

Do Worlds Connect @ Otterbein College Discussion Notes

An Erin McKenzie Virtual Welcoming Space <http://library.otterbein.edu/ErinMcKenzie/index.htm>
Co-sponsored by the Friends of the Library

Some opening thoughts by Barb McKenzie

Individualism: Perspective of dominant micro culture in the US – European Americans
(*Families, Professionals, and Exceptionality* by Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, and Soodak)

- Values **Independence**
- Values Competition
- System Centered Approach – laws and government

Collectivism: Perspective of diverse racial ethnic micro cultures in the US (*Families, Professionals, and Exceptionality* by Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, and Soodak)

- Values **Interdependence** – contributions of/to/with the group
- Relationship Centered Approach
- Robert Two Crow on the wall at the National Museum of the American Indian in DC
“The Lakota Universe can be described as *Mitakuye Oyasin*. That means everything is connected, interrelated, and dependent in order to exist.”

Shared words from Candee Basford <http://www.candeebasford.com/> (check out her blog)

“...Envisioning higher education as a place of transformational learning and deep social change that requires the full participation of citizens with diverse experiences and ways of knowing and an equal appreciation for each person’s contribution.”

Thomas Ahrens: Representing Gateway Program and International Studies

- Broad international spectrum is represented at Otterbein
- More emphasis in education for global learning
- More schools are sending students abroad
- He feels that Otterbein is welcoming and inclusive, but we **need to hear the student perspective**
- Would like to see more intentionality for spaces and events to welcome students to come together

Leah Monaghan: Representing Disability Services

- Students are required to qualify for college entrance and can only receive accommodations and other services with documentation
- Increase in students with disabilities over the years especially with learning disabilities and some mental disorders and also serve those with visual, hearing, and some physical and medical issues
- She does feel that more students are crossing barriers, but would also like to hear the perspectives of students, however, most students with disabilities are less likely to identify his or herself as being disabled first

Marsha Robinson: Representing Black Studies

- Many people of African descent have difficulty accessing libraries
- Libraries can be a political treasure or a political issue
- Has personally not felt welcome in some libraries – lack of materials – but Otterbein does seem to have more and is more welcoming
- Would like to increase inclusiveness of Otterbein College, but some students do not want to become one human family

- Would like to see film nights offered by the library/college
- Would also suggest soapbox – space/opportunity for students to speak

Suzanne Ashworth: Representing GLBTQ

- Uneven pockets on campus
- Still grouping especially in campus center
- Some are more welcoming and inclusive but tensions still exist (graffiti, swastikas, backlash to *Vagina Monologues*) which reflects attitudes prevalent in Ohio
- Agree that we need some intentionality – a truly diverse advisory group
- Need to hear from the students
- Curriculum expanded to add courses with GLBTQ focus and identify as such

Lisa Patterson Phillips: Representing Office of Diversity

- Originally began with a more ethnic focus, but now broader to look at all diversity
- What is diversity in 2009?
- Easier to find differences, but we need to find points where we connect
- Worlds connect at Otterbein at a superficial level – like bubbles bumping we touch but don't really get to know each other and have those uncomfortable conversations – we are “nice”
- We need to start those conversations

Shannon Lakanen: Representing Women's Studies

- Classes are rarely diverse – preaching to the choir
- Otterbein is welcoming within the limitations
- Inclusiveness embedded in the curriculum
- Need to hear student voices

Feedback from the small group discussions:

SURPRISES from what the panel members shared...

- Students present were surprised at how positive the faculty panel members were about the welcoming of diversity at Otterbein. Students are less positive and do not feel that most students are accepting. Concerns about grouping in the Campus Center were mentioned often by students. Students coming from small towns often think the campus is diverse and welcoming. The higher you go in your major, the more you are around the same people. Commuter students “fall thru the cracks.”
- Thinking of library as a source of power
- Backlash to *Vagina Monologues* being advertised and shown on campus and other incidents

OUR VISION FOR BUILDING A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY AT OTTERBEIN...

- We will learn to get along – more so, we will discover and appreciate each other
- There will be more diversity in the classrooms
- Challenge is good
- Getting out of our safety zone
- The power of students teaching students; faculty learning from students
- We will intentionally create spaces where all feel welcome to share and interact
- This vision will be integrated into the curriculum and supported through instruction

- Celebrating diversity – welcoming diverse community members to join with us in our celebration; all of us sharing gifts and customs

ACTION STEPS WE WILL TAKE...

- Personal Reflection – How do I handle various situations?
- More possibilities and opportunities shared and encouraged in freshmen classes/first year experience
- Infusion in curriculum and classes
- Classmate invitations to participate
- Including/inviting commuters in conversations and activities
- Embedded representations in classes
- Working with Otterbein’s Center for Community Engagement
<http://www.otterbein.edu/academics/CCE/index.asp>
- Infusion in service learning discussions; remembering to value all and not create helpers and helpees who never get to change roles
- Bringing community in
- Intentional dialogues
- Sharing/modeling skills to help with challenging conversations
- Opportunities to share/learn about customs, foods, music, ideas, struggles, dreams
- Seeking **CONNECTORS** from students and adults in our community

ADDITIONAL NOTES ABOUT CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD CONNECTORS, per

John McKnight: <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/publications/community/introd-building.html>

1. Gift centered (looking for the gifts/assets in each person)
 2. Well connected and has been part of the community for a long time
 3. Trusted
 4. Believes community is welcoming (seeing glass as half full)
- This is about **CONNECTING** rather than leadership. A good connector is not necessarily a leader.
 - A good connector is born and cannot be trained.
 - Thinking as a “server” can be limiting and focused on benevolence which is different from thinking as a “connector.”

A final question to ponder...

Colleges are innately exclusive places – tests to take in order to apply with limited accommodations for some labeled groups; standardized intellectual levels to qualify; applications to complete; other requirements depending on the institution; acceptance or rejection; competition to get in and stay in; financial issues to attend, etc.

Can an exclusive place be inclusive?

Compiled by Barbara McKenzie, 5/19/09