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Cultural Competence: A Journey to an Elusive Goal

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To develop cultural competence, one must undertake an elusive journey that likely has no destination. Social workers have a responsibility to undertake this often rocky journey with few guideposts. As educators of future professionals, schools of social work must ensure that their students begin, or continue, this journey during this time of professional training. This article presents a case study that describes the journey of a school of social work to develop a more culturally competent organization and its efforts to extend this perspective to the larger college and university in which it resides. An organizational change model is used to assess what strategies were most effective, and it offers potential strategies for other schools on their journey.

Social workers may recognize the importance of culturally competent practice and actively work to provide culturally competent services, but it is unlikely they ever feel truly culturally competent to work with all diverse populations or even one group different from themselves. For this reason, many argue that being culturally competent is not a goal or destination one can ever achieve but rather a journey that we must commit to across our lifespan (Allen-Meares, 2007; March, 2004; Perry & Tate-Manning, 2006). Cross (1988) discussed cultural competence as a developmental process that occurs along a continuum from cultural destructiveness to advanced cultural competence. Moving along this continuum requires discipline, motivation, commitment, conceptual and experiential learning, and self-reflexivity.

Schools of social work, with mission statements, curricula, trainings, and faculty that emphasize the merits of diversity and cultural competency, can easily succumb to the belief that they, as an institution, have attained culturally competent social work education and practice. The danger of such thinking is it can promote complacency among faculty, hinder dialogue regarding diversity issues, and limit the desire for additional learning and self-reflexivity—attributes that are paramount to effective culturally competent practice. We believe that schools of social work that can critically examine their journey toward cultural competency are better able to help their students begin, or continue, this journey as part of their preparation for professional practice.

In this article, we offer an example case study of one school of social work's journey to develop a more culturally competent organization (its environment, faculty, and students) and its efforts to extend this perspective to the larger college and university in which it resides. A description

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of the school's early approach to diversity, its developmental trajectory toward policies and programs that promoted cultural competency, and reflections by faculty and staff who have chosen to embark on that journey provide a realistic discussion on what challenges might be encountered along the way. The journey is also examined using an organizational change model to provide further insight into what strategies were most effective in continuing the journey. The article concludes with suggested strategies for other schools of social work to consider as they embark on or continue their elusive journey.

THE CHANGING FACE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Beginning in the early 20th century, social work professionals increasingly recognized that one must understand and appreciate the diversity among persons and their culture to be able to conduct practice that is congruent with the behavior and expectations of clients—that is, the need to be culturally competent practitioners (Dewees, 2001; Guy-Walls, 2007). For example, Helen Tucker is often identified as the first social worker to propose that social work education include experiences with Black people to enable social work students to develop skills in helping Black people in 1909 (Fox, 1983). Dr. Inabel Burns Lindsay, founding dean of the Howard University School of Social Work, was another early proponent for the consideration of race and culture in social work education, and her philosophy continues to inform contemporary social work practice approaches (Brown, Gourdine, & Crewe, 2011). Until the last 40 or 50 years, diversity was often, though not exclusively, narrowly defined and discussed as racial or ethnic differences between practitioners and their clients, a reflection of the cultural and political awareness of the times.

In the last quarter-century, a growing proportion of individuals in the United States identify with racial and ethnic groups other than the once-dominant European Anglo groups or as African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Throughout the country, the population has become much more diverse, with rapidly increasing Latino populations and a range of immigrant and refugee populations from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. This growing number of individuals from many cultural, ethnic, religious, and racial groups has heightened our awareness and examination of the terms *cultural diversity* and *cultural competence* for social work educators and professionals alike. Today there is also greater awareness about the diversity in diversity (Fong, 2007). For example, not all Asian/Pacific Islanders share the same culture, values, history, and experiences. Similarly, it is estimated that currently almost three million of America's Black population is foreign born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Between 1980 and 2005, the Black immigrant population, overall, more than tripled, with some groups growing much more rapidly than others. For example, the Haitian population quadrupled, and the number of Ethiopians increased 13 times between those years.

