

## Promoting a Positive Experience in the College Classroom: Embracing Diversity on Campus

### What is Diversity?

- The state of being diverse
- Difference or unlikeness
- Variety or multiformity
- A situation that includes a representation of multiple cultural groups (ideally all) within a prescribed environment, such as a university or workplace

### What is Diversity?

- Use the "Cultural Iceberg" exercise to demonstrate the various manifestations of diversity that exist among people.
- What do you think about when you hear the word "diversity?"
- Solicit responses from participants and write them down on the drawing of an iceberg.
- Ask participants whether the response belongs above or below a wavy line of the iceberg (representing water).

### What is Diversity?

- Main Points:
- The term "diversity" is very broad in scope.
- When thinking of the word diversity, we should be mindful of the many ways that we are diverse from each other and the importance of understanding those differences.

### What is Diversity?

- Who we are as human beings is often not visible to the eye (below the line) and we often make unconscious, "snap" judgements about people on the basis of a few characteristics that are visible to the eye (above the line).

### What is Diversity?

- We should learn to interact with people based on more of the information below the line, become aware of when we are judging people based on superficial information and in time, hopefully, stop making such judgements.

## Why is Diversity important?

- The United States is increasingly becoming more culturally diverse. The following are some specific demographics:
- Miami is 2/3 Hispanic American
- San Francisco is 1/3 Asian American
- English is the second language in California

## Why is Diversity important?

- Persons with physical and mental impairments comprise the largest single minority (45 million individuals)
- Of the net additions to the workforce by the year 2000, 65 percent were women, men of color and immigrants (Workforce 2000).
- In the 1980's, immigration constituted 30 percent of the nation's population growth.

## Why is Diversity important?

- The number of Asians in the United States has doubled and the number of Hispanic people has grown by 50 percent.
- By the end of the decade, African Americans, Latinos and Asians constituted nearly a majority of the nation's children.
- Women have been projected to account for more than 60 percent of labor force growth.

## Why is Diversity important?

- In 1990, of the 230 million Americans over the age of 5, more than 1 in 8, or nearly 32 million, speak a language other than English at home, a 38 percent increase over 1980.
- Seventy percent of married women with college degrees were either employed or looking for work in 1981, compared to 50 percent in 1971.

## The Value of Diversity Work

- No human being is born with racist, sexist or other oppressive attitudes. These attitudes are learned.
- When children learn about the world they are often misinformed about people who are different from themselves and their families by virtue of race, religion, class or sexual orientation. Stereotypes often emerge.

## The Value of Diversity Work

- Some of us received those messages from our parents, friends, teachers and others who did not intend to misinform us. They were simply passing on to us whatever messages had been handed down to them. Sometimes the messages were overt and sometimes they were subtle.

## The Value of Diversity Work

- We received some the messages from society at large, for example, through the media...whom we saw and did not see on TV, in our textbooks, or living “on the other side of the tracks.”
- Those early-learned stereotypes became “mental tapes” that affected both what we thought and how we felt about those who were different from us.
- Those tapes also affected how we automatically responded to people who were different from us.

## First Memories of Difference

- Use the First Memories of Difference exercise to help participants identify some of their earliest memories of how they first learned about difference.
- Allow participants to share their feelings about these differences.

## Getting off of “Automatic”

- How do we begin to stop responding automatically to differences based on stereotypes?
- Use the Choice of Paths exercise to help participants realize that stopping automatic responses to difference begins with conscious effort.

## Getting off of “Automatic”

- Use a few examples of diversity issues (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia) and walk participants, from bottom to top, through the various levels of the “Fear and Denial” path, and then the “Peacefulness” path.

## Getting off of “Automatic”

- Main Points:
- We may be on one path with regard to one issue (e.g., racism), but on another path with regard to another issue (e.g., homophobia).
- We often default onto the “Fear and Denial” path in emergency situations, when there is no time to think. It is important to be aware of our thoughts and actions in such events.

## Getting off of “Automatic”

- No one is totally on one path or the other. We usually go back and forth between the paths throughout our lives.

## Stereotyping: Why do we do it?

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- After learning the identity of a person, we place them in a “mental file.” The label could be “friend”, “not to be trusted”, “loved one”, “dangerous” or any other category. Having mental files is natural for us as human beings. It is how our brains are wired. Indeed, it is how we make sense of the world.

## Stereotyping: Why do we do it?

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- Stereotyping is a shortcut version of perception. When we stereotype, we place the person in a particular mental file, not based on information gained through knowledge about or personal experience of the particular person. Rather, we assign the person a mental file based on what we believe about the groups to which the person belongs.

## Stereotyping: Why do we do it?

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- Stereotyping of people is usually not helpful because no laws govern what characteristics people will have based upon their membership in particular group(s).
- Once learned, those stereotypes are called up instantly by our brain's Reticular Activating System (RAS), a biological filtering process by which the brain automatically screens out certain information to keep itself from overloading with too much stimuli.

## Stereotyping: Why do we do it?

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- Stereotyping, therefore, is very difficult to undo.

## Growing Beyond Stereotypes

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- A few suggestions:
- Become aware of your mental files. Get to know the labels and to whom we assign them to (e.g., Hispanic female....domestic; African American male.....threatening and hostile; Caucasian American.....educated and lives in suburbs)

## Growing Beyond Stereotypes

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- Decide not to act on your stereotypes. Experiment. Behave toward the person as if you had not placed them in whatever file you usually do.
- Seek out information. Read. Talk to others. Observe people as objectively as possible.
- Freeing ourselves of the emotional baggage of stereotyping people allows us to work more positively and effectively with people who are culturally different from ourselves.

## Stereotypes and Organizational Dynamics

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- Stereotyping impacts individuals and the organizations that they comprise (e.g., the university, the workplace, etc.)
- Use the Organizational Dynamics exercise to heighten participants' awareness of how people (women, men of color, people with disabilities, gay and lesbian people) get labeled in organizations and the impact that the labeling has on the organization.

## Stereotypes and Organizational Dynamics

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- Main points:
- The dynamics that emerged in the circle are the same dynamics that occur in organizations.
- Although no one talks about or acknowledges it, people are labeled in organizations.

## Stereotypes and Organizational Dynamics

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- The labeling often happens very quickly after people come into organizations.
- Often, the particular label that an individual is given is in response (either in whole or in part) to the person's race, gender, age, sexual orientation, class, or disability).
- The person who is labeled in an organization often responds in the same way to their label as the people in the circle did (e.g., anger, withdrawal, rebellion, etc.)

## Stereotypes and Organizational Dynamics

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- The process of labeling and the responses to the label minimize an individual's loyalty and commitment to the organization and robs the organization of that person's true talent and energy.