Diversity Assessment to Learn About Students' Attitudes and Awareness Concerning Diversity Prior to Enrolling In a Diversity Course and Students' Attitudes and Awareness About Diversity After the Completion of a Diversity Course

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Abstract

This project assisted students in their understanding of what various beliefs are held in a cultural environment that relate to that culture's beliefs, practices, customs and behaviors that might be found to be common to people living within a particular population. Cultural environments impact the way people in the same culture develop, influencing their ideologies and personalities. Behaviors influence cultural environments which are emphasizged by the perspective of many aspects of culture which influences personal choices and behaviors.

Before the research began, the researcher obtained written approval from The University of West Alabama's Research Committee. Attached, as "ANNEX", is the approval letter from the University's Research Committee.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness, Diversity, Multicultural, Culture, Worldview, Counselling

1. Background Information

The diversity of the population in the United States continues to rise. This increase can be attributed to longer lifespans, births, as well as an increasing amount of immigrants to this country. Gandhi's familiar quote," Be the change you want to see" is a clarion-call for colleges', and universities' action.

The U.S. immigrant population stood at more than 42.4 million, or 13.3 percent, of the total U.S. population of 318.9 million in 2014, according to American Community Survey (ACS), data. Between 2013 and 2014, the foreign-born population increased by 1 million, or 2.5 percent. Immigrants in the United States and their U.S.-born children at that time numbered approximately 81 million people, or 26 percent of the overall U.S. population.

As a leading University, our facility has a responsibility to create a teaching and learning environment immersed in a variety of ideas, beliefs, and lifestyles. We live in a global society thus The University of West Alabama offers opportunities for students to experience and embrace diversity through classes, guest speaker programs, interactions with students and faculty from various backgrounds. A need for growth in multicultural competency throughout The University is evidenced by University's commitment to diversity through the Strategic Diversity Plan endorsed by the Board of Trustees in 2007 and through the increase of diversity among The University of West Alabama students with a ten-fold increase with international students from 2010 to 2013 (University Progress Report 2013).

Rochester (2016) noted this study will be conducted in sections of course CO547, Multicultural Counseling during the Summer Two session (two classes), the Fall One (two classes) 2016, and Spring One (two classes), 2017. The total number of students in these six classes was 110. Out of the 110 students in the six classes a total number of 102 participated in the research study. The researcher will is the same for all respective courses in the study. After recording the results of this study there may be more classes in the Multicultural Populations courses that the researcher will include through coordination of additional participation. Additional course sections could be added due to the recent Alabama State Department of Education determination that this course meets their requirement for diversity preparation for educators.

2. The Literature Review

"The National Center for Cultural Competence http://nccc.georgetown.edu.html promotes the value of self-assessment as a way to enhance delivery of services by individuals and organizations to cultural and linguistic populations that are increasing in diversity. As noted in this website, "Assessing attitudes, practices, policies and structures is a necessary, effective and systematic way to plan for and incorporate cultural competence" (Retrieved from http://nccc.georgetown.edu/orgsel-fassess.html on April 12, 2016). During the spring of 2016 the Department of Education at The University of West Alabama committed to require every graduate to enroll in a multicultural counseling course to expose students to an environment of learning more about divisive issues to develop multicultural competency.

Mariska, (2013) notes the future of multiculturalism lies with building effective multicultural skills training for counseling students and professionals. Mariska believes the greatest challenge is learning how to step outside of your own worldview. This is a challenge inherent in all aspects of counseling, as we consistently work to engage both our empathy for our clients' experiences and the knowledge that their perception of these experiences can be vastly different from our own. McCombs and Vakili emphasizes one way that diversity, e-Learning, and technology connect is through e-Learning experiences that are grounded in learner-centered principles and support the complex process of learning through collaboration and learning situated in inquiry and community. Features of such learning experiences and instructional practices are multiple ways of presenting course curriculum using a variety of technologies such as:

• Graphics
• Audio
• Video
• Animation
• Learner choice to match learner needs
• Class discussions
• Collaboration
• Problem-solving
• Flexible curriculum

Volckmann, (2012), writes, "Diversity encompasses different elements, such as "socio-economic, worldview, race, age, cultural, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, cognitive abilities, life experiences, and developmental stage." (D'Andrea & Daniels, 1992) Generally, multicultural counseling courses stress a combination of one or more of the three dimensions of multicultural competence-awareness, knowledge, and skills.