The contemporary use of the term *diversity* more commonly (compared to earlier times) also refers to a wide range of human differences such as, but not limited to, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, physical and developmental disabilities, and age. Recognition of these diverse groups includes not only differences between and within these groups but also their complex web of meaning within the current sociopolitical context and their relationship to core social values such as familial roles, child rearing, and work ethics that are important to understand clients (Lee & McRoy, 2008; Lum, 2008; Perry & Tate-Manning, 2006). As a profession, we are also much more aware of the effect of the "isms" (e.g., racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, elitism, and

heterosexism) on ourselves, our clients, and our culture (Harrison, Thyer, & Wodarski, 1996; Van Soest, 2003).

The social work profession, by virtue of its value system, traditions, and history, is committed to social work practice that recognizes racial, cultural, and social diversity and opposes oppression (Allen-Meares, 2007; Cross, 2008; National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2006; Reamer, 1998). Social work's focus on cultural diversity is linked to its mission of social justice and culturally competent practice as stated in the profession's *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1999). In the last decade, that importance has been underscored with the development of the *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2001) and the *Indicators for the Achievement of the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice* (NASW, 2007). The importance of including cultural diversity in the social work curriculum is also clearly articulated in the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) that guide both classroom and field settings (CSWE, 2008).

During the last two decades, the social work literature and texts have seemingly exploded with the discussion of cultural competence (e.g., Healy, 2008; Leigh, 1998; Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006; Van Wormer, 1997; Walker & Staton, 2000). It is replete with numerous examples describing professional practice and organizational efforts that seemingly move toward cultural competence. However, including cultural competency in social work education has received some critical commentary as well (de Anda, 1997). Gallegos, Tindall, and Gallegos (2008), for example, have called for more advancement in the conceptualization of cultural competence. They address several areas of concern, including disagreements regarding how to define cultural competence, recognizing conceptual tensions at its center, as well as how to operationalize, test, and apply concepts related to cultural competence. The concerns identified by other authors extend to the epistemological foundations of cultural competence, the rights and dignity of the individual, and the very question of whether a social worker can ever be culturally competent. Johnson and Munch (2009), for example, delivered a strong disagreement with this entire area of inquiry and attempted to discredit much of what has been developed in the field of cultural competency, calling for a complete focus on what they see as fundamental contradictions to social work's historical values and principles. Moreover, they also question the place of cultural competence in the U.S. social work curriculum as it appears relatively uncontested. Although, overall, there appears to be agreement about the importance of cultural competence in social work education and practice, these authors have reminded us that more work needs to be done in this area.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The effect of the current broader understanding of cultural diversity on social work practice is exponentially greater compared to a few decades ago and requires that schools of social work adequately prepare their graduates for culturally competent practice in this context (Simmons, Diaz, Jackson, & Takahashi, 2008). There are a growing number of educators, field instructors, and practitioners discussing the necessary requirements to build cultural competence among social work students. Social work educators also increasingly recognize that to teach social work courses within a Western (White) dominant cultural paradigm not only provides an unrealistic focus for knowledge building and skill development but also diminishes the importance of recognizing the

differences in cultural background that students, professionals, and educators bring to the field (Fong, 2007; Yan, 2008).

There are many suggestions for strategies to increase cultural competence content within schools of social work. Some (e.g., Armour, Bain, & Rubio, 2004) suggest a course or training for field instructors and students, to increase the cultural competence of both in a practice setting where classroom knowledge can be integrated with practice skills. Others (e.g., Snyder, Peeler, & May, 2008) describe specific components or activities to be included in a required foundation course to encourage students to enhance their cultural awareness and understanding of how it translates into social action. Both of these types of activities promote knowledge building and support self-reflection.

Some have noted that although increasing knowledge, skill development, and self-reflection are required on the cultural competence journey, they are not sufficient (e.g., Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Dewees, 2001; Perry & Tate-Manning, 2006). They suggest that culturally competent practitioners must move beyond these steps to experiential learning that builds skills in working with clients different from oneself. Student immersion experiences (e.g., study abroad or service learning) are frequently identified as a means of developing cultural competence. Students returning from these experiences are reportedly more knowledgeable about, and sensitive to, other cultures (Parker & Dautoff, 2007; Wessel, 2007). Although schools of social work recognize and have increasingly embraced the need to prepare students for work in our increasingly global society by enhancing their cultural competence, it is left to each school, and sometimes to each individual instructor, to determine how and to what extent they will accomplish this goal (Wallace, 2000). Although there are many strategies to increase the cultural competence of students, Cross (1995/1996) and Torres and Jones (1997) suggested that to be most effective, the process must first begin at two levels within the academic institution: individual instructors and the organization itself.

