Chapter 3
Developing Diversity Awareness and Multicultural Competence Across Liberal Arts Campuses

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly changing world requires students to be prepared to address change and diversity with empathy, tolerance, and competence. To help prepare them, the authors collaboratively developed and implemented a set of blended, cross-campus multicultural competence modules in graduate and undergraduate courses. This chapter discusses the use of blended learning techniques, digital tools, and learning management technologies, as well as instructional design and collaborative approaches to teaching, learning, and course development. The modules were created to be disseminated for use in multiple courses, disciplines, and collegiate levels across college campuses in an effort to better prepare students for the rapidly changing social landscape of interpersonal relationships and technological developments. Recommendations for similar development and implementations are provided.

INTRODUCTION

"What's going on in this country [USA] right now is like being handcuffed to a tree and watching someone drowning. You can't do anything, but you know you want to," said Keisha. We stared for a moment pondering what our friend had just said.

After a moment, Liz thoughtfully replied, "That's when you need to turn to the tree and ask it to let you go and help."

"But I don't speak tree…."

And that is how we began.

Our world is changing faster than it ever has, primarily in terms of technology, population, diversity, and education. These changes bring myriad challenges associated with adjustments to what is familiar. One way to help prepare each of our students for a life full of change and diverse interactions is to cultivate their empathy, tolerance, and multicultural competence. While it is difficult to "teach" appropriate attitudes and beliefs related to diversity and social change, developing students' awareness and competencies to navigate change through the integration of the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes/beliefs (KSABs) identifiable within several topic areas may lead to more well-rounded and transformative lifelong learners who are amenable to all forms of change. Each of us has worked singularly throughout the years to develop our students' multicultural competence; however, recent current events indicated that a greater need was emerging. It was time to combine forces and make a bigger impact.

Similarly, educational changes, digital and technological changes, and the movement toward more online learning offerings have also impacted our students in higher education (see Adekola, Dale, & Gardiner, 2017; Allen & Seaman, 2014; Bates, 2015; Dron, 2014). Where fully online courses are not utilized or a possibility, blended learning strategies have emerged with the intention of reducing in-person teaching time by providing a well-designed combination of online and face-to-face pedagogical and andragogical learning methods (Adekola et al., 2017; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Halverson, Graham, Spring, & Drysdale, 2012). These changes presented us with an opportunity to develop multicultural competencies in our students and provide a flexible learning environment across liberal arts college campuses. We developed and implemented diversity awareness modules across two liberal arts college campuses in Pennsylvania that combined KSABs students need to understand and navigate diverse social relationships in diverse arenas of interaction. This chapter discusses the use of blended learning techniques, digital tools, and learning management technologies, as well as instructional design and collaborative approaches to our own teaching, learning, and course development. Our intention was to create and disseminate modules that could be implemented in multiple courses, disciplines, and collegiate levels across college campuses in an effort to better prepare our students for the rapidly changing social landscape of interpersonal relationships and technological developments.

BACKGROUND

Our Challenge as Educators

We want our students to learn. And, who doesn't? As longtime educators and learners ourselves, we have worked diligently to build our students' competencies in our respective content areas. While we differ in our subject areas, backgrounds, and demographics, we all agree that we want our students to gain knowledge, skills, and appropriate attitudes and beliefs about the things we are teaching them.

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