

RUNNING HEAD: STUDENT LIFE DIVERSITY

Student Life Diversity Training Workshop Reflection
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On Monday March 3, 2008 a workshop entitled “Diversity in Student Affairs – Translating Knowledge into Practice” was presented by Christina Lunceford Ph.D. for the Student Life staff at Azusa Pacific University. The workshop was approximately two hours in length and was well attended.

I appreciated how Dr. Lunceford opened the session by setting the context of the workshop. The first point she made was that this workshop was aimed at moving from awareness, sensitivity and knowledge of diversity issues into ways to practically apply all the information we have about diversity into student affairs practice. This issue is critical for student affairs practitioners (and many other people). It is required of us to take classes and participate in training that makes us more knowledgeable, but until one’s knowledge is translated into our day-to-day practice the knowledge is useless. During the first few minutes of the presentation, Dr. Lunceford also introduced a new term that is beginning to replace the term diversity in many settings- “culturally responsive.” She mentioned that the term diversity often has negative connotations connected to it, which I agree with. After some thought, I also found it interesting that the term culturally responsive requires action; one can not be responsive by doing nothing. I also appreciated the ground rules which were established for our time spent together: language is not to be a barrier, do not assume, and suspend judgment. These basic rules allow for a safe space to be created so learning can occur.

After the introduction, Dr. Lunceford asked those in attendance to share what they thought of when they hear the word “culture.” Individuals in the room shared ideas such as food and religion. The audience was then asked to share what comes to mind when they think of students and culture. Some of the thoughts that were shared were the same

as those related to the word culture, but others were identity and passionate. The final question in the portion of the workshop was “What does it mean to be culturally responsive in your position?” The answer was not directly given, but the answer seems to be what was shared earlier in the seminar; being culturally responsive requires action. The action required is going to look different in each student life position and in each situation that arises, but that is where one’s awareness, sensitivity and knowledge come into play. As student affairs practitioners it is important to be able to read a situation (even as it is unfolding) and appropriately respond. Personally, it overwhelms me to think about this task. I know I am going to make mistakes when it comes to appropriately responding to issues of diversity, but I do not want to make those mistakes. I do not want to unintentionally hurt students or those that I work with, but hopefully when I do make mistakes it can be a learning experience for all involved. It is also important for me to remember to give grace to students, staff and faculty when they do not appropriately respond to diversity issues.

The next portion of the workshop focused on the effect of culture in our lives. We were asked to reflect on how our culture affects the work we do. I find it so difficult to sort out how my worldview influences my daily work with students in the Office of World Missions, because my worldview is so ingrained in me. My worldview is very contradictory. I grew up in a Caucasian, Western conservative Christian, upper-middle class, traditional family but over the last several years I have spent weeks and months at a time living in an Asian, Eastern Christian, poverty level, community based village in Thailand. My time in Thailand has turned my worldview upside down, but I always come home to my American worldview; I do not know which one I adhere to more. I have

everything I could ever want, but crave a simple life. I only speak English, but hearing people speak in Thai makes me feel at home. I have experienced a God bigger than I can imagine, but I still tend to put Him in a box. All that to say, that when it comes to my position in the Office of World Missions as the Graduate Assistant overseeing Global Relief I tend to get frustrated with students and faculty who do not see the vision of providing relief to a world so desperately in need; but I am learning (and I have known for a long time) that we all have different passions and desires and it is part of my job (no matter my position) to empower students to pursue their God-given passions and gifts and not to impose mine on them.

The last part of the workshop was an interactive activity that focused on cultural collisions. The first part of the activity required each audience member to come up with two incidences of cultural collisions from their own life, reflect on one of them and then jot down ideas of how the collision could have been handled differently (if it was handled badly). The table I was sitting at actually picked my cultural collision, probably because it was rather funny. My cultural collision was about one of my experience in Italy. In short, my friends and I had gotten on a bus and we just wanted to make sure it was going to our town (we had gotten on the wrong bus earlier that day). I asked the bus driver if the bus was going to Florence and he said “yes,” but a lady passenger said “no.” A minor shouting match between bus driver and passenger broke out, with me standing in the middle having no idea what to do (and leaving me with no idea where the bus was going). I walked to the back of the bus to sit with my friends and as I walked by a lady on the bus she muttered “stupid Americans!” One of my friends came back with a harsh remark and thankfully I do not think the lady understood what was said. Our table decided that to

better handle the situation I could have possibly pulled out a map and asked where the bus was going and allowed the bus driver to show me (since the map was in both English and Italian) and it was imperative for my friend to not make the negative comment, even though it is very likely that the comment was not understood.

The cultural collisions portion of the workshop took up the majority of the time, but it was very practical. Several of the tables role-played their situations and time was given to discuss the situation, reactions, and how one could possibly react in the future. I was particularly engrossed in the role-play of an actual conversation that took place in a Student Life Directors' meeting. It made it very clear to me that diversity training like this one, where putting what one knows into practice is emphasized, is needed on campus.

One thing I did notice that could possibly be improved was that there was no time allotted for even a basic overview of theory on racial identity development. I do not know if that would be a normal component of a seminar like this one, but I feel it needed to be addressed. It became obvious to me that many of those in attendance, at the least needed to be reminded of this type of theory, when the role-play was done about the negative student comments made after a chapel with an African American student speaker. The reaction of many in the audience seemed to be of utter shock that students at Azusa Pacific University would actually say something of that nature. If theory had been presented, I think it would have been easier for those in attendance to have a better understanding of the processes of identity development that students at the university are going through.

The workshop as a whole was informative and interesting. I am glad that I had the opportunity to attend so that I could have the opportunity to grow personally and professionally.