Beyond the Classroom: Cultural Diversity Experience and First Year Students

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Overview

- The course
- Learning outcomes
- Cultural diversity experience assignments
- Outcomes
- Reflection and application
The Course

- GEN 1300: Inclusivity and Expression
  - Required General Education requirement for freshmen at GWC
  - Course Description
  - Dr. Harvey taught 2 sections; Dr. Johnson taught 1 with coordinated curriculum
Learning Outcomes

- Increase awareness of various forms of diversity
  - age, ability, ethnic identity, gender, indigenous heritage, national identity, race, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status
- Analyze commonalities and differences in student’s own cultural experiences and experiences of people of diversity and identify how differences affect the student
- Articulate this knowledge through coherent written and oral communication
Cultural Diversity Experience Assignments

- Collection of assignments centered around an off-campus "experience" to a location that takes the student beyond their customary contact zones

- Components
  - Proposal
  - Research paper
  - Reflection
Research Papers:

- Buddhist Temple
  - Mysticism and Ceremony: A Buddhist Tradition
  - The Legend of Buddha
- Islamic Center
  - Muslim Prayer
  - Perceptions of Women in Islamic Culture
- SMILES
  - Animal Assisted Therapy
  - Healing and Autism
- Oneida Reservation
  - Tsyunhehkwa Agricultural Practices and their Meanings
  - Oneida Agri-cultural Life
Overall the trip to the Islamic Center was different. It helped me open up my eyes and not be so closed to the community around me. I think that was the whole purpose of the experience, so this experience showed me that everybody has a faith and believes in something, even if it’s not a Christian God. It also showed me that everybody prays or celebrates their beliefs in his or her own way and that they have the right to do so without being judged. These things are already things that I believed and agree with because I would not want or like to be judged for my beliefs, race, or sexually either, so I understand how others feel when their beliefs are not respected.
I was completely unprepared for what I saw. I thought the temple would probably be an Americanized building, maybe somewhat modern and sleek with the look of a community center. Happily, what I saw instead was something far more traditional. Around the building, on the pavement, were elaborate traditional designs.
In the distance I noticed a robed figure sternly observing us from the distance. He looked like he was judging us. I expected him to be all secretive and mystical. I thought that he might have heard one of us crack a joke and that he would be offended. I didn’t expect him to greet us with a smile and a joke like he did. He had a very memorable laugh.....This affected my views on diversity, just because you expect someone to be some way doesn’t mean that they will be, however people should still include them in the group. They will probably want to be.
Upon arrival at the Tsyunhehkwa Farm, I was first amazed at the hospitable welcome we received from the employees of Tsyunhehkwa, and how familiar the setting of the farm felt. We were all made to feel right at home at an organic farm which reminded me much of the older farms still present in my hometown.
It was such an amazing thing to see kids get out of wheelchairs and onto a horse. When the class started I immediately began to realize how this class was helpful to them, the kids were able to balance and control the horses. I thought they would need more help but they were able to do a majority of the work by themselves. They didn’t have to go at a slow speed either; they kept up with one another at a steady pace. Not only were they getting therapy but having a great time while doing it.
Reflections and Applications

• What we would change in retrospect
  • Use annotated bibliography in place of stand-alone research paper
  • Combine research and reflection

• Using the Cultural Diversity Experience assignment in Social Entrepreneurship