(Mitchell, 2015) In most four-year college strategic plans, there is a good-faith statement calling for increasing diversity as an institutional goal. There are good-even noble-reasons for doing so. The principal one is that American colleges and universities must look more like the rest of America if they are to remain relevant in the 21st century. Once federal and state governments adopted the principle of increasing access through programs like the GI Bill, direct state subsidies, the Pell Grant and various federal loan programs, there was no turning back. It's been good for America as the nation continues its chaotic march toward broader equality for its citizens. Further, the linking of access to diversity more directly reflects the changing demographics of American society, the need to retrain in a postindustrial economy with a strong manufacturing component and a growing service sector. Fundamentally, it affects America's ability to compete in a global economy.

Rosado (2015), who specializes in diversity and multiculturalism, described seven important actions involved in the definition of multiculturalism:

o **recognition** of the abundant diversity of cultures;
o **respect** for the differences;
o **acknowledging** the validity of different cultural expressions and contributions;
o **valuing** what other cultures offer;
o **encouraging** the contribution of diverse groups;
o **empowering** people to strengthen themselves and others to achieve their maximum potential by being critical of their own biases; and
o **celebrating** rather than just tolerating the differences in order to bring about unity through diversity.

"The goal of assessment is to contribute to the counselor's professional competence when dealing with diverse clientele" (Deardorff, 2009; Lonner & Hayes, 2004; Paniagua, 2010; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004; Sue, Arrendondo, Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2004; Sue, Arredondo & Davis 1992). "This process aims to bring people who are culturally or ethnically diverse (the "clients") together with psychologists and others who themselves differ from the clients culturally or ethnically. Counselors and therapists should be acutely aware of the responsibility they have in the assessment of persons as well as in the proper delivery of their professional skills." (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, 2013; American Psychological Association, 2001; Draguns, 1998).

Research indicates that education and the world of work have continued to increase in cultural diversity. As early as 2004, the US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights presented commitment to work with educators to strengthen multicultural competency in academia from Pre-K through Higher Education. Efforts from this commitment focused on increasing diverse inclusivfe academic communities to support student enrichment through exchange and exposure to others with talents, backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences different from their own. As this presence of diversity in educational settings grew, need also grew for multicultural competency for educators and for support staff such as counselors. Warner (2002), notes six areas of competency within an individual's views and understanding about diversity and their perspective regarding awareness and commitment to a culturally diverse workplace. These are:
1. Awareness and Climate
2. Levels of Inclusion
3. Levels of Tolerance and Understanding
4. Degree of Empathy
5. Degree of Adaptation and Change
6. Persistence and Commitment
Research has supported inclusion of diversity training for both future educators and future counselors. Lonnquist, Banks, and Huber (2009) noted that inclusion of diversity training for fu-

ture educators would serve to influence their increased cultural competency and better prepare them to provide a strong learning experience for learners with diverse needs. Carjuzza (2007) noted that while student bodies are becoming more culturally diverse, teacher bodies are becoming more culturally homogeneous. Carjuzza integrated an experiential component in a required multicultural foundations course for pre-service teachers. Currently graduate counseling and student affairs majors at UWA also participate in a similar experiential component which requires students to experience a facet of life in a culture other than their own. Shen (2007) conducted a study to assess school counseling students' self-perception of competence with Asian American students and found perceptions of reduced knowledge in comparison to awareness and skills. Shen noted that attainment of sufficient knowledge required resources outside the traditional classroom learning, thus indicating a need for identification of areas of knowledge need.

