pretend to be anything else), this well-informed and well-written publication deserves to be widely read, and to become the daily companion of diversity/transformation officers/managers in higher education institutions in Africa.

References
CHE (Council on Higher Education) (2012). *VitalStats: Public Higher Education 2010*. Pretoria: CHE.