

Chapter 42

An Approach to Diversity and Cultural Competence Curriculum in Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

There are a variety of approaches that can be utilized to facilitate public administration students and practitioners using culturally responsive approaches in their professional lives. The importance of understanding cultural diversity extends not only to individual interactions but also the structure of organizations and organizational decision making. The chapter presents one approach to providing students with a diversity-focused curriculum in a graduate-level public administration program. This approach includes an overview of the historical legacy of diversity in public administration, legally required and voluntary approaches to organizational diversity, models that can be used to assess the diverse cultural experiences of individuals for more personalized practice, and activities that can be utilized and adapted to educate public administration students and practitioners on issues of diversity and cultural competency.

INTRODUCTION

By 2030, one in five Americans is projected to be 65 and over; by 2044, more than half of all Americans are projected to belong to a minority group (any group other than non-Hispanic White alone); and by 2060, nearly one in five of the nation's total population is projected to be foreign-born (Colby and Ortman, 2015). Given the current and future demographic changes that are taking place in the United States, it is imperative that public administration students and practitioners are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that will prepare them to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds and address the needs of individuals and communities in ways that acknowledge differences across culture and identity. In spite of this, many Master of Public Administration programs do not include components

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in their curriculum that emphasize the various dimensions of diversity (Sabharwal, Hajal-Moghrabi, and Royster, 2014). Hewins-Maroney and Williamson (2007) find that although most public affairs and administration programs include some form of diversity within the curriculum, it is not standard across all programs. Also, when present the focus is often on socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Other topics like sexual orientation receive little to no attention (Ryan, 2012; Wyatt-Nichol and Antwi-Boasiako, 2008). In some instances, diversity in the curriculum is limited to a minimal part of a course rather than an entire course or courses (Wyatt-Nichol and Antwi-Boasiako, 2008).

There are a variety of approaches that can be utilized to facilitate students and practitioners engaging in culturally responsive approaches in their professional lives. The importance of understanding cultural diversity extends to not only individual interactions but also the structure of organizations and organizational decision-making. This chapter is intended to be a general overview for faculty who are considering explicitly framing instruction around matters of diversity in public administration or for students and practitioners who received minimal formal training on diversity. Although not the specific audience, individuals from a variety of academic orientations and professional backgrounds who want to facilitate conversations about diversity and inclusion in the classroom or workplace might also utilize the chapter as a way to think about diversity and apply, where appropriate, the content and activities discussed.

The information presented, was originally developed for the course, “Diversity in Public Life” which is offered in the Master of Public Administration program at Auburn University¹. The course was designed to provide students with a broad understanding of diversity in public administration that can be applied to the curriculum that they encounter in other courses, which may not explicitly include components of diversity, and their professional lives. The course structure was rooted in the Carrizales (2010) framework of cultural competency for public affairs curriculum, which includes knowledge, attitude, skills, and community based cultural competency curriculum components.

The chapter, like the course, begins with a foundational overview of diversity in public administration, how it can be perceived, and its evolution in public administration. The chapter then shifts to a presentation of involuntary and voluntary approaches to diversity in public administration, their advantages, and disadvantages. Next, three models of organization diversity and cultural competence are presented as practical ways to understand and evaluate the diversity and inclusion in bureaucracies. The chapter concludes with the presentation of a curricular approach that was utilized to connect the knowledge-based information about organizational approaches to diversity and models of organizational diversity to assignments and activities. Although intended for an academic setting to facilitate discussion about organizational diversity, cultural competence, identity and perception, these activities can be modified for use in a professional setting.

What is Diversity in Public Administration?

There are a variety of ways to define diversity. Sabharwal, Hajal-Moghrabi, and Royster (2014) suggest that in its simplest form, diversity is synonymous with the concepts of variation and heterogeneity (p. 209). Joshi and Roh (2009), who focus on diversity in work teams, define diversity as an aggregate construct that represents differences among members of an interdependent workgroup concerning a personal attribute. They focus on two dimensions of diversity in the workplace; relations oriented diversity and task-oriented diversity. Relations oriented diversity includes individual attributes such as gender, race/ethnicity, and age; characteristics that are in many ways visible and easy to characterize. Task-oriented diversity includes professional tenure, education, and function in an organization. A similar differen-

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