Report of the First Year Evaluation of the Brandeis Campus Demonstration Project on Intercommunal Co-existence

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REPORT SUMMARY

Overview

The Brandeis Campus Demonstration Project on Intercommunal Co-existence is designed to “strengthen Brandeis University and its ability to accomplish its educational mission by creating opportunities for members of the campus community to explore issues of difference, and the tensions, conflicts and possibilities inherent in our diversity.” [source]

A Leadership Team, a core group of 16 staff members, faculty, undergraduate students and graduate students, met regularly as a group with facilitators from December, 1999 through May, 2000. Two major goals for this time period were: 1) to build the “co-existence capacities” of the diverse team and their mutual trust of each other through the use of oral history and artistic inquiry methods and 2) to create an action plan to be carried out in the larger Brandeis community in years two and three of the project.

The evaluation component of the project was initiated not only to gain insights about the effectiveness for Brandeis of the particular approaches used, but also to contribute to the broader field of coexistence work and to learn about the usefulness of different strategies to assess the impact of these approaches since little formal evaluation on co-existence projects of this kind has occurred to date. The hope is that we will be able to establish a longitudinal component to the data collection so that we can examine change over time.

The evaluation was designed to answer the following questions:

1) How and to what extent do attitudes, levels of understanding, self-awareness, and intercultural skills of members of the leadership team change over the course of the project?
2) How and to what extent do the kinds of interaction and level of trust among leadership team members change over the course of the project?
3) How and to what extent do attitudes, levels of understanding, self-awareness, and intercultural skills of members of participating campus groups change over the course of their participation?
4) How and to what extent do the policies, structures, and culture of the institution change over the course of the project?
5) How well is the project implemented?
6) How effective are the different interventions in creating desired outcomes?
7) What are the nature and sources of resistance?
Methods

Theory of change: The evaluation was built partly on a “theory of change” model, which involved a variety of stakeholders, including members of the project’s Advisory Group, in the creation of a logic model connecting program assumptions, activities and outcomes. The logic model is an evolving work as new activities are developed and learning about what is important and effective takes place. It is intended to be used as a planning tool to help clarify plausible goals and outcomes, as an evaluation tool to locate timing and topics for study, and as a policy tool to facilitate aggregation of evaluation results into a broader base of knowledge about program theory.

Tools and strategies for data collection:
To provide a variety of sources for triangulating data about the Leadership Team and its activities, we—
- Observed, recorded, and took extensive notes at all the formal sessions of the leadership team to document individual’s stories and assess team dynamics, sources of resistance, and implementation.
- Collected regular written facilitator feedback and participant reflections after meetings
- Administered two written exercises to and conducted two interviews with members of the Leadership Team at different time points

To learn more about the existing culture and awareness of the student body we—
- Submitted a set of questions to be added to the annual Senior Survey, administered out of the Management Research and Analysis department at Brandeis and analyzed the resulting data
- Reviewed results from the 1999 Senior Survey and a special 2000 survey on campus life that focused on the issue of community at Brandeis
- Collected information on selected relevant campus groups, meetings and events
- Looked at selected campus literature

Summary of the First Year

Demographics of the Leadership Team
- 9 women, 7 men
- 5 Jewish, 4 Catholic, 3 other Christian faiths, 2 Muslim, 2 no religious affiliation (but with Jewish heritage), with half of the team actively practicing their religions
- 3 black members of African descent, 3 Latino/as, 1 from East Asia, 9 Caucasians
- 6 undergraduates, 3 graduate students, 3 faculty members, including one with an administrative status, and 4 staff members.
- All undergraduates and one graduate student, age 22 or under; 4 staff/faculty over age 50; the rest of the team, age 29-39; 50 years age difference between youngest and oldest
- 4 faculty and staff members at Brandeis more than four years
- As children most lived near the place they were born through age 17 or 18.
• Only one person has never been outside the USA, and only one has traveled extensively.

