

## Promoting Cultural Awareness and Knowledge Among Faculty and Doctoral Students

JACOBA LEIPER, ELIZABETH R. VAN HORN, JIE HU, AND RAMESH C. UPADHYAYA

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### **Abstract:**

This article describes the activities conducted by the Race and Gender Committee of one school of nursing in North Carolina to promote cultural awareness and knowledge among faculty and doctoral students. Wells's Institutional Cultural Development Model provided a theoretical framework for a systematic approach to the development of activities designed to identify cultural issues as they relate to teaching and research. Strategies used included a variety of seminars and workshops and the participation of consultants and experts. The workshops and other programs led to improved interdepartmental dialogue among faculty and doctoral students, facilitated faculty and students' understanding of cultural diversity, provided the groundwork for promotion of attitudinal and behavioral changes and increased cultural awareness and knowledge. Recommendations are included for developing similar programs.

### **Abstract:**

Minorities represent 28 percent of the student population at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro School of Nursing. By 2015, this figure is projected to increase to 35 to 38 percent (1). These statistics reflect the cultural diversity of North Carolina, where Hispanics were the fastest growing population during the 1990s (there were 300,000 new Hispanic residents); the Asian population also grew rapidly (1.4 percent); and the African American population was stable at 22 percent (2). These statistics are also reflective of the increasing diversity seen throughout the United States. As cultural competence is an essential component of nursing care, it is clear that nursing education must prepare graduates to meet the needs of a population that is changing dynamically in its cultural and ethnic makeup (3,4). Nurse researchers must also be prepared to conduct research with minority populations that is culturally sensitive. This article recommends strategies for promoting cultural awareness and knowledge among faculty and doctoral students, nursing's future leaders and educators.

The Goals of the Race and Gender Committee When the School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro took on the goal of building a multicultural environment, it also established a doctoral program that focuses on promoting optimal health in ethnic minorities, women, children, and older adults. The Race and Gender Committee (RGC) embraced this goal and set out to increase faculty and student awareness, knowledge, and insight into important cultural issues in teaching and research. The RGC selected Wells's cultural model to guide the process (5-7).

Wells's Institutional Cultural Development Model presents stages of cultural development along a continuum, starting with a cognitive phase and ending with an affective phase, with concurrent movement from individual to institutional commitment. The cognitive phase encompasses cultural incompetence (lack of cultural health knowledge); knowledge (learning elements of culture and health behavior); and awareness (recognizing and understanding health behavior). The affective phase encompasses sensitivity (integration of cultural knowledge and awareness into individual and institutional behavior); competence (application of culturally appropriate health care interventions and practices); and proficiency (integration of cultural competence into scholarship).

The RGC chose this model because, by using a systematic approach, clear, progressive stages can be applied to a variety of strategies.

**Table. Application of Wells's Institutional Cultural Development Model to Race and Gender Committee (RGC) Activities**

| <b>Wells's Stages</b>  | <b>RGC Activity</b>   |
|--|---|
| Cultural knowledge<br>(learning the elements<br>of culture)  | SEMINAR 1. <i>Teaching Cultural Content in the Classroom: Issues and Strategies</i><br>Spring semester 2006<br>BROWN BAG LUNCH / ONE HOUR / INFORMAL  |
|  | FACULTY WORKSHOP. <i>Promoting Cultural Competencies: One Strategy to Address Health Disparities</i><br>Fall semester 2005<br>THREE HOURS / FORMAL  |
|  | CAMPUSWIDE PROGRAM.<br><i>Hispanic Cultures: A Comparative Discussion</i><br>Spring semester 2004<br>TWO HOURS / FORMAL   |
| Cultural awareness<br>(recognizing and understanding the<br>cultural implications of<br>health care) | SEMINAR 2. <i>Culturally Sensitive and Meaningful Research: Open Discussion Led by a Cultural Consultant and Faculty Researchers</i><br>Spring semester 2006<br>BROWN BAG LUNCH / ONE HOUR / INFORMAL |
|  | SEMINAR 3. <i>Research Issues with Minority Populations: Instrumentation, Language Barriers, and Grant Requirements</i><br>Fall semester 2006<br>BROWN BAG LUNCH / ONE HOUR / INFORMAL                |

### *Programs and Activities*

#### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The RGC started the process of building sensitivity, competence, and proficiency by doing an assessment of faculty. The survey asked faculty to indicate ethnic populations of interest and recommend topics for programs. A total of 21 faculty members returned the survey and requested more information on Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, and Native Americans. Proposed topics for programs included health care disparities for specific groups, ways to integrate culture into the nursing curriculum, use of clinical strategies to provide culturally effective nursing care, and use of teaching strategies to provide effective education for culturally diverse nursing students.