Hodges (2001) noted that, "a crucial task of college counseling centers in the 21st century was support of the growing multicultural landscape of higher education through design of service delivery to support the needs of a diverse student population. This support included examination of issues from a cultural framework and design of interventions that integrated the value of culture". Ethan and Siedel (2013) noted that professors felt they were brought into the lives of students for guidance and support whether trained for this or not. Indications were that faculty in addition to counseling center staff would benefit from enrichment of multicultural competency as they supported and guided increasing diverse student populations. A need for growth in multicultural competency throughout The University is evidenced by University commitment to diversity through the Strategic Diversity Plan endorsed by the Board of Trustees in 2007 and through the increase of diversity among UWA students with a ten-fold increase with international students from 2010 to 2013 (University Progress Report 2013).
The National Center for Cultural Competence http://nccc.georgetown.edu.html promotes the value of self-assessment as a way to enhance delivery of services by individuals and organizations to cultural and linguistic populations that are increasing in diversity. As noted on the website, " Assessing attitudes, practices, policies and structures is a necessary, effective and systematic way to plan for and incorporate cultural competence" (Retrieved from http://nccc.georgetown.edu/orgselfassess.html on April 12, 2016).

3. Project Description

The research study was designed to assess needs for growth in multicultural competency among university students as diversity grows among members of The University of West Alabama community and students prepare to serve in settings that are also growing in diversity of employees and students. The study consisted of the administration of pre and post diversity self–assessment. Students enrolled in the CO547 Summer Two, 2016 (which consisted of two six-week sessions), Fall One, 2016 (which consisted of two eight-week sessions), and Spring Two, 2017 Two, (which consisted of two eight-week sessions), and Spring One, 2017 (which consisted of two eight week sessions). Online students enrolled in these courses at The University of West Alabama were invited to participate via electronic completion of the pre and post

survey. The same professor/researcher administered all of the pre-survey, and post survey instruments. The Informed Consent was completed with an electronic signature obtained. After submission of this consent, participants were invited to take an anonymous per-survey prior to learning about the Multicultural Immersion Project. The pre-survey was administered the first week of classes. The last week of classes the same students were invited to take an anonymous post survey. The study focused on the impact that the information learned in a multicultural course will increase student's skills, competence-awareness, empathy, and knowledge of a diverse population. Analyses of the pre and post diversity self-assessment tool indicated that students increased in the four dimensions which are: Multicultural skills, Multicultural competence-awareness, Multicultural empathy, and Multicultural knowledge. The diversity course which is CO547, Counseling Multicultural Populations, used for this study requires a Multicultural Immersion Experience and paper detailing the immersion. Following is the description of the Multicultural Immersion requirement. A requirement of CO547 is participating in a cross-cultural immersion experience designed by the student with supervision of the professor. The purpose of this field experience is to place the student into a cultural context where the student has little or no experiential familiarity. While such an experience is ideally suited to a study-abroad experience, meaningful cross-cultural experiences may be created at the local level in one's community. The immersion experience may focus on any of a number of cultural identity factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc. Each student will propose a cultural immersion experience and obtain approval from the professor prior to beginning the experience. Please note that this activity requires placing the student into an identified cultural context, NOT bringing elements of an identified cultural context into the student's sphere of familiarity. This project was done during the Summer Two, Fall One, 2016 sessions, and the Spring One 2017-time frame. During the first week, the students were sent an example of a cultural immersion paper. The student does not have to visit another place to complete the cultural immersion experience. The student may do this immersion in their home city, town, or community. The students may do this study in another religion, a nursing home facility, a subculture, another school system, and with persons from a different background than the student's own background.

Time parameters for the field experience will vary, but the overall experience designed by the student should be sustained and ongoing, ideally involving an extended duration over several weeks. Limited contact duration and one-time activities or events will not fulfill the immersion requirement. The student is to do this study during the current course session; past experiences will not be approved for this project. Successful completion of the Cultural Immersion Experience will require submission of a summary which outlines dates, events, and reactions concerning activities and observations each date. A written paper summarizing the immersion experiences and overall reactions is to be submitted. The student's paper shall have a thesis statement, and background information pertaining to the culture studied. This paper is to be a minimum of 10 double spaced pages written in APA format. The cover page of this report does not count as one of the 10 pages of information. The paper is to have an introduction pertaining to the culture selected to study (the reason this culture was selected to study, and some historical background about the culture studied). The student must remember the primary focus of the paper is the immersion experience. Students are to present a list of dates worked on the project. Each date is to have the activity participated in and

