

Chapter 51

Enhancing Intercultural Competency Through Co-Curricular Activities in Higher Education: Three Examples From an American University

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ABSTRACT

In response to increasing student diversity, universities have begun to implement programs that provide experiences so that students may expand their understanding of cultural differences. This chapter focuses on the implementation of inter-cultural programming in a large university in the northeastern United States. The university is highly-selective, draws students globally, and diversity is evident across racial, ethnic, sexual orientation, national, and religious identities. This chapter focuses on three signature programs and examines the programs' underlying theoretical frameworks, program implementation, and program outcomes. Each program is presented as a case and program evaluation data is utilized to understand the learning process. The advocacy group is the subject of a mixed methods research project and preliminary data will be presented. The chapter includes a discussion of best practices and links theoretical approaches to practice.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural programming has been gaining importance within university environments, in part, due to demographic changes on campus. Population demographics have shifted in the United States (US Census, 2011) and these shifts are evident in higher education as numbers of under-represented students have increased across campuses. From 1990 to 2013, there have been increases in undergraduate enrollment for minority students thus resulting in increased numbers of historically underrepresented groups on college and university campuses (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016). In addition, there is increased mobility across nations and American universities have seen a rise in international student enrollments (Delgado-Márquez, Escudero-Torres, & Hurtado-Torres, 2013). University curriculum has shifted to reflect an expectation that students will engage across difference and will likely work in global contexts. These changes are reflected in increased study abroad opportunities and international fellowship programs (Chavez, Bender, Hardie, & Gastaldo, 2010; Nelson, Izadnegahdar, Hall, & Lee, 2012; Rhodes, Loberg, & Hubbard, 2014). Universities are developing and supporting intercultural centers with co-curricular programming designed to foster understanding and develop student capacity to engage across difference. Intercultural programming is reflected in classroom based activities as well as community engagement and international learning experiences.

Using transformational learning theory as a lens, this paper examines three educational strategies that are employed in a highly selective, research focused, American university that draws a diverse student body from the United States as well as globally. These strategies are designed to create a space for intercultural work and to provide undergraduate and graduate students with the opportunity to develop competencies in the area of intercultural communication. These competencies involve developing a language to address issues across difference, to explore topics related to social justice and to find ways to strengthen intercultural communication skills. From a transformational learning perspective, the authors argue that these experientially-grounded examples are designed to facilitate the creation of new conceptual frameworks and foster the transformation of world views as participants' question and reflect on their own understanding of diversity. Through engagement in learning activities, students experience a transformed sense of self, shifts in their perceptions of themselves in relation to others, and also develop a better understanding of social justice issues. In order to highlight transformational changes, program evaluation data and research data is reviewed.

BACKGROUND

The following literature review examines key concepts in relation to the learning processes described in this chapter. First, the authors present a framework of formal, non-formal, and informal learning activities that delineate the types of learning environment in which they occur and secondly, the authors discuss the concept of transformational learning.

These three programs are situated in a university context and are categorized according to the type of learning environment. The authors employ Marsick and Watkin's (2001) formal, non-formal, and informal concepts to categorize these three examples thus illustrating the idea that intercultural learning can occur in a variety of settings. Formal learning activities are defined as those educational activities that are supported by the university, highly structured, curriculum-based, and result in credits or a degree (Murdoch-Eaton & Green, 2011). In universities, these types of activities are typically classes or formal

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