

“MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER”: Serving Our Students
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Cultural Competence Work Group Position Statement

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Our Assumptions and Definitions

We define **diversity** as a community of culturally competent staff, institutionally supportive programs, and everyday actions that support, engage, and empower students and employees across and within all backgrounds.

Comprehensive Diversity Plans that start with creating inclusive environments for students of color set a precedent that can be applied to practices with other historically oppressed groups. And all comprehensive diversity plans should begin with a focus on cultural competence.

Cultural Competence is when a community member is aware of his/her own assumptions, biases, and values; possesses an understanding of the worldview of others; is informed about various cultural groups; and has acquired the skills to develop appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. “He/she also understands that one will never reach an ultimate level of knowledge and awareness about the self and various cultural groups. One understands that his/her identity, awareness, and skills are constantly evolving in response to new information being received about the self or the other. Cultural Competence means that one is continually seeking to raise his/her awareness and develop skills that help him/her to effectively address diversity and social justice issues. This requires that he/she develop the stamina to sit with discomfort, to continuously seek critical consciousness, and to engage in difficult dialogues” (Watt, 2007, Editor’s notes).

College Campuses must prepare for diversity. Prior to actually recruiting racial ethnic minority students, it is crucial that campuses devise a comprehensive diversity plan that begins with the faculty and staff exploring through difficult dialogues what it means to create a welcoming environment for their campus.

Difficult Dialogues are necessary to build critical consciousness. Critical consciousness is the ability to assess and take action against the social, political, and economic elements of oppression in a society (Friere, 1970). Critical consciousness about diversity develops when one’s own privileged status is explored, often through engaging in emotionally charged dialogue with others.

What is a comprehensive cultural competence plan?

A comprehensive cultural competence plan needs to include a tool kit of resources and guidelines (i.e. vignettes, specific examples, and day-to-day practices) and must establish measurable goals for individuals and departments to make progress toward cultural competence. The overall goals should align with the institutional mission. A comprehensive cultural competence plan should outline expectations for how every office on campus can make progress toward cultural competence.

Why is it necessary to have a comprehensive cultural competence of faculty, staff, and students?

We believe that creating and implementing specific guidelines for how faculty, staff, and students can live up to the expectations of cultural competency will ultimately lead to a campus that is more inclusive for all students and contributes to a more globally aware society.

What is our goal?

- Create a clear definition of the campus climate and the needs to be addressed.
- To build partnerships across campus to foster a campus climate that is open and inclusive.
- Encourage and make possible the full participation of for all students in their educational experience and the experiences of the entire campus community.
- To explore ways to have difficult dialogues about issues related to pluralism.
- To discuss and exchange ideas about strategies that will contribute to the success of underrepresented students and the engagement of all students.

References

Friere, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Company.

Watt, S.K. (2007). Difficult dialogues, privilege and social justice: Uses of the privileged identity exploration (PIE) model in student affairs practice. *College Student Affairs Journal, 2007 Special Issue, Vol. 26(2), Spring 2007*. p. 114-126.

*Draft is a compilation from discussions with the Cultural Competence Work Group and students in the 7c432 Doctoral Seminar Course on Student Affairs Practice.