reactions to the activity. The paper is to have a conclusion with reactions to this experience. As with every assignment all information outside the realm of general knowledge must be referenced. Past activities undertaken by students in this course have included living with the family of a different race or ethnic group for several weeks, taking a trip to rural Mexico, staying at a Native American (Indian) reservation, participating in the religious and social events of another religious group over several weeks, and participating in the social/political activities of a gay or lesbian community. Creativity and innovation are encouraged with 25% of the grade for this activity being derived from the instructor's evaluation of the appropriateness, depth, and duration of the experience reported by the student. Students must place the Cultural Immersion papers in the Discussion Board if they wish to share with classmates. To measure the improvements in students' multicultural awareness a pre-diversity course self-assessment was administered to students enrolled in the CO547 Diversity Course before the course was taught, and before the Multicultural Immersion Experience was completed. After students had completed the CO547 Diversity course, and Multicultural Immersion Experience the post-diversity self-assessment was administered. Thus, it will be learned if students have gained multicultural awareness and positive attitudes after completing this course on diversity, and participating in a Multicultural Immersion Experience. Participation in this research project will be voluntary on the part of the students. It is anticipated that this research will show that students gain multicultural awareness and positive attitudes about diversity by taking this course. (Rochester, The University of West Alabama Blackboard CO547 courses 2016, and 2017).

4. Conclusions and Findings

The research study was designed to assess needs for growth in multicultural competency among University students as diversity grows among members of the University Community and students prepare to serve in settings that are also growing in diversity of employees and students. This information will support development of appropriate training and ongoing program support by offering more students an opportunity to enrich cultural competency and diversity equity in:

- Career preparation programs that require inclusion of preparation in cultural competency and diversity equity such as educator preparation and counselor preparation.
- Delivery of culturally competent counseling and other University services to members of the culturally diverse University community.

This information will also support efforts to attain seed grant funding for establishment of a sustainable program of support for the above.
 Of the 102 students who voluntarily participated in this research study there was a positive outcome on the post-surveys as compared to the pre-surveys. The research reviled that the students gain knowledge as that their skills increased, as well as competence-awareness, empathy, and knowledge of a diverse population.

The intent of this proposal is to offer this training through an online module housed in a current Blackboard shell for the CO547 courses and to collaborate with University programs of study for integration as needed into their curriculums. Based on the current study, recommendations are to provide for additional CO547

Counseling Multicultural Populations Courses to the graduate student population. The current study provides stimulus for future research, and likewise, a longer term of study. A replication study will provide another safeguard to find out if this Multicultural Cultural Course offered is providing effective training.   This study strengthens the University's commitment to offer diversity courses for every graduate student enrolled in a graduate program of study in the College of Education.

This information will also support efforts to attain seed grant funding for establishment of a sustainable program of support for the above. Suffice it to say that this research will assist in providing a comprehensive snapshot of the vision of a need for growth in multicultural competency throughout the University as illustrated by The University's commitment to diversity through the Strategic Diversity Plan endorsed by the Board of Trustees in 2007 and through the increase of diversity among The University of West Alabama students with a ten-fold increase with international students from 2010 to 2013 (University Progress Report 2013). It is anticipated that ongoing research will be conducted to assess the dynamic efficacy of a program to promote and sustain cultural competency among the University community.

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ANNEX to Abstract

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May 1, 2016

Pamela R. Rochester, Ph.D
Assistant Professor, Instructional Leadership and Support The
University of West Alabama
Station #33
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Dear Dr. Rochester

The University of West Alabama IRB has granted approval for your proposed collaboration study entitled *Diversity Assessment Learning About Student Attitudes.* The committee determined the risks are minimal/low in your project. This approval is valid from the date above through April 30, 2017.
I wish you well with your research endeavor. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me and use protocol reference # 16-033

Sincerely

Rodney J. Granec

Institutional Review Board Chair
Office of Sponsored Programs
The University of West Alabama