

## Diversity Issues and the Curriculum

### Some Results from Workshops with Dr. Suzette Speight on March 27

Despite our attribute as the “most diverse university in the Midwest” NEIU has been struggling with effectively utilizing the educational benefits of its diversity. Our academic calendar is marked by many campus events that allow students and faculty to hear about issues of diversity. We have three academic programs with a focus on ethnic and gender diversity. Many of our faculty incorporate diversity issues into their courses. Our new First Year Experience program attempts to integrate a “Diversity of Chicago” theme into every course section. And yet, we still seem to lack an overall concept of how to address diversity at the curricular level as well as translate it into our overall campus climate. Examples for that include:

- Students on campus largely keep to their own ethnic group when socializing in between classes.
- There is a lack of public communication between people from different backgrounds regarding their experiences (on or off campus) of disrespect, intolerance, and injustice.
- Many students have little knowledge about what it takes to function effectively in our global society.
- Many students (and probably faculty) are ill-equipped with conflict resolution skills when it comes to sensitive interactions between members of different ethnic and racial groups.
- There is probably little agreement on the university’s role in not only helping students acquire critical knowledge but also *acting* on this knowledge and the resulting beliefs and values.

Dr. Speight’s workshop last week helped us sort out some of these issues and brainstorm steps to take toward making our efforts of dealing with diversity more coherent in the long run. The list of items generated by the workshop attendees included the following:

- Have more “hang-out” space for students (and faculty)
- Engage our alumni more effectively; hire an alumni director
- “Teaming” (as in sports, but also in academics) for creating a stronger sense of community
- Create more integration between Student and Academic Affairs and find a forum for this integration
- Increase the activity level of student clubs, and use more peer tutors and mentors as role models
- Consider teaching-excellence awards for (1) faculty who are most innovative in utilizing diversity in their courses, and (2) for faculty who best exemplify models of faculty-student interaction
- Have departments sponsor annual events on issues of diversity and globalization for their students and faculty
- Community begins at the department level: Stimulate and enable departments to have more activities that bring students and faculty together
- Have the Foundation make funds available for faculty wanting to promote faculty-student engagement
- Create more media coverage and advertising for these issues
- Name our campus buildings for prominent (campus) figures who have promoted diversity issues
- Create a new name for our university that better expresses our campus identity

These are items from our initial brainstorming that are only the beginning of a discussion the campus should have on this topic. Larger events are needed (such as University Day) to develop a more coherent plan for action. Dr. Speight indicated three criteria for any large-scale initiatives to be effective. Such initiatives should be:

1. *comprehensive* rather than piecemeal
2. *sustained* over the long haul
3. *coordinated* across the campus

The afternoon workshop focused on ideas for the classroom. Dr. Speight built her presentation around ideas from Paul C. Gorski. The following short list is only a mini-summary. Please go to the URL below if you want to find out more about what each of these points entails.

### Seven Key Characteristics of a Multicultural Education Curriculum

By Paul C. Gorski (<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/curriculum/characteristics.html>)

#### 1. Delivery

Delivery acknowledges and addresses a diversity of learning styles while challenging dynamics of power and privilege in the classroom

#### 2. Content

Content is complete and accurate in its representation of under-represented groups and viewpoints

#### 3. Teaching and Learning Materials

Teaching and learning materials are diverse and critically examined for bias

#### 4. Perspective

Content is presented from a variety of perspectives and angles in order to be accurate and complete

#### 5. Critical Inclusivity

Students are engaged in the teaching and learning process. Instructors facilitate experiences in which students learn from each other's experiences and perspectives

#### 6. Social and Civic Responsibility

If we hope to prepare students to be active participants in an equitable democracy, we must educate them about social justice issues and model a sense of civic responsibility within the curriculum

#### 7. Assessment

The curriculum is constantly assessed for completeness, accuracy, and bias.

You might want to explore EdChange's website, the *Multicultural Pavilion*, at [www.edchange.org/multicultural](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural) for a wealth of ideas on classroom strategies and curriculum reform related to multicultural education. One of the materials presented is a short but instructive beliefs inventory on what it means to be a good multicultural educator, which ultimately translates into being a better educator in general:

"20 (Self-) Critical Things I Will Do to Be a Better Multicultural Educator" at:

[http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/resources/self\\_critique.html](http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/resources/self_critique.html)