

**Food and My Story: An Exercise in Diversity Consciousness**

Cammie G. Weaver  
Graduate Teaching Assistant  
Penny Pennington Weeks  
William G. Weeks  
Oklahoma State University

445 Agricultural Hall  
Stillwater, OK 74078  
(405-744-3036)  
cammie\_grace.weaver@okstate.edu

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### **Innovation**

Research Priority 7 of the 2016-2020 National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Education (Andenoro, Baker, Stedman, & Weeks, 2016) calls for the profession to address complex problems in agriculture. To tackle some of these complex problems in agriculture, students need to recognize cultures other than their own in order to work effectively with others. Students in agriculture-based programs need to be prepared for diversity in the workforce (Rodriguez & Lamm, 2016). Our innovation, *Food and My Story*, is a class assignment used to increase diversity consciousness in a multicultural leadership course taught in the agricultural leadership program at Oklahoma State University.

As the American population diversifies, so does the population of those involved in agriculture. Many believe agriculture as an industry, and agricultural education as a discipline, are not keeping up with these changes (Vincent, Killingsworth, & Torres, 2012). Diversity consciousness, defined as having an understanding and skill set relating to diversity (Bucher, 2015), is perhaps the starting point in diversity education. Bucher (2015) outlines six stages of development in diversity consciousness. In the first stage, students are asked to explore their own diversity. Before students can make sense of other cultures, they have to be aware of their own. *What makes me unique? What is my own culture? How am I different from other students?* are questions we ask students to ask themselves as a part of the *Food and My Story* assignment.

### **How It Works**

In this assignment, we ask students to prepare a food item with special significance to their family and culture. This food item can be eaten on a regular basis or prepared for special gatherings. The following instructions for the assignment are provided to students:

- Before preparing the item, contact a family member to discuss the recipe and your family's history behind this item being served at family meals, holidays, or other gatherings. Include your family members' reaction to this assignment.
- Cook/bake/prepare the item and take photos of you preparing the item. Include three to five pictures in your presentation. Please prepare the item yourself. To receive documentation points, you must be in at least one of the photos and the photos must clearly demonstrate that you prepared the item yourself. Invite friends over to sample your wares when you are done cooking.
- In your PowerPoint presentation include the recipe (ingredients and instructions) as well as your family's story as it relates to the food item.
- Integrate at least three course concepts or quotes from our text in your six slide PowerPoint presentation. Use BOLD print to signify keywords or quotes.

Once the assignment is complete, students submit their presentation to the course management system for grading and post to the course's online discussion board. Students view their classmates' presentations and ask questions about recipes shared to better understand how family food traditions represent unique aspects of their cultures.

### **Results to Date**

Approximately 400 students enroll each year in the multicultural leadership course and complete the *Food and My Story* assignment. Student feedback on this assignment has been overwhelmingly positive. Many students comment about the excitement of family members getting to participate in the class by helping with the assignment.

- “My mother always prepares the Ota for my family, and when I told her about this project and how I would have to prepare the food, she was excited to give me the recipe” (Sione).
- “When I told our family about this assignment my wife actually shouted ‘Sopa de Pollo’. The same reaction occurred with many of my other family members” (Matt).
- “I called my grandma and told her that I had an assignment to make a family recipe. She was excited to hear that I had chosen her recipe and was eager to help. I FaceTimed her through the whole process” (Jeremy).

Through creating their own presentation and reviewing those of their classmates, students can increase their diversity consciousness, which is assessed through the integration of course concepts in their presentations. There are several recurring concepts in the projects that students connect to course content, such as assimilation, pluralism, and cultural cruise control (Bucher, 2015).

- “A few of my friends from different places around the U.S. also have this class and I went to try their foods and I think that helps with cultural cruise control by trying new things,” (Jamaal)
- “Culture is something I believe that is special, and when it comes to foods, it is definitely something that unites people,” (Jessica).
- “Although generations and cultures seem to change overtime as they choose to assimilate with coexisting cultures, my grandmother’s recipe stayed true to its origin” (Tyrell).
- “Just think, if people only ate fast food or boxed meals our food pluralism would soon all start to assimilate, and everyone would be eating nearly the same thing, there would be no history or diversity in our food,” (Amanda).

### **Future Plans and Resources Needed**

The agricultural leadership program at Oklahoma State University plans to continue the use of *Food and My Story* in the multicultural leadership course. We are considering several variations on this assignment. As the assignment is used exclusively in an online course, giving the option to create a video might increase interaction between students in the discussion board. Many of the students enrolled in the online course are campus-based students, so we are also considering adding the option of having students share their food product with the class in a central location on campus at a specified time. Sharing their prepared recipe could increase cultural awareness by further celebrating and highlighting each student’s culture. The faculty are also very interested in sampling the recipes. This project does not have any costs, nor does it require any resources for the instructor, unless he or she wants to participate in the project. Students do incur the cost of preparing their recipe, which we hope fits into their normal grocery budget.

## References

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