“Cultural Competency and Student Employability in Appalachian Ohio”

Zane State College
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February 2014 – June 30, 2015

June 13, 2014
Re-submitted with revisions on July 29, 2014

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PROJECT FOCUS:
Zane State College students will gain a greater understanding of local race and cultural relations and appropriate workplace behaviors through research in Muskingum and surrounding counties and by connecting Muskingum Valley Human Resource Management Association (MVHRMA).

PROJECT DETAILS:

Course Number, Name, and Instructor:

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<th>Course Number, Name, and Instructor:</th>
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| **SOCI 2060-02** | **Instructor:** Susan Markel  
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Community Partner:
Muskingum Valley Human Resource Management Association (MVHRMA)

Need:
Problems Addressed:
Zane State College has a quality record of sending well-educated graduates into their respective fields. However, in today’s diverse marketplace, these graduates need a clear understanding of employer expectations for cultural awareness and sensitivity in the workplace.

In 2013, the Zane State College Advisory Council met collectively to discuss the top three professional traits for new employees. The group included the various program advisory committees consisting of local employers and college representatives. The discussion highlighted the fact that Zane State College graduates were well trained academically, but they lacked the soft skills that employers seek. Respect and communication skills were among the skills listed; these skills can be honed through cultural sensitivity and awareness training.

On a local level, Tim Snodgrass, Workforce and Training Coordinator at Zane State College, comments that, in rural Appalachia, there is evidence of “cultural
shifts." The oil and gas business has “attracted more minorities, women, and youth, and managing a multi-cultural workforce is challenging.”

According to Tracey Tonnous, Zane State College’s Workforce Training Supervisor, many of our local manufacturing companies are international companies: German owned, Austrian owned, Japanese owned, etc. She says, “This sometimes causes difficulties, especially with communication. We need to be graduating students that are prepared to deal with these types of cultural issues.”

The Director of Zane State College’s Small Business Development Center, Cindy Voorhies, echoes Tracey Tonnous’s comments. She acknowledges that for retail and restaurant small businesses, communication with different cultures can be challenging.

The National Center for Cultural Competence strongly supports the need for cultural competence training...in order to gain a competitive edge in the market place. (http://nccc.georgetown.edu/foundations/need.html)

According to Prime Time Computer Services, Inc. "even one isolated instance of cultural insensitivity can damage the organization." “Unfortunately," writes Crystal Vogt of Demand Media, “past experiences and education do not always teach people how to be culturally sensitive toward one another, and a lack of cultural sensitivity skills among your workforce can have negative consequences.”

The following comment by Betancourt, Green, and Carrillo in a field report for the Commonwealth Fund titled “Cultural Competence in Health Care: Emerging Frameworks and Practical Approaches” is appropriate in light of Zane State College’s many health related programs: “As we become a more ethnically and racially diverse nation, health care systems and providers need to reflect on and respond to patients’ varied perspectives, values, beliefs, and behaviors about health and well-being.” (http://smallbusiness.chron.com/cultural-sensitivity-skills-workplace-20375.html)

According to the United States Census Bureau, Muskingum County has a population that is 93% white, compared to 83.4% in the state of Ohio. (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/39/39119.html)

Due to this lack of diversity, Zane State College students are generally not exposed to much racial and ethnic diversity; therefore, they sometimes lack a clear understanding of appropriate language and behavior, especially in terms of a diverse workplace in today’s global economy. Students lacking a diverse worldview also face more challenges in employability. Muskingum County is in the bottom
20% of Ohio counties in employment levels. The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services’ Labor Market Information shows that in April 2014, Muskingum County ranked 15th out of 88 counties in Ohio in unemployment, with an unemployment rate of 7%.  

Solutions Implemented:
This project will address the Appalachian Regional Commission’s General Goal 2: “Strengthen the Capacity of the People of Appalachia to Compete in the Global Economy” with emphasis on Strategic Objectives 2.1: “Develop Leaders and Strengthen Community Capacity” and 2.2: ‘Enhance Workforce skills through Training and Education.”

In order to assist Zane State College students in becoming effective, employable global citizens, the ATP project will link students with the human resources departments of local employers—many of whom employ the College’s graduates—in order to instill in them employer expectations of cultural awareness and sensitivity in the workplace. As noted above, Muskingum County has a high unemployment rate and limited diversity; thus, Zane State College students who are culturally competent will have a definite edge over the competition when seeking employment.

Students will conduct research on cultural diversity in Appalachian Ohio, specifically in Muskingum County. Through active research and writing assignments, students will work on both (i) understanding and accepting their own narratives of identity and (ii) understanding and accepting the narratives of identity of others.

