The SR Paradigm

Does ASQ's view of social responsibility lead to a paradigm of helping disadvantaged students succeed in higher education?

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Social responsibility (SR) has been defined as "the responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment through transparent and ethical behavior."[1] Because of its broad scope, SR can have a different meaning to higher education researchers, educators and administrators, such as increasing organizational governance, community involvement and engagement, having a "greener" campus, treating employees well or providing a foundation for helping students succeed in college.

Current research from multiple sources shows that students from low-income school districts, on the average, have lower achievement scores, even in the primary grades; have a lower access rate to college; and graduate from college at a lower rate. Does the paradigm for SR include helping disadvantaged students—often from low-income schools—achieve at the same level in college as students from average or well-to-do schools—those with more educational resources and on the average, schools in which students are more prepared for college?

Because of the strong connection between SR and quality systems thinking, it is important to address SR in an educational context. This paper will review current ASQ publications on SR and discuss how they relate to the issues of higher education. Then, it will present three ideas for employing the SR paradigm to help disadvantaged students be successful in college.

Overview of ASQ publications

This review is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to be an overview that highlights four articles.

1. "Seeking Sustainable Success: ASQ Integrates Quality and Social Responsibility"[2]

This is one of the first ASQ publications covering SR and discusses the ISO 26000 standard. The publication is significant because it quotes quality guru Genichi Taguchi on the observation that "a product or service demonstrated good quality if its production and use caused little to no harm to society."

This publication connects business and industry to SR issues, but not education. Education is only mentioned in terms of providing education on SR issues, not on improving education. It concludes by establishing ASQ's focus in the SR area: "While ASQ embodies and supports all seven principles, it initially [concentrates] on the areas that will deliver the greatest value to the quality community by focusing on three elements: organizational governance, environment and community engagement." With respect to helping disadvantaged students be successful, organizational governance and community engagement will be most relevant.

2. "Pathways to Social Responsibility: Successful Practices for Sustaining the Future 2012"[3]

This publication is the latest ASQ publication on SR. It highlights 12 organizations, including the University of Virginia, Darden School of Business and its graduate programs focused on improving the environment and enhancing sustainability.

There are no case studies of K-12 schools, undergraduate programs or educational programs for disadvantaged students. However, there are several articles that focus on how SR helps disadvantaged and low-income people, especially in distributing food to low-income citizens (Fondy Foods, Zingerman's), providing healthcare to Detroit's youth in poverty (Henry Ford Health System) and repairing homes for low-income elderly and people with disabilities (Rebuilding Together Greater Milwaukee). The focus on the applicability of SR to the educational system seems to be missing.

3. "Seeking Sustainable Success: ASQ Integrates Quality and Social Responsibility in Primary, Secondary and Higher Education"[4]

In this 2009 publication, ASQ specifically discusses SR in the education sector. The summary states: "Education organizations that seek to be better positioned for the future understand the importance of addressing social responsibility through quality management and improvement tools that help reduce costs, improve efficiency, and have a positive impact on their communities." Note the focus on efficiency and partnerships in the community but lack of specific focus on student success. However, there is a focus on integrating energy conservation with improved learning environments for learning and developing SR curriculums.

The Iredell-Statesville Schools (I-SS) in North Carolina, which won the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 2008, is included as a case study. Although I-SS won the Baldrige Award partially based on improvement in academic achievement,[5] this element is not listed among the SR characteristics. What is listed are economics (budgets and fiscal accountability), engagement with community partners and environmental concerns. No discussion is presented on helping disadvantaged students, which leads to conclude that it is not on the radar for SR.

4. "[ISO 26000 and Educational Leadership Preparation](http://www.asq.org)"[6]

In this publication, Fernando Padró discusses the connection between SR and social justice. It is an important discussion. He writes: "Focusing on community relations and how schools can become better community members is not necessarily the same thing as the redress of social inequalities, which, for many educators is an important step in improving student learning."

Although educators are interested in helping disadvantaged students achieve academically at a higher level, the SR standard ISO 26000 is focused on "the transactional relationship between the organization and its external environment."[7] As an important consideration, Padró also discusses the importance of educational standards in bridging the gap between SR and social justice in an educational sense, so all students have the opportunity and resources to achieve academic excellence.

