

Multicultural education transformation in higher education: getting faculty to “buy in”

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ABSTRACT

As higher education institutions seek to prepare students to live and work in a global society, many realize that faculty must be equipped to address this challenge. This institution has been successful in getting faculty to “buy in” to their multicultural curriculum initiative. This paper discusses how one institution systematically educates its faculty to transform their courses to embrace a multicultural curriculum.

Key Words: Diversity in Higher Education, Multicultural Curriculum Transformation

Introduction

The Institute helped to solidify my commitment to an inclusive pedagogical approach and taught me essential skills in course design, assessment and evaluation, all of which have been invaluable in strengthening my course, communicating the content more effectively, and creating a more meaningful classroom experience for both my students and me (Professor A).

As higher education institutions seek to prepare students to live and work in a global society, many realize that faculty must be equipped to address this challenge (Author, 2006; Author, 2009). Professional development is a significant key to enhancing multicultural literacy among teachers, and this training can lead to vigorous multi-perspective critical thinking and learning environments that affirm and push forward a larger and more diverse student body. Current research in multicultural education reveals that multicultural curriculum strategies that emphasize holistic approaches promote greater student achievement (Banks & Banks, 2005; Pang, 2003.). Culturally responsive teaching and learning with its emphasis on greater teacher awareness of the cultural dynamics in the content, interactions, and pedagogy enhances teachers' ability to design culturally enriched and sensitive teaching/learning experiences. Multicultural curriculum best practices have the potential to increase the retention, at all levels, for students of color while also leading to positive results for mainstream students---and re-invigorating faculty. With this in mind, one southwestern university launched a vigorous multicultural curriculum initiative designed to give faculty in all disciplines the tools they need to transform the traditional curriculum to reflect multicultural curriculum best practices.

The university has been successful in getting faculty to “buy in” to their multicultural curriculum initiative. This paper will discuss how one higher education institution educates its faculty to embrace multicultural curriculum transformation. More specifically this paper will share: (a) the history of the multicultural curriculum initiative; (b) techniques that were used to encourage faculty to participate in the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute ; (c) faculty evaluations of the Institute and (d) pedagogical strategies that faculty used in the transformation of their courses as well as student responses to the transformed courses, and (e) plans for the future.

History of the Multicultural Initiative

The Institution. The southwestern institution is a doctoral granting university located between two Austin, TX and San Antonio, TX on the Interstate 35 corridor. There are 29,000 students enrolled in 115 undergraduate programs, 84 master programs, and 6 Ph.D. programs. This campus is the largest campus in the Texas State University System, and the sixth largest university in the State of Texas. More than 25% of the students are students of color. The University is one of the top 20 producers of Hispanic baccalaureate graduates in the nation and produces the largest number of new K-12 teachers in the state each year.

The Center for Multicultural and Gender Studies (the Center) has been at the forefront of the university's multicultural curriculum transformation initiative. As part of the College of Liberal Arts, the Center houses and administers the Diversity Studies minor at the undergraduate level and the Women's Studies minor at the graduate and undergraduate level. In addition, the

Center uses its curricular and co-curricular activities to assist in the preparation of students to work and live in a pluralistic society. It provides faculty with resources and information that encourage the infusion of an interdisciplinary curriculum addressing such issues as race, class, gender, and ethnicity, and it plays a key role in the implementation of the University's Diversity Plan to achieve multicultural curriculum transformation as outlined in the 2004-2009 Strategic Plan. The diversity plan states, ". . . the curriculum will reflect a multicultural perspective Annually, two courses in each college will be modified to reflect multicultural content and/or perspectives."

In the spring semester of 2006, the second year of the Multicultural Institute, systemic change came to Texas in the area of multicultural education when, after the endorsement by the Council of Deans, the Provost announced a university sanctioned multicultural course assessment instrument that includes The Institute's multicultural course identification paradigm, inspired by the work of Dr. Margie Kitano (1997), and a university-wide process for courses to receive University approved multicultural designations.

The Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute

After a pilot year working with four faculty members on research and implementation of multicultural curriculum infusion best practices, the Director of the Center planned and received University approval and financial support for a Multicultural Curriculum Transformation Institute. Recently renamed the Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute (The Institute), it completed its fifth year in May 2009. The Institute ran for the first three years as a two week session, and then changed to a one week session in May 2008. It is an intensive review of best practices pedagogy and strategies to facilitate multicultural curriculum transformation. It annually employs nationally known guest scholars and Texas State faculty consultants with expertise related to multicultural curriculum. The facilitators share ideas for implementing multicultural content, but also multicultural perspectives related to teaching strategies, classroom dynamics, and assessment.