Each faculty member must assess her or his personal level of cultural competence and its effect on teaching and mentoring students. The most frequently identified barrier to including content to enhance cultural competence in the classroom is that instructors lack the personal knowledge of their own cultural competence and feel uncomfortable exploring these issues with their students (Mishna & Bogo, 2007; Walker & Staton, 2000). Perry and Tate-Manning (2006) argued that it is imperative for individuals to understand the development and foundation of their own cultural understanding to create self-awareness from within rather than from the influence of others. Based on a personal assessment, individual faculty members must decide what areas of knowledge and skills they need to strengthen and what strategies they will use to accomplish that goal. For example, one might begin with readings or attendance at workshops and diversity activities or take part in immersion experiences within the academic setting, in the larger community, or around the world.

Equally important, the second level, suggested by Cross and others, focuses on the organization itself. The organization, that is, the school of social work, must examine the curriculum that is offered within the school and how it addresses students' needs for cultural competence content and skill development. When assessing the organizational culture, Yan (2008) and Eckley et al. (2004) underscored the importance of determining if there is a balance between providing content about dominant and minority/diverse groups and helping students examine conflicting values and practices within those groups compared to their own values and those of the social work profession. In addition to reviewing the course materials and activities for this content,

instructors would also find it helpful to seek consultation from persons of diverse backgrounds and invite them to participate in the class. Others suggest that recognizing diversity and moving an organization toward cultural competence is an ongoing effort that requires internal leadership and systematic support (Yee & Tursi, 2002).

This integration of diversity content into a curriculum can occur at different levels and in different ways. Banks (1993) suggested that, ideally, the entire academic process across the university or college, not just the school of social work, would increase students' cultural competence by exposing them to academic knowledge that consists of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream knowledge and expand the historical explanations that are traditionally accepted within the dominant culture. Although a school or college of social work cannot necessarily regulate the larger university, it can ensure that the entire curriculum within the department is designed to have a multicultural focus by infusing content on diverse groups and culturally sensitive practice into each course (Chestang, 1988; Fellin, 2000; Roberts & Smith, 2002). Some advocate for designing a specific required course that concentrates information on diverse groups and oppression to ensure that all students receive consistent content to increase their cultural competence (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997; Latting, 1990; Snyder & Omoto, 2008). Some schools of social work offer or require immersion learning experiences to provide these opportunities.

A CASE STUDY: ONE JOURNEY TOWARD CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Beginning in the 1990s, a Midwest school of social work began to more formally embrace the importance of culturally competent practice and began a systematic process to include this content in the school's curriculum. Even though this initiative began almost two decades ago, it continues to evolve. Although each step in the process has contributed to the journey, it has not always been a smooth journey for those involved. At each point along the way, differences of opinions about the current plan or what the next steps should be had to be resolved before the school could move on.

This case study not only traces the journey of this school but also identifies some of the many challenges that were encountered along the way. A review of school documents (e.g., committee and faculty meeting minutes, course outlines from classes since the mid-1990s) and semistructured interviews with faculty and staff were used to understand the journey of this school. Using an organizational cultural change model (Weiner, 2009), the journey was also reviewed to identify patterns or trends and the most effective strategies to inform future steps within the school and how they might also apply to other schools of social work who undertake a similar journey in the future. Although there are many organizational change models with varying degrees of complexity, most of them share some common components. The authors chose Weiner's (2009) organizational change model as it provided the most useful perspective and terminology for their understanding of the school's process in this case study. Weiner's change model focuses on two common key requirements for change: (1) change commitment (members' shared resolve to implement a change) and (2) change efficacy (the organization's members' shared belief in their collective capability to do so).