Summary of Meetings
During the 11 three-hour sessions, two-day retreat (which occurred after the first session), and final celebration, the Leadership Team:
• Introduced themselves and shared why they were taking part in the Leadership Team (12/6)
• Created an artistic expression of a “aesthetic inheritance” and shared the story surrounding that inheritance in pairs and with the whole team (retreat)
• Discussed issues related to power in their own status groups (e.g. undergraduate, staff, etc.) and then allowed the team to sit in on their discussion through a “fishbowl” exercise (retreat)
• Created a timeline of their lives with significant events, interviewed an assigned person from the team who was in a different status group, and then shared a part of their story with the whole group (1/31 to 2/21)
• Created group collages representing each story and points of connection among the stories (3/6)
• Discussed issues related to being Jewish or not Jewish at Brandeis within same affiliation groups and shared key observations with the whole team (3/13)
• Revisited the group’s journey and brainstormed key themes that had emerged from the stories (3/20)
• Prepared a presentation to capture some highlights of their work so far and gave the presentation for members of the Advisory Group (3/27 and 4/3)
• Brainstormed their vision for Brandeis in the year 2010 within their status groups (4/10)
• Developed a series of activities that would allow the vision to be realized (4/17 and beyond)
• Tackled group issues related to ageism, lack of acknowledgement, public performance, power differences, commitment, among others (every week)

Selected Findings
The findings summarized below are organized loosely around the study questions, with emphasis on #1, 2, and 7 and a revision of #3 to focus on students at large.

Impact of the project on attitudes, awareness and knowledge of the members of the Leadership Team
Starting points
• About half of the Leadership Team members feel that their families are/were very accepting of others who came from a very different backgrounds; 5 believe that their families aren’t/weren’t very accepting.
• In describing their identity half named race/ethnicity and/or religion, including all 5 self-reported Jewish people; 5 of the 9 women, but only one male made reference to gender. At least half the team members feel that their identities were shaped by race/ethnicity and religion to a “great extent”. Class has the most spread out meaning for individuals on the Leadership Team.
Almost all the students reported that they had interacted “a great deal” with others who were different from them in a variety of respects (race/ethnicity, religion, national origin, class, age, gender) prior to joining the Leadership Team.

Most Leadership Team members claimed to have close friends who are different from them in terms of race/ethnicity, religion, national origin, class, gender, age, and sexual orientation. However, team members tend to have friends at Brandeis who are similar to them.

Most members of the Leadership Team do not tend to seek out situations where others are like them in these various respects, except for 4 of the 5 Jewish members, who indicated that they seek out situations where others are Jewish to a “great extent”.

Leadership Team members are slightly more likely to seek out situations where people are different from them rather than the same, but even so, a majority not did report actively seeking out people who are the same or different from them to any great extent.

About half of the members of the Leadership Team (7), including all three of African origin and all three Latino/as, agreed strongly that they have found themselves in situations where they were one of the few people in their racial, ethnic or religious groups.

Race/ethnicity has been the greatest source of misunderstanding or challenge for team members. Religion is less troublesome, but 4 of the 5 who checked this category were Jewish.

5 of the 6 ethnically Jewish members of the Leadership Team agree that they spend a lot of time discussing religion with people from similar backgrounds to them as does one of the Muslim members of the group. The rest of the team does not do so. Most do not discuss religion with people from different faiths from them.

Members are only slightly more likely to talk about issues to do with race and ethnicity with people who are similar to them in these respects than they are to talk about race and ethnicity with people who are different from them.

Members describe Brandeis as intellectually excellent, but hard driven; comfortable, but socially fragmented; liberal but complacent and insular; in transition but unfocused; overemphasizing its Jewish identity; and lacking a sense of community.

Leadership Team members see themselves as highly accepting of others from different backgrounds; possessing a high degree of empathy; interested in learning about other cultures and religions, with an actual knowledge of religions higher than their knowledge of other cultures; and able to resolve conflicts among others.

Only 5 members of the group, including 3 undergraduates, said they had participated previously in anything like the coexistence leadership team.

Mid-course

Most of the self-reported learning at the mid-year emerge from the stories themselves and the ways in which the stories touched members. “I am the family historian. I have gone back to work on that with a vengeance.” “[I learned that] I am really affected by the personal odyssey of others whereas I thought I didn’t
care about such things.”

• The undergraduates were more likely to report strongly affirming discoveries about themselves than the older participants. Two believed that they had a more positive relationship than they had thought. “Brandeis has made or helped created myself.” “I like Brandeis more than I am willing to admit.”