The Institute offers a stipend for at least two faculty members from each college each year to attend The Institute as a practical method of achieving the strategic goal of transforming two courses per college each year. The faculty members agree to deliver a transformed syllabus at the end of the session, or shortly thereafter, to receive the stipend. Since the pilot year of 2004 the university has trained over 75 faculty members representing all of the colleges—Applied Arts, Business, Education, Health Professions, Liberal Arts, Fine Arts and Communication, Science, and University College. Many faculty members who transformed a course during the Institute went on to transform their other courses. Several have led sessions on multicultural curriculum best practices for their departments and officially serve as multicultural curriculum consultants for their colleges. In addition, throughout the year, the Director to the Center (and the Institute) engages in one-on-one mentoring of faculty who wish to transform their courses to receive a multicultural designation.

Diversity Studies, International Studies, and Women's Studies are the key multicultural content areas identified at the Institution. To receive a multicultural content designation the course must have a minimum of 60% multicultural content; to receive a multicultural perspectives designation the course must include multicultural approaches to teaching strategies, assessment, and classroom dynamics: it may have less than 60% multicultural content. Most of the transformed courses have received both multicultural content and multicultural perspectives

designations. To date, nine core curriculum courses have received multicultural designations: Communication 1310 (Fundamentals of Human Communication), English 1310, English 1320 (Freshman English), History 1310, History 1320 (History of the United States), TH 2313 Introduction to Fine Arts: Theatre, MUSI 2313 Introduction to Fine Arts: Music, ARTS 2313 Introduction to Fine Arts: Art, and DANC 2313 Introduction to Fine Arts: Dance.

Recruitment of Faculty

The keys to success in getting faculty at the institution to “buy in,” that is, to participate in multicultural curriculum transformation projects from the Institute have included the following:

Institutional Support. The most significant strategy for success was getting the multicultural initiative detailed in the 2004-2009 strategic plan, debated and approved at all levels, with clear outcomes measures. The impetus for change was enhanced by an accountability element in the strategic plan that made institution leaders at all levels accountable. When The Institute was revealed as a way to realize the multicultural education goal it was enthusiastically embraced, promoted, and funded by the Provost.

Compensation. With competition from competing workshops, research projects, teaching, service, and summer vacation, compensation in the form of a substantial financial stipend has encouraged faculty to dedicate one to two weeks to earn a multicultural designation for a specified course. In addition, tenure-track faculty members have been inspired by the opportunity to enhance their teaching, and senior faculty members have been inspired by the opportunity to review teaching strategies and network with their colleagues. Faculty compensation includes incentives to turn in outcome measures reports for transformed courses and to present at conferences or publish related to the transformation.

Emphasis on Benefits. The Institute promotional materials have emphasized the benefits of attending including stipends, networking, improved student responses, research opportunities and incentives, and consultant opportunities. These serve as recruitment efforts for faculty.

Consultant Opportunities. An official board of consultants of former Institute participants now exists for each college. Participants have welcomed the honor and the opportunity to serve as leaders in multicultural education in their colleges and departments. In 2008 and 2009 The Institute’s recruitment brochure personalized the call to enroll by including testimony from previous participants representing all of the colleges of the University. In addition, former participants have had the opportunity to serve on an ad-hoc committee to give input for revision of future Institutes.

Well-Planned Relevant Instruction. Promotional materials have outlined key topic areas: 1) the Multicultural landscape at the institution, 2) diverse learning styles and multicultural teaching approaches, 3) discipline specific multicultural content enrichment ideas, 4) culturally enriched teaching techniques, 5) culturally sensitive assessment strategies, and 6) effective intercultural and cross cultural communication and communication in conflict strategies. In addition, modeling multicultural education best practices in the design and implementation of The Institute sessions led to positive responses. Most importantly, the faculty participants had many opportunities during the training sessions for interaction with presenters and each other.

Pedagogical Strategies

The pedagogical umbrella for The Institute starts with the institution's Multicultural Policy Statement which is consistent with definitions by scholars of multicultural education philosophy.

[The University] believes that freedom of thought, innovation, and creativity are fundamental characteristics of a community of scholars. To promote such a learning environment, the university has a special responsibility to seek diversity, to instill a global perspective in its students, and to nurture sensitivity, tolerance, and mutual respect. Discrimination against or harassment of individuals on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, or disability are inconsistent with the purpose of the university. (*Texas State University-San Marcos, Undergraduate Catalog, 2008-2010*)

Margie Kitano (1997) defines multicultural education as follows:

Multicultural education is the development of citizens for a more democratic society through provision of more accurate and comprehensive disciplinary knowledge and through enhancement of students' academic achievement and critical thinking applied to social problems. The promotion of the values of diversity and equal opportunity for all people through understanding of the contributions and perspectives of people of differing race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and physical abilities and disabilities. ("A Rationale . . .," p.12)

Margaret Stone Hanley (1999) goes a little further when she says:

Essentially, multicultural education is about social change through education. It is another aspect of the continuous human journey toward justice and pushes us toward the fulfillment of the promises of democracy. It gives us new questions to ask and directions to follow to uncover human possibilities in the new millennium.