Some aspects of the culture and dynamics of the school provide a context for the change process. For example, the school has a shared governance framework and adopted an action

research model that uses a feedback loop to assess strategies and policies. Therefore, rather than one administrator making decisions, the faculty as a whole had to collectively discuss and reach consensus about each step. In addition to the main campus, the school also has three distant education centers across the state that offer additional opportunities—but also challenges—for incorporating content on diversity into the curriculum. For example, one center offers unique opportunities for integrating knowledge and skills related to Native Americans that cannot be easily replicated at the other centers. Conversely, students in the distant education centers are not always able to connect with or participate in special events on campus. The school is also home to a coffeeshop that was started by and continues to be staffed by persons with disabilities. In addition, the school hosts a number of annual conferences related to persons from marginalized groups, which keeps diversity in the forefront of day-to-day operations. It is important to note that as this initiative has developed over the last two decades, the faculty and staff composition has changed as some have retired or left the school and new members have joined. Also given this length of time, new faculty at one point along the journey have now become senior faculty. Collectively, these changing dynamics have played a role in the ongoing development of the cultural competence initiative.

A GROWING COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Beginning in the early 1990s, the faculty was increasingly cognizant that within the state there were an increasing number of racially/ethnically diverse individuals, though it was (and still is) largely (91%) composed of White, or European American, individuals (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Because of this relatively small percentage of diverse persons in the population, it was clear that many students could enter the program with little previous interaction with individuals different from themselves but were likely to engage with them in their future professional practice. By the mid-1990s, faculty and staff increasingly received informal feedback from current students and alumni that they felt inadequately prepared to work with persons from culturally diverse groups. In addition, it was questioned if the school was adequately meeting the needs of diverse students. A former director of the school recalled the impetus for the development of the focus on culturally competent social work practice: “Faculty and staff noticed persistently, students of color were not doing well in some courses.” She also noted:

> The school had a procedure of identifying students who weren’t doing well so that there could be early intervention. Some of the application of the process resulted in some students feeling very targeted, and from the faculty and staff perspective, some people were wise enough to begin to ask, “what’s wrong with this picture?” We could just say it’s all about the students, but maybe some of it is about our process.

Another faculty member recalled the following:

> During that time some of the minority students were feeling the need to have some kind of support group, so they could gather and support each other because they were feeling a bit marginalized . . . So they wanted to form a group, and they wanted to do it within the school structure. So they went to the school director to ask for approval because it was the professional thing to do. The director at the time refused to grant permission feeling that having this group of students start a [support] group would be separatist, would be divisive.

The school had already developed a required a course examining diversity, racism, oppression, and privilege and their effect on professional practice. Knowledge from this course and its discussions were in stark contrast to students' experiences in another course at that time where students reported the instructor would often make racist remarks in class and engaged in practices that were antithetical to what they were learning in their racism and diversity course. This created an environment of dissent and dissatisfaction among the students. When CSWE site visitors were on campus for a reaccreditation assessment and students voiced their dissatisfaction, the issue was again identified as an area requiring serious reflection and attention by faculty and staff. Collectively, these incidents increased the commitment to change among faculty and staff, the first step required in Weiner's organizational change model.

For some faculty, this feedback was surprising, as they had observed many positive changes in the 1960s and 1970s related to racial differences and believed that the school offered appropriate content on diversity within that context. Some faculty remembered that just finding a consensus on the definition of the term *cultural competency* was challenging. One former director stated:

> There wasn't any [definition], really. I mean it was a non-issue. We had just come out of the 60's and the civil rights movement, so everybody was very open and conscious about minorities, to the point that it was a non-issue. You didn't have to teach people this, you know, we've been through that. Did we understand everything about Blacks and Chicanos, probably not, but it wasn't something that you talked about. For people who were coming into the school at that time, they had been through a cultural education . . . the whole 60's was that cultural education.

This sentiment was echoed by another faculty member who remembered that he was

> initially impressed with our [the school's] focus on diversity issues, that had been a major part of the school's history, especially relative to disabilities . . . this created an environment of acceptance among faculty and students . . . I think we did pretty well in regard to [this].