A significant characteristic of the SR standard, ISO 26000, is that it encourages organizations to "identify stakeholders" and "communicate and demonstrate commitment to

student learning and community support, as appropriate and feasible."[8] So there is a much stronger focus on engagement of stakeholders and meeting the needs of the stakeholders in the community. From an educational system perspective, this translates into learning outcomes that employers expect all graduates to have and the importance of university advisory boards.

It is noteworthy that this particular article differs somewhat in focus and in content from the other three, and therefore reflects a closer alignment of educational opportunities as an outcome of social responsibility awareness.

Using the SR paradigm to help disadvantaged students in higher education

Based on these four publications, I propose three ideas for applying the SR paradigm to improve higher education's ability to help disadvantaged and low-income students:

1. Create a partnership between universities and community stakeholders. Let's use the ideas of SR in ISO 26000 to engage stakeholders in the community in a meaningful way that helps all students. Universities must partner more with the surrounding community and develop partnerships with companies, industry and community organizations. In return corporations need to partner more with schools and universities.

At the ASQ Education Division's 2012 Advancing the STEM Agenda Conference held at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie, we had a panel discussion on science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education-industry partnerships throughout the STEM pipeline. We talked about how these important partnerships connect the university with industry, with opportunities for co-ops and internships, and with industry representatives engaging students in middle schools on exciting careers in the STEM fields.

With respect to disadvantaged students, exposure to career opportunities while students are still in middle school has been shown to make a difference. Opportunities for co-op experiences and internships in college or between high school and college motivates students and especially gives disadvantaged students a new perspective, as well as hands on integration of experience with education. In some cases, it reinforces the importance of completing a degree and embracing academic opportunities.

2. Recognize the importance of Baldrige for SR. As mentioned in the SR articles, the Baldrige model includes an SR focus and embodies the SR element of organizational governance.[9] It establishes a quality culture for a university. The use of the Baldrige model can bring systems-thinking to universities and effectively incorporates the ideas of SR, including identifying and engaging stakeholders and having a more effective organization that addresses students' needs. For example, in "Systems Thinking: Critical to Quality Improvement in Higher Education," Julie Furst-Bowe writes about Baldrige systems thinking in the university: "Systems thinking is based on the idea that all key processes in an organization are interrelated. Understanding these relationships is critical to obtaining desired results, making targeted improvements, and achieving organizational effectiveness."[10]

Increased use of the Baldrige model by universities is recommended. A systems approach benefits disadvantaged students in giving them more support through an effective network and more learning opportunities.

3. Use quality tools to improve academic achievement. According to ASQ, "Quality provides the method to support the ideology of SR efforts."[11] We know that using quality tools—such as the plan-do-study-act cycle—and being more process-driven can improve student success. The highest drop-out rate occurs during the freshman year at college. All universities have student support programs such as learning centers, summer programs, tutoring and mentoring programs, especially for students who are underprepared or disadvantaged.

As part of the SR paradigm, these programs must be scientifically designed and managed using quality tools. Often they are not, and the benefits to students that could be gained are not achieved. For example, Casey E. George-Jackson and Blanca Rincon conducted a research study on sustainability of STEM intervention programs (SIP) at 10 large research universities and found that only about half of the SIPs were formally evaluated for their success in helping students.[12]

More focus on being data-driven, making data-driven decisions and providing this feedback into the next year's program must be seen as part of a university's SR paradigm. The

result will be higher retention rates, especially among those students who are challenged the most.

The future

The 2012 *ASQ Research: Quality and Social Responsibility* survey shows that 10 universities surveyed indicated they had a SR program.[13] Future ASQ SR publications could provide more depth by exploring additional uses of the SR paradigm and the ISO 26000 standard for improving higher education systems, and especially for helping disadvantaged students. Much more needs to be done in our educational system to help disadvantaged students achieve at the same level academically as others.

I believe the paradigm of SR includes helping these students be successful, just as much as helping elderly citizens' repair their homes or feeding people in poverty. Many of these disadvantaged students could be our future teachers, engineers and doctors, given educational support and a stronger SR paradigm toward student success.

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