• In terms of specific impacts on behavior, attitudes towards others, and awareness of others outside the group, group members believed that they had gained some sensitivity about and interest in others at Brandeis, especially those from groups different from their own, “status groups” (i.e., graduate students, undergraduates, faculty, and staff), religious groups, and racial/ethnic groups. “The group has sensitized me to the experience of students on campus more.” “I now know that members of the faculty and staff actually do exist on a more significant level.” “I now feel there is a need to connect more to the non-Jewish students, so I invited a few to some social-cultural Jewish events.”

• A few described a greater sense of belonging. “Every time I walk out of every session, I feel revived and happy. I feel less needy—to prove myself as a member of this community anymore.”

• Although not everyone felt that what was important to them had changed all that much because of their group experience, most members expressed some theme that was related to feeling more positive, more empowered to act, and clearer about personal goals.

• Two key themes emerged about what makes a strong community: the importance of being seen as an individual within that community, and connections and points of shared vision.

End of Year

• Although a number of team members reported coming in with good listening and group facilitation skills, they reported that the team experience heightened these skills and the desire to use these use.

• “People are more three dimensional” was a common theme in response the team experience’s impact on thinking about people in different status groups (e.g. staff, faculty, undergraduates)

• Team members find themselves more attuned to certain issues on campus that might need addressing. Issues they noted included the gradations of Jewishness, the social life of non-Jewish students, the perception of architecture that hinders social interaction. A few feel more connected to the campus.

• Other than heightened listening, members were less likely to feel that the coexistence team experience had had an impact yet on their behavior outside the group. Three students mentioned going to cultural events they might have bypassed before. Several mentioned taking initiative to connect with others. An team member, who is an employee of Brandeis, said s/he is now “communicating across boundaries” more “responsibly” than before and has helped to bring some different constituencies together on campus.

Changes in kinds of interactions and levels of trust among leadership team members

• All team members reported increased interaction with and interest in others on the
team across status lines. Participants named staff members more often as people they had come to know, felt they had something in common with, or had engaged with outside of the sessions.

- Trust levels in this group, especially as represented by willingness to reveal oneself, appeared to develop early on, regardless of place in the university, race, religion or other marker. “I feel comfortable with the level of trust and honesty brought forth by the sharing of experiences. I for one can honestly say that I have expressed feelings and personal family information that until now I had no desire to share with anyone.”
- That level of trust and feelings of closeness that emerged were a surprise to many, and in fact, was the most common theme mentioned in terms of surprise about the leadership team as a whole. Time and the need to accomplish goals were too barriers to the development of trust.
- However, although faculty members were more vocal regardless of the situation, in general group members appeared more comfortable communicating within their own status groups, especially undergraduate
- Group members seemed reluctant to challenge each other or to raise issues that might cause any rift or discomfort, but were able to confront one another when called to do so.

Sources and nature of resistence among leadership team members
In the course of the project, team members put up roadblocks, several of which were difficult to overcome. Some were individual issues, but most were the province of a majority of team members. These areas of resistance often mirror issues in the campus community or go against some idealized version of what community is (e.g., a place where confrontation never occurs.) They provide us with some clues about how to design effective co-existence strategies. These sources of resistance were:

- Resistance to dividing into different status groups
- Resistance to putting aside deference towards age and status
- Resistance to confrontation and giving feedback, resistance to discomfort
- Resistance to leaving the mode of sharing
- Resistance to dividing into Jewish and non-Jewish groups
- Resistance to performance alternative modes of expression
- Resistance to being a full member of the group
- Resistance about talking about hard issues:

Selected Brandeis baseline data on issues related to coexistence and community
We began to collect and analyze some baseline data from the 1999 and 2000 Senior Surveys, with a view to developing more extensive data sources over the next year:

- Brandeis seniors do not believe strongly that there is a sense of community within the student body. Students who feel there is a sense of community are more likely to be satisfied with their overall experience. Non-white students were slightly less likely to feel there was a sense of community than white students.
- In 1999, Students most often named diversity issues as affecting the sense of community: 1) lack of diversity on campus, and 2) lack of interaction among those from different backgrounds.
• Religion is more important to Jewish students than non-Jewish students.
• Brandeis was first choice for fewer than half of students, even Jewish students.
• Non-whites were significantly more likely to participate in official school activities and clubs over their four years than whites, Jewish students more than non-Jewish students, and those who valued religion more than those who did not (with no interaction between these last two factors).
• More than half of students were dissatisfied with the social life on campus. Non-whites were less satisfied than white students.
• Four-fifths more of seniors consider as very important factors for facilitating co-existence: “Everyone is treated equally inside and outside of the classroom”, “People feel comfortable expressing their true identities”, “People readily make friendships with people from very different backgrounds”, and “Both Jewish and non-Jewish students feel invited to and welcome at each other’s events”. About half felt it was important that “Brandeis facilitates discussions on issues related to co-existence.” Except for the final factor, which non-whites answered similarly to white students, non-white students felt slightly less strongly about all these factors than did white students.
• In general, students felt treated equally, felt comfortable expressing their true identities and got to know as friends people from different backgrounds. They were much less likely to feel invited and welcome to events, regardless of who sponsored them, and least likely to have participated in discussions on issues related to co-existence. Non-white students were somewhat less likely than white students to feel that they were treated equally and feel invited to events, and slightly less likely to feel comfortable expressing their true identities. However, they were slightly more likely to have made friends from different backgrounds.
• Students were asked how important they felt that creating co-existence among different groups was to increasing the feeling of community on campus. Three-quarters felt this was essential or very important. Only 4% didn’t think it was important at all. There were no significant racial differences.
• More than two-thirds of seniors reported having friends of a different race prior to coming to Brandeis, with the percentage showing the least growth compared to friends from a different religion, class, national origin, and sexual orientation.
• Non-white students were slightly less likely to have had an excellent experience at Brandeis. Fewer would attend Brandeis again compared to white students.

Learnings and Recommendations about Evaluation

One of the goals of this project is to learn more about ways to evaluate co-existence programs. Because this evaluation has only been running for just over six months out of a three year project, the nature of our learnings are more about the process of evaluation than the content. We offer recommendations for other projects, based on our experience, and highlight some of our continuing challenges.

Recommendations for evaluation
• When possible, try to hire the evaluator at least a couple of months before the project formally begins.
• Tap existing resources and expertise to enrich the project and increase the connection of others on campus with the project.
• Remain flexible in terms of specific evaluation strategies, but have a vision for the evaluation that you develop with your stakeholders
• Use logic models as a way to engage stakeholders in the project and have them grapple with their assumptions about how change occurs, what outcomes can reasonably be expected, and what resources exist or are needed to promote the project’s success.
• Use a variety of methods to collect information and build on existing data collection efforts.
• For written exercises and reflections, create an expectation that these are a part of the project by providing the time and space to complete them (while the audience is still captive). For other kinds of evaluation,
• Encourage leadership to include evaluation as part of the intervention by reinforcing how important it is for all participants to cooperate with any data collection efforts
• Focus on evaluation as a way of promoting new learning, heightening, personal insights and strengthening programs rather than mainly as a source of judgment.

**Continued challenges to evaluation of this project**
- The difficulty of planning ahead because of the open-ended nature of the team’s task
- The difficult of collecting data that shows change related to project initiatives in the face of initiatives with similar goals
- The size of the team and especially the small size of the sub-groups for making inferences
- Lack of time to collaborate with team members and to answer complex questions

**General recommendations for implementation of a campus-based co-existence project that combines story-telling with action planning**

The following recommendations were derived from team members comments and suggestions, facilitator reflections, and the evaluator’s observations and analysis.

- Stay flexible, but maintain a vision
- Establish and revisit the journey’s route
- Fit the scope of the total agenda to fit the time allotted
- Start intensely, away from routines
- Establish a confidentiality policy at the beginning
- Establish and discuss what commitment means
- Use a variety of modes of expression
- Vary group sizes and configurations
- Model desired behavior
- Set a norm for inclusivity in talking
- Teach good listening skills
- Beware of letting any one person’s needs carry too much weight
• Debrief tense situations adequately
• Push people beyond their comfort zones
• Build in regular, oral reflection time
• Give people the tools to give supportive feedback
• Encourage the group to take leadership
• Set action-oriented assignments early on
• Break bread together
• Include celebration and appreciation as part of the program