BUILDING CHANGE EFFICACY

To address this concern and begin the conversation about cultural diversity and cultural competence, the school invited Terry Cross,[1] a leader in the conceptualization of cultural competence and its application to social service delivery, to present a workshop for the faculty on cultural competence models and their application to social work education. There was some hesitation among the faculty to embrace this training session. However, those who attended described it as "informative" and "beneficial" to their understanding of cultural competence and "at the end of the day, it was good."

As a result of the discussion begun by Cross's presentation, a diversity committee was organized within the school to provide leadership and coordination for diversity education activities so that "we could do a better job of educating our students." The charge of the diversity committee, consisting of interested faculty and students, was to develop a plan to increase the school's capacity to work in the context of cultural difference and then guide its implementation. The creation of the diversity committee can be seen as an indicator of the faculty's *change efficacy*,

[1] Terry Cross, MSW, ACSW, LCSW, is currently the executive director of the Indian Child Welfare Association.

that is, a shared belief in their collective capacity to make changes. The benefit of having this committee at this point in the process was that it provided a mechanism to organize and focus the cultural diversity efforts in the school. Although the diversity committee began with a group of interested faculty and students, one of the school's directors later institutionalized the group by designating that the committee would be composed of the BA, MSW, and PhD program directors; the distance education and field directors; elected student representatives; and the school's director to ensure that the best interest of students at all levels and in all locations of the programs would be represented. More recently, the committee's membership was made totally voluntary once again.

REASSESSING TO ONCE AGAIN UNDERSTAND COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

To gain knowledge of the perceived knowledge and skills of both faculty and students, the diversity committee distributed a short survey asking both groups to rate their knowledge about, and skills working with, 10 different groups (e.g., Latino/a Americans, persons with physical disabilities, gay men/lesbians/bisexuals). Students had recently reported receiving little knowledge about diverse groups other than African Americans in their courses, so a number of different groups were included on the survey in an effort to get an accurate picture of knowledge and skills. This was another effort to assess the faculty's commitment to change. Both faculty and students identified areas that could be strengthened. In addition, faculty recognized that increasing their knowledge about diverse groups would benefit them personally as well as the content of the courses they taught.

However, at this juncture, some faculty questioned the wisdom of spending time creating and analyzing a survey instead of spending an equal amount of time enriching faculty knowledge on issues of diversity. A faculty member who questioned the wisdom of conducting a survey commented,

> If I could tally up all the hours I spent developing this survey, administering it, focus groups, all the meetings that I have gone to over the years . . . hundreds of hours . . . I could do something with depth that would really create, for me, more expertise on a specific area.

Others believed that much was gained from the discussions that occurred in the process of developing the survey and interpreting the results. This difference of opinion suggests that the collective change commitment (identified as a key requirement for change by Weiner) was not strong enough among the faculty to result in major changes to the organizational culture.

To the diversity committee, it seemed apparent that the faculty wanted educational opportunities to increase their knowledge about diverse groups as a starting point, which did not require a major change effort. Subsequently, the committee planned a monthly educational seminar on diversity issues for faculty that was incorporated into the regular monthly meeting day, ensuring that all faculty would be able to attend. Also during this time, a comprehensive review of the curriculum was undertaken to determine the extent of diversity content in all required courses. Faculty were encouraged to include content on diverse groups in all of their courses by selecting readings, for example, that addressed course content in the context of a diverse group that could be used to begin a discussion.

WITHOUT CHANGE COMMITMENT: A TIME OF MAINTENANCE

As a next step, members of the diversity committee developed a cultural competence model for formally and systematically incorporating learning about diverse groups into the curriculum. This model was developed after a review of the literature suggested many strategies for infusing diversity content into a curriculum (e.g., Aponte, 1995; Cross, 1996; Green, 1998; Imbrogno, 1996; Torres & Jones, 1997) but provided few formal models (Manoleas, 1994). Key components of this model included (1) integration of immersion experiences for faculty and student into course content to provide an affective component that encourages going beyond being a tourist in a different culture, (2) development (by faculty) of formal networking and mentoring relationships with individuals from diverse groups to increase opportunities for personal connections and classroom collaborations, (3) systematic integration of content into core courses on a focal group identified by the faculty each year to ensure students receive a depth of information about at least two specific groups while in the program, and (4) implementation of a formal evaluation plan to monitor effectiveness. In addition, this model called for students to create a personal plan in their first semester that would guide the development of their cultural competence while in the program. Their plan would identify specific diverse groups they were most interested in developing cultural competence with and identify activities, knowledge, and skills they would develop over the course of their program. All of these model components required significant changes to the curriculum and some teaching strategies on the part of the faculty.