The selected community partner, the Muskingum Valley Human Resource Management Association (MVHRMA), is “an affiliate chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management and consists of human resource professionals in the East Central area of Ohio.”

According to President Dedra Parsons, MVHRMA members are continuously looking for ways to give back to the community. This project serves as a forum for meeting a community need by addressing issues of employability.

Informational sessions between Zane State College students and the MVHRMA members will focus on helping students understand appropriate workplace behaviors and learn about cultural and racial stereotypes.
Zane State College students will meet with MVHRMA members to address questions related to diversity sensitivity and race relations in the workplace, such as:

1. What are some red flags the HR professionals see in the workplace in terms of racial and ethnic sensitivity?
2. Why are they important?
3. What legal ramifications are there?
4. What are the biggest areas of concern? Are they slurs, hostile environment, overt intimidation?
5. What are the moral and ethical implications to consider?
6. Are there examples where employees are culturally offensive without even realizing it?

Students will also attend a diversity presentation arranged by the MVHRMA on October 8, 2014. Valerie Smith, Director of International and Multicultural Services, Muskingum University, is the presenter.

Students will showcase their research findings on the importance of cultural competency for employability in a poster board which will be displayed at the Putnam Underground Railroad Education (PURE) Center in Zanesville, Ohio.

Tentative plans include Zane State College students connecting with different age groups in the community through the Muskingum Valley New Tech Academy (NTA) (http://www.newtechnetwork.org/schools/muskingum-valley-new-tech-academy). College students will share their newly acquired knowledge with high school students, who will in turn pass on this information to middle school and grade school students.

**Number and description of planned meetings with the community partner:**
1. Initial meeting between faculty facilitators and MVHRMA.
2. Students meet with MVHRMA representatives and connect with Human Resource professional mentors throughout the semester.
3. Presentation by guest speaker Valerie Smith, Director of International and Multicultural Services, Muskingum University.
4. Zane State College students present findings to MVHRMA at monthly meeting.
Overview of the project, including its central focus (10-12 sentences):
This project will allow students to take two linked college courses—Race and Ethnicity (Sociology) and Freshman Composition (English)—which incorporate a community-based project. Students will conduct research on the diversity of native Appalachians within Muskingum County which will assist them in gaining cultural competence. Active research will include students interviewing local persons to retrieve their personal narratives of Appalachian identity which will aid in setting the foundation for diversity sensitivity.

Zane State College students will link with the MVHRMA with an aim to learn about employer expectations, promote positive cultural and race relations, and boost employability in the region. In order to make the connection with the community partner more meaningful to students, the MVHRMA will link students with mentors who are Human Resource professionals in each of the participating students' chosen career fields or interests.

Writing assignments on Appalachia and the Appalachian Teaching Project (ATP) will be part of the course requirement for both classes. Findings will be organized and presented in a PowerPoint presentation as well as a poster board presentation. Students will share their conclusions with 1) MVHRMA members and 2) at least one other community organization. This will help prepare students for the final presentation at the Appalachian Regional Commission's ATP conference in Washington, D.C. in December.

To address issues of long-term sustainability, students' ATP projects and/or presentations will be showcased through Zane State College’s social media outlets. Additional connections with the MVHRMA, the PURE Center, and the Muskingum Valley NTA will be sought.

Goals and Objectives:
1. Develop clear narratives of identity of self and others.
   1.1 Write reflective journals about one's own narrative of identity.
   1.2 Study and write about other people's narratives of identity through use of interviews.

2. Research local diversity issues and topics.
   2.1 Examine demographic data of Muskingum County.
   2.2 Research local historical issues of race relations.
3. Document and present important diversity sensitivity concepts.
   3.1 Write an academic paper on local diversity issues and diversity sensitivity concepts.
   3.2 Deliver a presentation on the local diversity issues and diversity sensitivity concepts.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:
- Research local diversity issues.
- Write reflective journals about one’s own narrative of identity.
- Interview local individuals and share their personal narratives in a writing assignment.
- Meet with Human Resource professionals through the MVHRMA for diversity sensitivity training.
- Write an academic paper, using primary and secondary sources, about the types of Appalachian diversity in Muskingum County and identify significant diversity sensitivity concepts.
- Develop a presentation highlighting the main points derived from active research.
- Create a poster highlighting main points of research project.
- Present findings to community partner, MVHRMA.
- Present findings to at least one community group.
- Present findings at the Appalachian Regional Commission’s ATP conference in Washington, DC.