



Understanding diversity and mentoring diverse students

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Presentation Outline

- Journey towards diversity
- Teaching in a diverse classroom
- Mentoring diverse students



Journey towards diversity

How the topic of diversity found me and why we fell in love...

- Teaching background
- Diversity courses
 - Textbooks
 - Groups approach
 - Teaching tolerance
- Is there a better way to communicate information on diversity and diverse populations?

I got started...

- Presentations
- Writing and publications
- SME for UL System on Diversity
- Diversity Lunch Series
- Changed my teaching paradigm
 - Traditional methods won't work
 - Must create a balance of safety and challenge for students
 - Must create opportunities for students to be more self aware

Creating a Culture of Learning

- Consider these questions and statements
 - Who Am I?
 - Who Am I with others?
 - “More reflective, less reactive”
 - Having a clear sense of who you are allows you to more easily relate to others without feeling threatened



Teaching in a diverse
classroom

What do we mean by *diverse students*?

- Any group that has been historically underrepresented on college campuses
- Racial/ethnic minorities, women, nontraditional students, international students, gay and lesbian students

Starting a dialogue about diversity

- When we discuss *cultural diversity*, the key is creating “buy in” from the students
 - Because of the changing demographic of our society, students must learn to interact with peers, faculty, coworkers, and employers from diverse backgrounds.
- How is this done?

3 Steps

- Step 1:
 - Looking within (introspection)
- Step 2:
 - Looking outward (exposure)
- Step 3:
 - Synthesis (pull experiences together)

Step 1: Introspection

- Start with the individual and broaden their perspective through reflective exercises
 - *I am a cultural being*
 - *Sorting people* activity (challenges our way of thinking about race)
 - www.pbs.org/race
 - *Ancestry interview*

Step 2: Exposure

- Attend cultural events
- Explore history of diverse groups to provide context
- Interact and dialogue with ELS students
- Guest speakers

Step 3: Synthesis

- Reflection or culminating paper
- Project where diverse students work as a team
 - Group presentation

What if I don't have time to do steps 1 and 2?

- You'll need to fast-track teamwork and collaboration
- How do you accomplish this task?
- Part of getting students to work together is building equity and fairness into the course and communicating it to all students
- When you create equity, students are typically motivated to work together because you're creating a *collective* group experience
 - Principles built into group therapy
 - "I'm not alone", "We're all here to accomplish the same goal"
 - Inclusion

Teaching in a diverse classroom

- Communicate high expectations
 - Low expectations breed low performance and contributes to achievement gaps in education
- Communicate clear expectations, but be ready to assist
 - Don't assume everyone knows how to access certain resources, has graduate level writing skills, etc. (various levels of preparation)
 - There is always a range of students who write as well as we do and students who struggle with sentence structure, grammar, etc.
 - Graduate Written Paper Rubric
 - Point out writing resources on your course syllabus or as appropriate/needed

Diverse classroom (cont.)

- Infuse cultural elements into classroom materials
 - Utilize examples and case studies which include diverse individuals
- Nurture the garden-provide opportunities to foster relationships
 - Small group work
 - Students get to know each other better
 - Community service project
 - Especially one that exposes students to differing perspectives

Diverse classroom (cont.)

- Consistent, frequent feedback
 - Regular intervals of feedback and communication between the instructor and the student is necessary so there are no surprises
 - In many collectivistic cultural groups, there is more focus on *interdependence* than *independence*
 - *Interdependence means that members of the group are mutually reliant on each other; dependence means that one person relies heavily on the other, but the opposite is not reciprocated*
 - Frequent and open communication with diverse students models an ideal that is embedded within the student's cultural framework

Diverse classroom (cont.)

- Stay attuned to classroom discussions
 - If the discussions are becoming more critical than helpful, it may be time for you to step in to set the tone and model appropriate listening skills
 - Women and minorities (underrepresented groups) may be more hesitant to speak up if their opinions are constantly met with resistance

Diverse classroom (cont.)

- Be sure diverse students are not being asked or called upon to speak for their entire race or gender
- While diverse students may have certain lived experiences, they are only the experts of their own lives



Mentoring diverse students

(photo courtesy of ADVANCE at NC State)

What is mentoring?

- "Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance, and become the person they want to be."

Eric Parsloe, The Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring

Points to ponder when mentoring diverse students

- Diverse students may be unaware that they are being mentored
 - *This type of relationship may be relatively new so there is no existing context*
- Diverse students may not trust mentoring relationships
 - *Trust will be the most important ingredient for a successful mentoring relationship*
 - *In many minority cultures, children are taught early on self preservation skills (both physically and psychologically)*
 - *Trust is not freely given; it must be earned*
 - *The student may be unsure of the faculty member's motivations to mentor; this will change over time with consistency and rapport*
- Diverse students may believe that mentoring responsibilities include emotional support and contributing to overall well being as well as encouraging and promoting a high level of career development
 - *This alludes to the faculty member caring about the person and the professional in training*

Source: Handbook for Faculty Mentors (University of Washington)

My story of being mentored

- Doctoral student at UNO
 - My first advisor
 - African-American female
 - May have been paired due to *ethnic matching*
 - Identified with her, but on a generic level

Mentor (cont.)

- My mentor match
 - Dr. Barbara Richter Herlihy
 - German ancestry
- Why we fit together
 - Less about appearances
 - More about similar research interests, work ethic, etc.
 - She continually showed interest in my success and encouraged me along the way
 - I continually sought out opportunities to learn more from her and collaborated on scholarly research
 - We still collaborate and meet for dinner to catch up
- What made the difference?
 - Authenticity and genuineness in the relationship

Closing Thought

- "The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches, but to reveal to him his own."

Benjamin Disraeli

References