In addition, the multicultural education dimensions outlined by James Banks (2001) establish significant multicultural goals and potential outcomes: 1) content integration, 2) [enhanced awareness of] knowledge construction, 3) prejudice reduction, 4) equity pedagogy, and 5) an empowering school culture. Introducing the Texas State multicultural policy statement, and showing the resemblance to Kitano, Hanley, and Banks has helped highlight for faculty the rationale and significant goals of multicultural education, but also the wide net of potential benefits.

Kitano Paradigm. Margie Kitano's work entitled, "What a Course Will Look Like after a Multicultural Change" (1997), has been the inspiration for the multicultural curriculum model. Her paradigm begins with a course description that identifies the multicultural elements, multicultural goal statements related to four basic elements for change: content, teaching strategies, assessment, and classroom dynamics, and outcome measures to determine if the multicultural goals are successfully implemented. Drawing on the scholarship of multicultural educators over the past 25 years, Kitano recommends classifying the transformation elements as levels of infusion with the first level as the traditional curriculum (non-inclusive), the second level consisting of an addition of different perspectives (inclusive), and third level including critical thinking, examination of the construction of knowledge, and synthesis of old and new (or different) perspectives.

Faculty and Student Surveys and Testimonials

Faculty Evaluation. During the years, 2005-2007, there were 38 faculty members who participated in the program. Liberal Arts had the most with 9 faculty members (three each year), while education had six (two each year). In addition, liberal arts and education had faculty who participated in all three years along with fine arts and health. As Figure 1 indicates faculty members came from Applied Science, Business, Education, Fine Arts, Health, Liberal Arts, Science and the University College. They represented all of the colleges of institution.

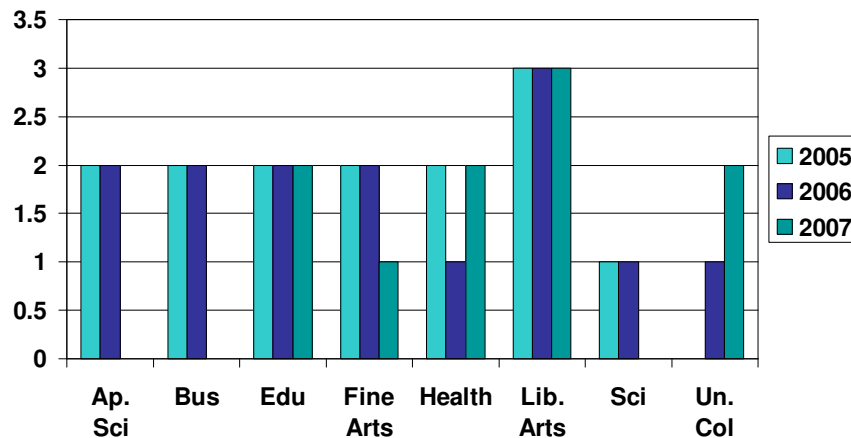
After each institute, the directors conducted an evaluation. The participants were asked to rate the following: materials, information, space, communication, hospitality, sharing with others, administration and the overall institute evaluation. The scale on the evaluation was 1 poor, 2-fair, 3-good and 4 excellent.

In year 2005, 13 of 14 participants completed the evaluation. In year 2006, 11 of the 14 participants completed the evaluation and in 2007 all 12 of the participants completed the evaluation. The participants ranked hospitality (3.87) and sharing information with others (3.87) as their top three, with information and administration in the second highest and space as the lowest with 3.46. They rated the program overall for the three years to be 3.73. Overall, faculty rated the institute to be from good to excellent with the three-year overall evaluation of 3.73. (See Figure 1).

Faculty Comments: When faculty were asked to respond to two open-ended questions about what they found most valuable in the institute, the responses were in three areas – faculty, curriculum instructional materials and speakers.

Figure 1

2005 -2007 Faculty Participants and Department



Faculty found collaboration and interactions with other faculty members a valuable part of the experience. They felt that getting to meet and network with other faculty members was the highlight of The Institute. For example,

“I was delighted by this experience. I was able to successfully transform my syllabus, and the session I attended also let me interact with teachers from various disciplines. On any issue I was able to hear a variety of perspectives, and I came away from my session convinced there are plenty of committed teachers at [the institution] (Professor G.)

Faculty comments about instructional materials ranged from liking the opportunity to share instructional materials, exchanging ideas and learning new pedagogy and content. One faculty stated:

“The Institute reminded me about many of the goals I’d had when I became a university professor, and it introduced me to new strategies for realizing those goals. It was also taught in the way I want to teach: openly, welcoming alternate views, and championing differences (Professor D).

