

Chapter 4

Promoting Diversity and Multicultural Training in Higher Education: Calling in Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The educational system and academia reside at the core of most professional settings. The issues are that diversity and multicultural content and process continue to be taught in higher education but multicultural issues within programs are sometimes neglected. These concerns occur in and out of the classroom and can be a microcosm of biases in our society. This chapter seeks to promote diversity and multicultural training and discussion of microaggressions to infuse and build higher education programs to become more culturally competent both in content and process. The theoretical concepts are presented to offer a guideline and lens to perceive faculty training. Biases are explored as they pertain to our current state of higher education in both the structure and content. Instances of faculty training are given with case examples to highlight the training process and to promote an academic environment that is open to multicultural discussions and persistent on creating and maintaining safe space and time. Suggestions for future exploration and reading recommendations are made.

BACKGROUND

The academic system has a unique hierarchy and is an interconnected unit that is at the pinnacle position for many fields. At the core of any academic institution resides faculty who are connecting the expertise of the field and their colleagues with the future contributors to the field; the students. The students, will then pass this learned knowledge onto future generations of professionals, their clients, as well as

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internalizing this knowledge themselves. In the current social environment, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism is a common headline, topic of discussion, and ethical debate.

Today, the stance towards diversity is taken as nobody in their professional capacity is or can be bias free; this is also the perspective the authors are taking in this chapter towards diversity and multiculturalism. The authors also acknowledge that the terms diversity and multiculturalism are currently seen by some diversity scholars as a hot topic used by higher education organizations as a way of not having “progressive utility” (Harris, Barone, & Davis, 2015, p. 24). What they mean by this is, some demonstrate the practice of diversity on face value to claim that their students get exposure to diverse people, rather than exploring and targeting thinking and ideology that promotes multicultural practices on a deeper level. For example, minority people being placed in a role as having the responsibility to become the authorities on teaching their culture to others and having to change themselves based on “whiteness as [a] normative” way of being, without exploring power and inequity (Harris, Barone, & Davis, 2015, p. 26).

Further, when considering various fields of mental health (e.g. psychology, social work, professional counselors, and marriage and family therapy) having an acknowledgement around bias is vital, especially when exploring professional growth for both faculty as well as the students they teach. By acknowledging this stance, the subjective and objective can be explored, and challenged rather than ignored. In a dynamic society; it is important for faculty to follow changing needs of their respective fields. Staying dangerously stagnant regarding their stances towards multiculturalism and diversity may transmit these attitudes to their students, which would be disadvantageous when students leave academia for the real world. Diversity and multiculturalism training should be a priority for faculty in any academic institution as faculty serve as models for future generations. Without these types of training academia could be in danger of continuing to marginalize students by only addressing diversity and multiculturalism with face value.

This chapter seeks to promote university institutions to infuse academic faculty development with a systemic approach to diversity and multiculturalism training. Previous research has pointed to positive outcomes for learning about diversity to improve the overall health of an organization from the administration to the student, in addition to, the individuals within it (Figueiredo-Brown, R., Ringler, M. C., & James, M., 2015; Winston, M., 2001). This chapter will discuss further the importance of the following topics: the importance of faculty receiving additional training in terms of syllabus development to highlight and support multiculturalism, promoting difficult dialogues, looking at and working through faculty’s own diversity blind spots, participation in on campus meetings discussing diversity, and microaggression training.

Further, this chapter will discuss basic diversity and multicultural theories in assisting faculty to use a lens to perceive their academic courses, provide several activities and examples of promoting faculty development, and troubleshooting potential roadblocks a faculty member may encounter in their own development. The authors’ chose to begin theory discussion first as a method to ground the various needs for specific trainings, activities, exercises, and process to take place. Each of the theories discussed have greatly contributed to diversity and multiculturalism in the mental health field, and thus, serve as a great starting point in understanding of cultural competency training for academic faculty across different fields.

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