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AGR 20100

Reflection 5

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Prior to taking AGR 20100, I felt as though my previous three years at Purdue had exposed me to so many different people from different backgrounds and cultures and that my training to become a supervisor for the new student orientation program, Boiler Gold Rush, had prepared me to tackle the challenges that would be presented to me in this course. As a supervisor, my worldview and multicultural awareness was examined, discussed, and then challenged. I expected that this experience would help me in this course, and while it did, it did not help to the extent that I thought it would. This course addressed more issues than I had been trained in through Boiler Gold Rush and I learned more about identifying my own biases and correcting them rather than solely learning to recognize cultural differences and be respectful of them.

At the beginning of this course, I was encouraged to investigate my family’s history in this country. Though I knew the story of how my father came to America about thirty years ago, I learned how my mother’s side came from Luxembourg, Germany, and Belgium over a hundred years ago and farmed to make their living. As someone who has lived in a relatively well-off suburb her whole life, I had never felt a connection to people who live in a rural society, especially with the recent polarization of urban and rural populations in America described by a Pew Research Center study published in May of this year (Badger, 2018). This informative study, which comes from a reputable nonpartisan, non-advocacy public opinion polling research organization, shows that these two populations believe that everyone else is looking down on them and does not understand their problems or share their values. Like the study suggests, instead of trying to form connections, I held onto biases and stereotypes about these people. Once I learned about my family history, I knew that I had to challenge my biases. I realized that while my time at Purdue had exposed me to a variety of different people, I had not made a serious connection with someone who grew up on a farm to challenge my biases. Through this course, I met group members who had done just that. During our project, I learned about their worldviews, their goals, and their experiences, which brought me closer to my familial roots. Had I not taken this class, I would not have had a chance to learn about my culture and challenge my bias. While I appreciate this, I cannot help but feel a little saddened because my family members who had these experiences I am just now connecting to are deceased.

At the beginning of the semester, I felt like I understood everything about cultural awareness. Boiler Gold Rush’s FreeZone initiative taught me to tolerate and support others’ values without judgment. Coming into this class, I thought that this was enough. However, by the middle of the semester, I learned that blind tolerance is not enough; understanding why someone has values different from yours and learning about the experiences behind someone’s values is what creates true understanding and support. According to a blog post by the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to inspiring young people to build peace in the world, tolerance is simply saying that you admit that someone different from you has the same right to life choices as you do, whether you like it or not; on the other hand understanding is realizing that your way is not the only way and that discovering the basis for our differences of opinion enables us to better work together (Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, 2012). While the blog was written six years ago, the message is still applicable: without having a conversation to reach out and understand someone else, your biases about differences will never be challenged and subconsciously, you will still harbor judgments, even if you externally do not express them. Additionally, blind tolerance may create external harmony, but, as we learned from the Circular Model of Communication in chapter five, underlying conflicts will never be solved without communication about the biases and judgments we hold (Morris, 2016).

Overall, this course taught me to move beyond tolerating others’ viewpoints and values and to learn to understand why others hold these values to better accept and learn from these differences. The discussion boards enabled me to pause and think about my beliefs on a topic and why I hold those beliefs before challenging me to see where others are coming from. At times, reading others’ posts helped to evolve my values and beliefs. I would not say that I simply learned in this class; that would not be the correct verb. Instead, I grew emotionally throughout the duration of this class and I am excited to be able to apply my new set of skills and values to my experiences once I graduate from Purdue.