Faculty committed to rethinking their syllabus and incorporating, culturally responsive teaching into their courses. They acknowledged the effectiveness of the speakers in providing useful information and multiple perspectives. Several faculty members noted that the institute boosted their self confidence.

English Student Responses. As a result of The Institute influence, English professors added the following three questions to their standard departmental evaluation form: Did the course introduced a variety of texts and writers from cultural groups? There were 718 students that involved 27% of the fall 2007 enrollment. This included 40 sections of two English classes and 20 instructors. Of the 718 students, 99% stated that course introduced texts and writers from a variety of cultural groups. More specific comments included that there were many different writers in the course. They read readings from writers of different sex, race and background. Students stated that they loved the readings and were glad to get experiences of reading works about many cultures.

Faculty Responses After Attending Institute. Faculty participants completed follow-up surveys at the end of The Institute and sent responses after teaching the transformed class he first time. One faculty member stated:

“I have noticed a steady increase in the number of students who mention diversity and multicultural teaching in their comments on my course instructor evaluations, as well as those who give positive feedback regarding the "transformed" areas of my courses” (Professor C).

And a second faculty member remarked:

“I get even more of these comments verbally. I feel I have always emphasized multiculturalism in my courses, but whereas the amount of emphasis has been constant, the institute help me change how I approach integrated multiculturalism in my teaching. (Professor K).

One faculty member noted that: “I have also noticed that faculty now comment on multiculturalism within my T&P [tenure and promotion] materials (Professor D).

One faculty member in Education added an additional question to her student survey. All students (100%) stated that the professor addressed relevant issues regarding diverse population, the professor was open to discussion of other view points and that the professors demonstrated respect for all students. One student captured the essence of the professor with the following statement:

One of the most amazing characteristics of Dr. Johnson’s teaching is her ability to create a space that is safe and comfortable for every one of her students. Her past encompasses such a great variety of experiences that help promote diversity and establish an environment in

which all the voices are welcome, regardless of race, class, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, etc. Being an international student, I truly appreciated the classroom community that accepted and encouraged my cultural differences. (Student A).

The Three R's of Faculty "Buy In"

There are three Rs of get faculty to "buy in" to participating in a multicultural course transformation initiative. These are revision, rewards and research.

Revision. Feedback from each of the yearly institutes was added to the next year's plan. For example, feedback from the first year stated that the participants shared discomfort about the room temperature and we changed the temperature in the room to reflect the comfort of the students. From year 3 to year 4, the institute was changed from two weeks to one week. Based on comments from the participants, we advise the next presenters to change their presentations as some topics were redundant. For example, the definition of multicultural education was presented by several presenters. We asked them to make the necessary changes and suggested that more time be spent on areas. In 2008, the Institute was changed from two weeks to one week.

Rewards. Financial compensation for faculty provided an incentive. Often in the academy faculty members received no monetary compensations for participating in to attend professional development. Another reward was improvement in faculty student evaluations. Faculty noted that there was increase in positive student comments about their teaching and that their overall student evaluation mean score increased. In addition, there were more students who participated in the evaluation. One professor stated that it helped her receive tenure.

Research. Participants were encouraged to conduct research about their teaching and submit papers for conference presentation. In addition, the institute provided financial support to faculty members to present at conferences. Also, participants were encouraged to submit their papers to professional journals. Many faculty members found that there are few papers written about the inclusion of multicultural education in their respective discipline and were willing to write about their multicultural work which for many would add to the literature in their respective disciplines.

Summary

There are few universities in the country that strategically try to prepare students for working and living in a global society by course transformation that are steeped in the tenants of multicultural education. The Colleges/Departments of Education have led the way through the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). This university did not regulate the-responsibility to the College of Education, but to the entire university. We have provided strategies to assist other universities in attempting this enormous task. We believe that this can be done on campuses if institutional support is an integral component of the strategic plan, if qualified personnel to direct the project, and when willing faculty members who have a desire to participate are rewarded for their efforts. Can this type of intervention work on campus is the question. One professor captures it best in the following statement:

I was surprised how easy it was to make my courses more diverse and have continued to use many of the ideas from the institute in my teaching, including

in a quantum mechanics class. Participating in the institute allowed me to see many more cultural connections in my research and teaching. (Professor F).

Having a multicultural curriculum transformation institute can assist all stakeholders, faculty, students and the university as a whole with preparing a workforce for living and working in a global society. No longer can institutions use rhetoric in their mission regarding diversity; they must begin to strategically address the issues to enhance the ability of faculty to utilize multicultural course transformation to prepare multiculturally literate students who will more than any other generation live and work in the global society.

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