

Improvement of Diversity Awareness through a Faculty/Staff-Facing Workshop Series

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Abstract

The evidence-based “Worldview Workshop Series” aims to increase openness to diversity and intercultural competence of faculty, staff, and administrators. Drawing from four phases of Vande Berg’s (2009) transformational processes, the program contains topics on *Cultural self-awareness*, *Awareness of others*, *Communication*, *Empathy*, and *Bridging cultural differences*. The scores of pre- and post-test on participants’ openness to diversity were measured and compared, to examine the effect of the program on diversity awareness. Participants’ written reflections were also collected to gain rich data.

Introduction

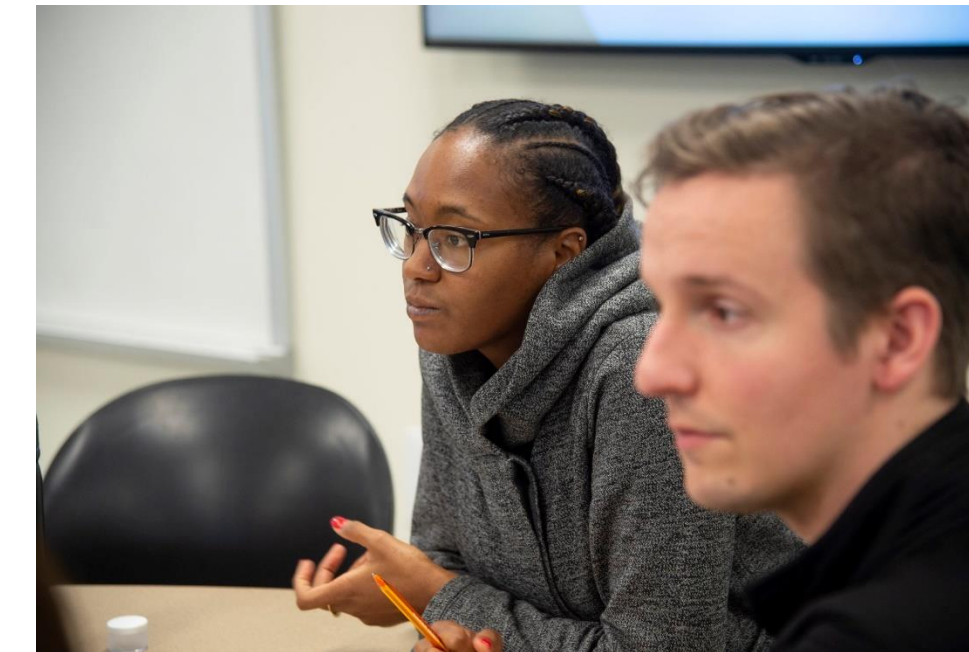
Culturally diversity in universities is on the rise. It is predicted by the U.S. Census that by 2044, people of color will account for over half of the nation’s population. In this multicultural society, it is imperative for faculty, staff, and administrators to become more open to diversity, examine their personal biases, and incorporate culturally responsive instruction in their work, to create a more inclusive climate for learning. Fostering inclusion and awareness around diversity benefits all faculty/staff and students.

The faculty/staff-facing program “Worldview Workshop Series” is created and conducted in a diverse public university to promote diversity awareness of faculty, staff, and administrators, who frequently interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The 6-session workshop series consists of various activities (i.e., role play, narrative learning, interactive games, and case studies, etc.) and facilitated discussion on the topics of Cultural self-awareness, Other awareness, Communication, Empathy, and Bridging cultural differences. Each session is held weekly.

The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of the workshop series on participants’ diversity awareness through both quantitative and qualitative data.

Methods

48 participants attended the “Worldview Workshop series”. We conducted pre- and post-test to measure diversity awareness using the 37-item Miami University Diversity Awareness Scale. We received 34 responses. Sample items include “I seek to learn about different cultures”; “A conscious effort should be made to teach cultural expectations in schools and/or classrooms” (5-point Likert scale). Paired sample t-test was used to compare the participants’ pre- and post-score of openness to diversity. Written reflections were also collected. We used content analysis based on transformational processes.



Participants’ engagement in activities/discussion

Discussion

In the written reflections, the participants indicated that the workshops increased their awareness of cultural differences and similarities, such as in communication styles, cultural values, and traditions. The participants also pointed out that they would apply their learning in interacting with students and coworkers “by fully listening and seeing if I can identify ‘values’ in conversations, which helps me expand my heart and mind” and “learning about students’ background to better help them”. The program helps prepare more culturally-responsive educators/staff today, and ultimately creates greater inclusion helping students with different backgrounds and needs succeed.

Results

Quantitative data

The result of t-test showed that participants’ openness to diversity was not significantly changed after attending the workshop series ($z = -0.93$, $p\text{-value} = 0.35$).

Qualitative data

Cultural self-awareness

“I find the “Iceberg Concept of Culture” very helpful. That makes me realize that so often I focus on surface culture.”

Other awareness

“Activities/discussions that draw attention to my possible blind spots are enjoyable - it is easy to be complacent. Good to be thinking about how my awareness can affect interaction with others.”

“I would love to see a little more challenges in the series. A little discomfort goes a long way to help us learn.”

Communication

“From the “Pacing” activity, I learned that just because someone’s communication style is different doesn’t mean they’re disengaged or rude.”

Empathy

“I meet with students (who are often struggling) on a regular basis, so reminding myself to put myself in their shoes before reacting. Also, practicing cultural empathy is important.”

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Female	6	17.65
Male	27	79.41
Choose to not respond	1	2.94
Age	43.29 (Mean)	
Position		
Faculty	1	2.94
Staff	33	97.06
Race/Ethnicity		
White	28	80
Hispanic/Spanish	1	2.86
Black or African American	3	8.57
Asian	2	5.71
Highest level of education		
High School	1	3.03
Community College	2	6.06
4-year College	8	24.24
Master’s Level	16	48.48
Doctoral Level	5	15.15

Conclusions

Participants identified the most important learning outcomes for themselves to include empathy, openness, and awareness of the fact that everyone, including themselves, has biases. Several pointed to listening as a key strategy they intend to apply in the future. They also valued learning about communication and getting to know people from other parts of campus. Several would have liked more challenge and even discomfort for the group, especially around questions of race. Individual responses to open-ended questions suggest that participants were at different places in terms of the learning outcomes when they entered the program, and one even stated explicitly that they already did the things that were emphasized.

The results of the study can be used to explore best practices for increasing faculty, staff, and administrators’ diversity awareness and creating an inclusive climate in higher education settings.

Future Directions

Future research could explore the long-term impact of the faculty/staff professional development programs on improving intercultural competence and knowledge. It is also worth investigating the effect of the programs in curriculum development and design.

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The Intercultural Learning Hub endeavors to be the one stop needed by intercultural learning (ICL) practitioners seeking to embed ICL into the academic classroom, the study abroad experience, and/or co-curricular offerings. Full of interactive tools and assessments, the HubICL Toolbox offers a searchable library of ICL resources.

Acknowledgements

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