Upon examining this model, the faculty determined that cultural competence was addressed well enough by the school using existing methods and such a formal change, as required by the cultural competence model, was not needed. When reflecting about the model, a number of faculty recalled that at the time the model was introduced, the school had just recently been commended at the collegiate level for their efforts in promoting diversity within the school environment and within the curriculum, suggesting that such a formal mechanism was not necessary. However, there was a consensus among the faculty that continued attention to cultural competence was warranted and the diversity committee would remain charged with monitoring and facilitating continued development. This clearly is another example of the importance of Weiner's change commitment to the process of organizational change; without any evidence of a need for change, the organization is not likely to make changes.

To help determine the best strategy for continuing the cultural competence plan, the following year the diversity committee decided to once again survey the faculty about their current needs and interests. Again, however, some faculty questioned needing to conduct yet another survey to move forward. Responses indicated that faculty were most willing to continue regularly scheduled educational presentations and identified a number of diverse groups and topics to be covered in future seminars. There was a consensus that each seminar should provide information about one of the identified groups, pedagogical methods relevant to teaching about the group or to persons in this group (e.g., international students), and time for discussion. Every faculty member agreed to assume some responsibility for developing at least one of the presentations throughout the following year. This shared responsibility allowed individual faculty members to tailor a presentation that would answer some of his or her individual interests and introduce campus or community resources relevant to the topic.

There was also a commitment to institutionalizing various immersion experiences into a standardized course offering. A subcommittee of the diversity committee met to establish curriculum

requirements for students to receive course credit for immersion/travel study courses. This provided a structure for all immersion learning courses that ensured consistent academic content applicable to any national or international destination and facilitates the development of new opportunities. The school currently offers both domestic and international immersion/service learning trips on a regular schedule and continues to explore additional potential sites. Although immersion learning is recognized as being important by the faculty, it remains an ongoing discussion about the best ways to develop these opportunities. One faculty member observed, "immersion learning is a very small thing, and it does not have a very acknowledged position in the curriculum" compared to some schools of social work. Others commented on the competing interests of students to experience an international trip, which offers an opportunity to get out of the state and broaden one's perspective about the importance of global social work policy and practice, with local immersion opportunities that potentially connect students with future clients. For example, one faculty member noted that "we could be doing things right here [in our state], and make the point to our students that it is right here and it's relevant" because these are future clients. Students who have participated in these activities clearly articulate the role they have played in the development of their cultural awareness and competence. For example, "India opened my eyes. The experiences I had there allowed me to appreciate everything I have. Seeing the stigma of disability, orphan children, and gypsy villages really leaves an impression of how different a world can be from our own." And another example:

> It [this trip] solidified my commitment to the service of others. There are so many people who are in need and while it is impossible to help everyone it is so doable to help someone. I was impressed by the resilience, graciousness, and kindness of individuals who by some standards have so little . . . I will carry this experience with me always.

However, even given all of the positives related to immersion experiences, priorities for future immersion learning opportunities remain under discussion because of the time and energy required of faculty for their development and conduct. Although these activities addressed the strengthening of cultural competence within the school, they were not significant changes to structures within the school and did not require a major effort for individual faculty members.

COMMITMENT TO CHANGE: SPREADING CULTURAL COMPETENCE ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY

The most recent step in the school's cultural competence journey came about as an alternative project for CSWE reaffirmation. The school developed and implemented two certificate programs in cultural competence available to students across the university. At the undergraduate level, a critical cultural competence certificate requires students to not only learn about diverse groups but also to critically reflect on their own experience and growth in cultural competence. The certificate is completed with enrollment in a foundation and capstone course, 9 hours of elective credits selected from an approved list of diversity and/or culture-specific courses, and a three-credit immersion or service learning course dedicated to skill development with diverse populations. The emphasis on immersion/service learning stems from empirical research, focused primarily on undergraduates, demonstrating that these types of learning can significantly enhance academic

development, life skills, and a sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Rosner-Salazar, 2003). Enrollment for this certificate has tripled in the first three years it has been offered.

