

BRINGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY INTO THE  
MARKETING CLASSROOM:  
A MODEL TO ENHANCE FACULTY SENSITIVITY

Barbara A. Oliver, Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO 80523  
(303) 491-5384

ABSTRACT

Universities are recognizing the need to address diversity within their cultural boundaries. Discussed is a model which was used to sensitize faculty in order to allow them to incorporate a multicultural perspective in their classroom. Specific issues of the model include focusing on the concept of diversity from an historic, current and future sense. Learning styles of students are addressed and the importance of teaching in a variety of ways discussed.

BACKGROUND ON CULTURAL  
DIVERSITY

The racial and ethnic make up of the United States is rapidly changing. By the beginning of the 21st century it is predicted that minorities will outnumber the white majority for the first time in history. In some parts of the country, that is already true, especially in the western regions (Henry 1990).

With this changing population profile, colleges and universities are recognizing the need to focus on diversity. This commitment to address ethnic multiplicity is particularly important in light of marked increases of racism on campuses in the United States over the past few years (Schnell 1990). Research has found that by incorporating cultural diversity

into the classroom, the education of all students is enhanced and understanding among groups increased (Davidman 1990; Schnell 1990; Woolbright 1989). Because of these findings, many institutions of higher education are mandating that diversity and equal opportunities be part of the curriculum. Not only are the demographics of students in higher education transforming but also those of the work force with whom students will interact upon graduation. A culturally diverse education is necessary for everyone who is going to work and be active in this pluralistic society (Hughes 1990).

A potential problem with the mandate for diversity on college and university campuses, however, is that many professors are not prepared to bring a multicultural component into the classroom. Most faculty matriculated in curricula which reflected a homogeneous view of society descended from northern European ancestry (Oltjenbruns and Baez 1990).

Because of this, the first stage necessary to encompass cultural diversity within a classroom is to sensitize faculty regarding the topic. Faculty must be provided an opportunity to acquire knowledge and tools to identify their own cultural biases in order to heighten their cultural awareness (Abi-Nader 1991; Hughes 1990).

## A MODEL FOR FACULTY INSTRUCTION

Faculty underwent intensive training activities for a year. The goal of the training was to enhance their knowledge regarding the ethnic past of the United States, current diversity issues, and the impact that demographic changes will have on the country's future. A variety of speakers provided expert information on topics of interest. Readings were disseminated and discussion groups held. Participants were encouraged to react to the topic at hand as well as address anxieties they might have at the prospect of bringing diversity into their classes. Concerns ranged from fears of stereotyping and alienating diverse students to dread of backlash from ultra conservative, ethnocentric students who might voice opposition to having diversity as part of the curriculum.

Introductory training sessions for faculty focused on background information addressing the essence of cultural diversity (Green 1982; Roosens 1989). Topics also included historical perspectives on race and racism in the country which affect the current climate (Model 1990; Takaki 1987). These initial readings and meetings set the stage for future issues which were more focused in their impact on teaching from a diverse point of view.

A paradigm was shared with the participants which delineated six stages of "intercultural sensitivity" progressing from "ethnocentrism" through "ethnorelativism" (Bennett 1986). Before a faculty member can gain insight into the

importance of diversity he/she needs to be at some stage of ethnorelativism. By accepting and trying to understand differing values and ideals held by others, one can show a multicultural appreciation.

Faculty were encouraged to reflect on where they might fit along this continuum. Activities included in the discussion of this paradigm dealt with the diversity that all faculty bring into the classroom. This was an opportunity to identify personal strengths and weaknesses that could be addressed when incorporating diversity into courses. A first step in gaining a diverse perspective was for each faculty member to gain awareness of self (Locke 1988).

Another important topic covered was learning style. Research has shown that learning style is a personal attribute based on biological and developmental factors (Dunn, Beaudry and Klavas, 1989; Dunn and Griggs, 1988). Some people learn better by "doing" while others can learn by "hearing." Individuals process information much better if teaching style is complementary to their learning style.

If cultural diversity is being considered, learning styles must be a factor of interest. There is evidence that different cultural groups may emphasize one learning style over another (Cattey 1980; Dunn, Beaudry and Klavas 1989; Kolodny 1991). A variety of teaching methods and assignments which allow students the opportunity to excel where they are most comfortable is essential.