Based on findings of the survey, the RGC planned workshops and activities grounded in the cognitive phase of Wells's model. The committee started from the premise that there was a lack of cultural knowledge among faculty and that to start the cognitive process and facilitate communication, there would be a need to address cultural knowledge and awareness.

The RGC organized formal and informal sessions to promote dialogue on cultural issues in teaching and research. Each seminar, workshop, and program had a theme. For example, the first of three one-hour seminars

focused on teaching; the second focused on research with an emphasis on cultural sensitivity in recruitment of minority populations; and the third focused on research instrumentation, language barriers, and ethnic and gender grant requirements. The RGC also held a faculty workshop on promoting cultural competencies and organized a campuswide program on Hispanic culture.

Informational sessions provided opportunities for faculty to interact and converse interdepartmentally. Faculty teaching at different levels (undergraduate, master's, and doctoral) shared teaching strategies, methods, and resources, and spoke about barriers to cultural education. They also discussed their research and shared information on an array of issues.

These discussions not only facilitated open communication among faculty at all levels and in all departments, but also connected nontenured and tenured faculty involved in research with doctoral students. Doctoral students came away from these sessions with information on methodological issues and exposure to some of the advantages, disadvantages, and other issues related to research involving minority groups. The Table provides the name and format of each seminar and illustrates the application of Wells's cultural model to the activities.

### *Evaluating the Programs*

Program evaluations were designed to measure the effectiveness of each event and to obtain feedback for future activities. The RGC used the evaluations to assess participants' perceptions of the value of the programs in increasing cultural knowledge and as a means of increasing communication on cultural issues. For the evaluation, a five-point Likert-type scale was used, and scores were averaged.

#### SEMINAR 1.

##### *Teaching Cultural Content in the Classroom: Issues and Strategies*

This seminar was intended to foster dialogue among faculty through the sharing of innovative strategies and resources for teaching cultural content. Undergraduate and graduate faculty who taught cultural content in their courses were asked to lead the seminar. Faculty members who attended represented both the undergraduate and graduate (master's) programs. Topics discussed included strategies to add cultural content to courses (group projects, websites, self-assessments of cultural bias); barriers to including cultural content; outcomes (what works, what does not work, what is gained); cultural diversity and issues of culture in the classroom (ethnicity and stereotypes); and sensitivity to minority groups in the classroom.

The seminar led to lively discussion. One faculty member introduced websites containing cultural bias tests that students took as a class exercise to increase understanding of their own cultural biases. Faculty examined these sites and heard how the exercises enhanced student cultural knowledge. The URLs were later posted on the school's webpage to promote their use in the curriculum and increase cultural knowledge among faculty. The RGC received positive evaluations for this seminar. One faculty member wrote: "A very enjoyable workshop that provided me with more information than I expected."

#### SEMINAR 2.

##### *Culturally Sensitive and Meaningful Research: Open Discussion Led by a Cultural Consultant and Faculty Researchers*

This seminar was designed to open dialogue between faculty and doctoral students on the topic of recruitment and retention of minority populations in research. Several faculty were asked to speak on aspects of their past or current research related to minority group recruitment and retention, strategies for access, the importance of community liaisons, and the establishment of trust with research participants and community members. An expert cultural consultant and researcher led the discussion.

This activity reflected Wells's stage of cultural awareness. Discussions of research subject recruitment and retention moved beyond the basics of cultural knowledge and required recognition and understanding of the influence of culture on health behaviors. Faculty researchers noted that gaining access to minority populations and establishing trust in communities requires advanced cultural awareness and understanding.

A total of 27 faculty and doctoral students attended. One doctoral student wrote: "This was great — will definitely use the suggestions when doing my research."

### SEMINAR 3.

**Research Issues with Minority Populations: Instrumentation, Language Barriers, and Grant Requirements** This seminar was designed to promote dialogue between faculty and doctoral students on cultural aspects of conducting research with minority populations. The focus was on issues associated with instrumentation, language barriers, and meeting grant requirements for minority participation. Several faculty spoke about their experiences with instrument development, translation, and testing in differing populations, the use of interpreters, and National Institutes of Health grant requirements regarding inclusion of minority subjects and women. Faculty speakers provided handouts, including copies of instruments, psychometric data, instrument translation data, and subject recruitment data, to supplement their presentations. Speakers also provided valuable examples from their research.

