



FORUM ON “CONVERGING COMPETENCES: DIVERSITY, HIGHER EDUCATION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY”

Strasbourg, October 2 – 3, 2008

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

WE, THE PARTICIPANTS in the Forum on “Converging Competences: Diversity, Higher Education, and Sustainable Democracy”¹, organized jointly by the Council of Europe and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy at Council of Europe Headquarters in Strasbourg on October 2 – 3, 2008

underline the important role of higher education in developing and maintaining societies based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law;

reaffirm that sustainable democracies require citizens who value the diversity of our global society as well as of our individual countries, regions and local communities and who are willing and able to engage in intercultural dialogue;

recognize that our societies are becoming increasingly diverse in terms of people’s backgrounds, social and ethnic origins, beliefs and convictions as well as in the increasingly wide diverse ages of those seeking higher education as are our higher education institutions that are, in most cases, still far from reflecting the composition of society at large;

affirm our commitment, as higher education policy makers and leaders, to fulfilling the full range of purposes of higher education, including:

- preparation for the labour market;
- preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- personal development

¹ For background information and documentation, see http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Forum7_Converging_competences/default_EN.asp#TopOfPage

- the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base;

assume the responsibility to ensure that higher education advances knowledge on sustainable democracy, civic engagement, human rights, and diversity and provide its graduates with the subject specific and transferable competences needed for them to help build and maintain the kind of society in which we would like future generations to be able to live;

underscore the crucial importance of cooperation among all actors and levels of education to improve the opportunity for all to benefit from higher education.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND

that higher education institutions and their representative organizations

- expand their mission and institutional objectives to comprise the goals of democracy, diversity and human rights and make them an integral part of their policies and practices;
- promote equal opportunities to higher education in terms of access and completion of studies and make lifelong learning an important part of their mission;
- establish adequate mechanisms, through strategic plans, policy objectives and implementation and other appropriate means, to fulfil their mission comprising the full range of purposes of higher education;
- develop and maintain cooperation and partnerships with their communities, schools, and civil society;
- reflect the principles and practice of democracy, diversity and human rights in their approaches to teaching and learning as well as in their structures and decision making procedures; in all aspects of the institution's daily life;
- review their teaching and learning policies and practice across disciplines to encourage the inclusion of the underlying principles of democracy through activity based learning, problem solving and learning through community service with a view to fostering the civic and academic competences of students;
- establish reward mechanisms and criteria for hiring and career advancement that encourage faculty to develop innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to democracy, diversity and human rights;
- develop and maintain structures to ensure that the student voice is heard in the governance and life of the institution;
- engage in self-assessment to determine strengths and weaknesses in their actions to further democratic culture and to devise additional actions where needed.

that public authorities

- with due account to the principles of institutional autonomy, establish policies that encourage higher education institutions, public and private, to define and fulfil their mission with due regard to the principles stated above;
- provide support and incentives for programs and initiatives on issues of democracy, diversity, human rights and social cohesion strengthening the engagement of higher education institutions with the communities and civil society of which they are a part;
- integrate social and civil competences in the development of frameworks for learning outcomes qualifications;

that students and their representative organizations

- raise awareness among all students of the importance of developing a broad range of capacities required for active participation in public life at all levels – locally, nationally and internationally;
- actively engage in the development of students’ capacities for democracy, diversity and human rights;
- empower students in developing and implementing initiatives that can help fulfil the mission of higher education with respect to democracy, diversity and human rights;

that the Council of Europe

- work within the Bologna Process to foster the mission of higher education in furthering democracy, diversity and human rights as part of the values and goals of the European Higher Education Area;
- work to describe competences in qualifications frameworks in such a way as to cover the full purposes of education and to reflect the need for ‘converging competences’ in the newly developing national qualifications frameworks as well as the overarching framework of qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA-QF) as well as the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF-LLL);

that the Council of Europe and the US Steering Committee of the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility and Democracy

- build on the project “Universities as Sites of Citizenship and Civic Engagement” which focused on institutional assessment of the civic engagement of higher education and the “Penn Democracy Project” which focused on democratic values, practices and skills of students,
- on this basis, establish a new project exploring activities of higher education institutions on democracy, human rights and diversity in curriculum development, teaching methods and approaches and the way these issues are addressed by the institutions’ research projects, programs, centres and institutes;
- to organize a conference in the United States in 2009 or 2010 to continue the dialogue on these issues and to seek to increase the involvement of European institutional leaders as well as of higher education leaders from other parts of the world.