The last topic covered dealt with subtleties of racism and discrimination. Studies have shown that racism is often an unconscious act on the part of the perpetrator. It was noted that a faculty member should never focus attention on a minority student and/or assume that the student represents the entire race or culture to which he/she belongs. There is diversity within subcultures and these variations need to be valued and understood (DiGiacomo 1990). At the same time, it is essential that the faculty member not assume that the student has assimilated into the mainstream culture. This is a difficult line to walk but one that needs to be addressed in a sensitizing experience.

#### Project Goals

Four major goals were defined at the outset of the project. The first was for each faculty member to target a course into which he/she could bring a diverse component. Rather than try to encompass an entire course load initially, it was decided that one course on which to focus would be a more productive use of faculty time. It was stressed that one or two "lectures" on diversity issues would not, in most instances, be sufficient. The entire course should focus on diversity in some respect so students could be aided in perceiving themselves within a culturally diverse society (Hollins 1990).

The second goal was for each member of the project to contribute to an annotated bibliography. These sources are available to all members of the group as well as to others in

the university and across the country.

Goal three was to share experiences and concepts with others in the department. By bringing the education back to the department, it is hoped that other faculty might also focus their attention on the importance of diversity within the classroom. The ultimate goal is to provide a diverse education to students in all classes.

The fourth goal was for each participant to disseminate information to faculty at other colleges and universities. This model is an excellent tool that can be used in any location. If diversity is an important consideration within a university system, training of faculty is a significant first step in the process. Sensitivity is necessary to raise faculty's awareness of cultural issues.

#### REFERENCES

- Abi-Nader, Jeannette (1991), "Creating a Vision of the Future," Phi Delta Kappan, 72 (March), 546-49.
- Bennett, Milton J. (1986), "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Inter-cultural Sensitivity," in Cross Cultural Orientation, Michael Paige, ed. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 27-69.
- Cathey, Margaret (1980), "Cultural Differences in Processing Information," Journal of American Indian Education, (October), 23-29.

- Davidman, Patricia Terry (1990), "Multicultural Teacher Education and Supervision: A New Approach to Professional Development," Teacher Education Quarterly, 17 (Summer), 37-51.
- DiGiacomo, Frank (1990), "Doing the Right Thing," Marketing & Media decisions, (June), 25-28, 30, 32.
- Dunn, Rita, Jeffrey S. Beaudry, and Angela Klavas (1989), "Survey of Research on Learning Styles," Educational Leadership, 46 (March), 50-58.
- Dunn, Rita and S. Griggs (1988), Learning Styles. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Green, James W. (1982), Cultural Awareness in the Human Services, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- Henry, III, W.A. (1990), "Beyond the Melting Pot," Time, (April 9), 28-31.
- Hughes, E.M. (1990), "Taking Responsibility for Cultural Diversity," Black Issues in Higher Education, (January 18), 24-27.
- Kolodny, Annette (1991), "Colleges Must Recognize Student's Cognitive Styles and Cultural Backgrounds," The Chronicle of Higher Education, (February 6), A44.
- Locke, Don C. (1988), "Teaching Culturally-Different Students: Growing Pine Trees or Bonsai Trees," Contemporary Education, 59 (Spring), 130-133.
- Model, Suzanne W. (1990), "Work and Family: Blacks and Immigrants from South and East Europe," in Immigration Reconsidered, V. Yans-McLaughlin, ed. New York: Statue of Liberty Ellis Island Foundation.
- Oltjenbruns, Kevin A. and Victor A. Baez (1990), Model for Multicultural Perspective in Home Economics Curriculum. USDA Challenge Grant. Washington, D.C.
- Roosens, Eugeen E. (1989), Creating Ethnicity: The Process of Ethnogenesis. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schnell, James A. (1990). The Multicultural Classroom: Working to Create Opportunities Out of Possible Obstacles. Gahanna, OH: Old Dominican College, (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 320 175).
- Takaki, Ronald (1987), From Different Shores: Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Woolbright, Cynthia (1989), Valuing Diversity on Campus: A Multicultural Approach. Bloomington, IN: Association of College Unions-International. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 280).