This activity also fit into Wells's stage of cultural awareness. The application of research instruments to a variety of culturally diverse populations requires more than cultural knowledge. Discussions focused on aiding doctoral students in considering issues and problems that may arise when applying research instruments to previously untested populations; for example, problems in translation and cultural sensitivity.

A total of 39 participants attended the seminar, and their evaluations were very positive. Comments included, "Well organized and appreciate the opportunity to be informed of studies being conducted by [the institution's] faculty."

### FACULTY WORKSHOP.

#### *Promoting Cultural Competencies*

A leader in cultural issues in nursing was asked by the committee to conduct a three-hour workshop for faculty entitled "Promoting Cultural Competencies: One Strategy to Address Health Disparities." The speaker described components of cultural competence using two different models and discussed how cultural competence is demonstrated in health care settings. In addition, she provided strategies for teaching cultural competence in the nursing curriculum and recommended resources for developing and evaluating strategies. This activity was placed under Wells's stage of cultural knowledge because it provided information for faculty on basic elements of cultural knowledge and incorporated innovative activities for teaching cultural content.

Twenty-seven faculty and two doctoral students attended the workshop. Narrative comments were exceptionally positive and included, "Great group activities," and "Exercise was fun and useful learning activity, Very Good!" Two participants said that the workshop needed to be a full day.

### CAMPUSWIDE PROGRAM.

#### *Hispanic Cultures: A Comparative Discussion*

This program was co-sponsored by the Teamwork in Research and Intervention to Alleviate Disparities Project (TRIAD), funded by the National Institutes of Health, and the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities. The RGC considered it important to offer this program campuswide because graduates from all disciplines will be interacting with the rapidly expanding Hispanic population in their future places of employment. The discussion was led by a panel of researchers and health care providers who discussed ways to interact with Hispanic groups in American society. Topics included the concept of culture (what is it and who has it) and multicultural concepts in general. The panel also presented basic facts about the health care needs of Hispanic patients and discussed barriers for nurses who work with them.

Approximately 70 people from across the campus attended the program, including faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students. The RGC received positive feedback from those who attended the program.

### *Institutional Involvement*

Progression on Wells's cultural model involves movement from the individual to the institutional level. To move toward the affective phase and the stages of cultural sensitivity, competence, and proficiency, the RGC is planning additional seminars for faculty and students and engaging in several new activities. For example, the school of nursing's website now includes links to such organizations as the Black Nurses' Student Association and the American Assembly for Men in Nursing (AAMN). The website also provides information about minority student demographics for the school of nursing and the university. Also planned for the website is information about faculty grants for research with minority populations, the faculty members who conduct such research, and courses related to cultural competence or health disparities offered at the school of nursing.

Future plans for the RGC include an intercollegiate effort to establish a chapter of AAMN in the area with student and faculty members from several local universities and community colleges. A two-term president of the AAMN is helping to organize this effort. Goals of the AAMN include providing a forum for nursing students and nurses to meet, discuss, and influence factors that affect men in nursing. Goals for the local chapter will include service activities and community involvement, with plans to rotate meeting sites to promote participation among all the campuses in the chapter.

### *Discussion*

This systematic approach has proven successful in promoting cultural awareness among both faculty and doctoral students. Based on what the committee learned through this process, it is possible to make a series of recommendations.

1. Adopt a model or theory that supports the philosophical view of your project. The RGC used Wells's Institutional Model of Cultural Development to implement a variety of strategies to engage students and faculty in culturally meaningful ways, with the goal of working along the continuum depicted in the model from cultural knowledge toward cultural proficiency. This model works well because it moves from lower to higher levels of cultural understanding and from the individual to the institutional level.
2. It is important to use a systematic approach that includes assessing needs, planning and implementing programs, and evaluating the success and value of the activities presented. This approach will ensure that relevant content is presented, that planned activities are carried out successfully, and that future activities are informed by evaluation data.
3. Paramount to program success is use of all available resources, Identify resources interdepartmentally, in the school, and across the institution. Often, existing resources are under utilized due to lack of knowledge or request. The RGC capitalized on existing faculty resources and computer technology while also collaborating with consultants and experts in nursing and other disciplines.
4. A committee is not an island. The RGC found that involving faculty members, inviting them to participate in seminars and discuss their teaching and research, contributed greatly to the success of the programs. Faculty were receptive to invitations to participate.
5. Expand your horizons by trying new approaches and strategies to enrich your planned programs. This approach has facilitated dialogue, increased faculty and students' understanding of cultural diversity, and laid the groundwork for attitudinal and behavioral change. The work of the RGC has created a foundation for the provision of culturally competent care to patients and clients and the conduct of culturally sensitive and meaningful research. [.

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