Diversity Task Force Meeting
October 15, 2009


The meeting started by attempting to define what it means to be “multiculturally competent.” The responses of the task force members can be grouped into two categories: definitional statements and methods by which multicultural competence might be developed.

Definitional Statements

- Multicultural competence is an evolving state; we should focus on how we can better learn about diversity
- Multicultural competence is becoming aware of power structures, seeing our commonalities, and gaining cultural competency beyond our own identity through interaction with others
- Respect needs to be included in the definition of multicultural competence; our differences need to be recognized
- To define multicultural competence, we need to think of our goals. If our goals are to transform students and faculty, what would the results of this transformation look like? What is a profound understanding of diversity? Suggestions include:
  - Must understand power and privilege in American society
  - Must know the history of race and racism in America
  - Must recognize the organizing role of culture and race in society (i.e., the social structure of rules and norms that guide behavior, that are taken-for-granted assumptions in our societal relationships, the dominant cultural mindset)
  - Must understand our own level of cultural competency
  - All groups need to develop multicultural competence, not just certain groups
- Multicultural competence requires knowing about all the “isms” and this knowledge must be transferable to settings beyond the university campus as this is the world in which our students will live. “Societies have problems; universities have disciplines.”
- Elements of a multiculturally competent person: knowledge about race, racism, power and power structures, privilege, class, gender, ethnicity, culture and history.
Methods to develop multicultural competence

- Curriculum is the main vehicle to deliver multicultural competency
- Clear recognition and acknowledgement of the cultural assumptions embedded in our interactions with others and in teaching
- Developing and enhancing knowledge base about multicultural competence is important
- Student life beyond the classroom and curriculum needs to be a focus of change efforts
- It is important to motivate students to continue learning to build multicultural competence, as it is never a fully attained state. Need to decide the level of multicultural competence that is realistic for us to attain with students.
- Application of multicultural competence to some disciplines (e.g., the natural sciences) is less apparent, but still necessary (e.g., must work in teams of people from around the world; people possess or lack power on different axes and power is not absolute)
- Building multicultural competence must be in every course, not special “diversity” courses; how we do this will vary with each discipline
- We need to learn what we don’t know
- Unconscious bias must be brought to awareness
- How do we get faculty to care about these issues? What is it that we are to care about?
- Storytelling can be a powerful tool to make people become aware of these issues
- Students need to become culturally competent for life; they need discipline-specific skills but also citizenship preparation
- Need to build awareness, knowledge, skills, respect, and real-life experience around the elements of multicultural competence

The next step is to look at potential actions we can take as a task force and cluster these into groups. Sub-task forces can work on these clusters of activities. Potential sub-task forces can be charged with:

1. Developing Learning Outcomes for Multicultural Competence: Refine the meaning of multicultural competence and develop a set of learning outcomes that reflect this competency for curriculum development.
2. Building a Campus Climate for Diversity: Develop actions that would improve campus climate, develop faculty to be conscious of and motivated to engage in efforts to enhance multicultural competence, and design rewards and incentives for engaging in diversity efforts.
3. Designing a Diversity Forum on Campus: Plan a forum or jamming session for Spring 2010 to seek ways to deal with diversity challenges on campus (e.g., hate crimes) and explore ideas for future development.