

Breaking News!

Cultivating Cultural Proficient Conversations Using Media Outlets

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Our world is rich with differing cultures, ideals, and perspectives. To fully appreciate the world around us, we must understand our personal cultures as well as the cultural differences of others (Livermore, 2009). With the fields of food, agriculture, environmental sciences, and natural resources continuing to become more diverse in terms of practitioners, consumers, and scholars, we must recognize the distinct cultures that are present (Martin, 2019). There is a need for individuals to develop skills to navigate the cultural differences and similarities in their diverse fields and ultimately work toward cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency goes beyond identifying diversity issues at a surface level to focusing on many social identity categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion (The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice, 2022). Individuals working towards cultural proficiency should be able to examine the nature of multicultural tensions and how to navigate conversations in multicultural environments. Individuals are students of their own assumptions who must study their own values and beliefs to explore strategies for examining cultures and obtaining insight into cultural differences (CCPEP, 2022).

People interact with the media to help make sense of the world around them (Ostertag, 2010). Often, people use news media to “mentally engage with, process, negotiate, and organize their cultural environment” (Ostertag, 2010, p. 827). Students are exposed to numerous sources of information that will continue to challenge their thoughts and beliefs about cultural diversity in their fields. Connecting news media to individual understanding of cultural proficiency could help students guide conversations about multicultural differences. Establishing the ability to seek out information and guide conversations about diversity in our world will help individuals on their path to cultural proficiency.

How It Works/Methodology

Toward Cultural Proficiency COMLDR 3535 is an elective course offered through the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences at The Ohio State University. This course is open to all [university name] undergraduate students in good standing with the university. Students enrolled in [course number] were instructed to complete the *Culture in the Media* assignment as part of the course requirements. For this assignment, students were asked to find a story from a popular news outlet to help start discussions around cultural proficiency. Each student searched through popular news outlets to find examples of cultural topics or issues (immigration, poverty, essential workers, healthcare, education, housing, environmental issues, professional dress, climate change, Land Grant universities, food security, mental health, sports, family dynamics, etc.) and used their examples to guide conversations with classmates. On their assigned day, students were asked to bring in a media story where they critically evaluated how the topic was presented. Students were asked to consider three questions: What perspective is missing? How is culture being portrayed in this issue? What can we take away to increase our cultural understanding and engagement? Instructors assisted with guiding discussion as needed, but these conversations were majority student led. Students incorporated firsthand experiences

and personal thought and feelings to explore the presentation of multicultural topics in the news. Finally, students were asked to write a reflection after each *Culture in the Media* discussion.

Results to Date/Implications

Although COMLDR 3535 has been offered in previous semesters, the results correspond to the 28 students enrolled in the fall of 2021. Through their reflections, the students mentioned having found a practical and applied reasoning of the theoretical concepts of the class through its approach to social realities. Students say that the discussions around media outlets created discomfort and challenged many of their preconceived ideas, forcing them to rethink diversity, equity, and inclusion concepts. A student mentioned, “I did not know these types of things happened...Perhaps, I would never have realized certain prejudices, although I do not know if I have them. Now I must consider and learn to manage them.” According to the students, the benefits of talking about the events in current media outlets aroused their curiosity to explore what other similar situations are affecting their communities. A student shared, “after leading this activity I decided to look for other news. I was intrigued by certain facts, and I was surprised by what I found.” Students indicated that the use of media outlets helped them to develop a more critical eye when gathering information. Media played a huge role in enhancing momentum toward cultural proficiency for social justice issues. A student commented “I did not think I could learn about other people's experiences through the media. Now I have a clearer reason why people dedicate time and effort to promote causes of social justice.” Media outlets now give them an avenue to guide conversations about issues involving diversity, equity, and inclusion in their everyday lives.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Instructors plan to continue to implement the *Cultural in the Media* assignment as part of the course requirements for the COMLDR 3535 class. Information gained from the discussions through this assignment will assist in adjustments to the course in the future. Instructors interested in implementing similar activities in their courses should be aware of the need for teacher-guided training on how to identify diversity issues in popular media. Media outlets accepted for this assignment will be limited in the future to focus information sources. Students should also be exposed to teacher-guided discussions about multicultural issues before guiding their own discussions. If not previously trained, instructors should develop their own cultural proficiency skills through formal education, workshops, and collaboration with university diversity, equity, and inclusion officials before incorporating similar assignments.

Cost/Resources Needed

There is no monetary fee associated with this innovation beyond the cost of the general course credit. Resources for this innovation do not extend past general resources required for instruction of the [course number] course. Toward Cultural Proficiency instructors provide course time to allow students to lead discussions and encourage outside of class preparation by students equivalent to typical course assignments.

References

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