A graduate certificate, initially cosponsored with the college of education and now administered by the graduate college of the university, is open to any graduate student across campus. Similarly, this certificate also requires completion of a foundation and capstone course, an immersion or service learning course, and graduate-level electives. This certificate is also available to professionals working in their respective fields who wish to enhance their knowledge and skills in this area.

The development of these certificate programs was designed, in part, to influence broader change within the university. In addition to the benefits to individual students, as other academic and nonacademic units of the university work together with the school of social work on these certificates, increased cultural competence and an appreciation for diversity on campus is promoted. For its part, the university recently (in 2011) committed to joining the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), an international nonprofit leadership development network dedicated to the elimination of racism and other forms of oppression. Many of the social work faculty and some of the current students have taken part in training offered by this program to enhance their awareness of diversity and oppression in society. Beginning in fall 2013 all entering MSW students complete a one-day NCBI training as part of their orientation. The school plans to phase in this requirement for all entering undergraduate students in the next few years.

CHALLENGES ALONG THE JOURNEY

The journey that the school of social work began almost two decades ago continues today with no end in sight. That age-old question, "Aren't we there yet?" can only be answered "no." Although many aspects of academia have a clear beginning and completion point (semesters, research projects, exams graded), the journey toward cultural competence has no end in sight. Collectively, the faculty and students feel good about what progress has been made, but frustrations remain about how to define the journey and increases with the realization that the work is never really done.

One faculty member described one of the largest challenges in this regard as "we are always at the beginning, we are always bringing people along, bringing people in, we are always assessing." This sense of always needing to "bring people along" has led to more maintenance-level activities being planned and implemented. The activities continue to evolve but do not require the change commitment or change efficacy that is needed for a cultural change within the organization. Another faculty member noted that because the journey, in itself, is elusive, it is hard to develop an "elevator speech" about the whole concept of cultural competence and its importance to the school that can be used when talking with colleagues outside the school. As a result, it is sometimes hard to discuss this core commitment and its implications for policies and practices within the school.

Other challenges come from the ongoing nature of the work that is required and the time that it takes to do it well with little acknowledgment of that effort within the academy. Serving on the school's diversity committee was a requirement for some faculty until fairly recently, but even now if one chooses to be involved because of a personal interest, faculty (and students) must choose among competing interests and any number of expectations. One faculty member

recently acknowledged, "there is absolutely no reward structure in the academy [for serving on this committee], I don't benefit in anyway in terms of promotion." The need to balance a commitment to strengthening cultural competence within the school with the rigor of academic work continues to be a challenge for many faculty.

Another challenge faculty face when including content on cultural diversity and skill development in their courses is that there are few existing mechanisms to coordinate among faculty what content or strategies they are using in their courses. This is true within each of the school's sites (main campus and three distance education centers) as well as between them when sharing online instruction. At the same time, faculty feel strongly that they should have academic freedom to select and present content as they deem appropriate to their courses and do not always feel comfortable with imposed structures or guidelines. Consequently, there can be duplication in content or a disconnect in what is provided in one course from the next and across distance education centers. For example, faculty who teach the Discrimination Oppression and Diversity (DOD) course reportedly hear from students that the framework of cultural competence presented in that course is not necessarily the same one presented or followed in other courses. As a result, some students have questioned the focus of the school, and others have struggled with how to integrate the different perspectives presented across the program. Without a way to coordinate content, one faculty member commented that she felt as though she had "one shot to cram a lot of stuff in, [because I was not] certain that it was anywhere else in the curriculum."

Within the school, a focus on cultural competence is often woven into formal and informal discussions among faculty and naturally integrated into agenda items at faculty meetings or other committee work. It is a challenge, however, to ensure that all adjunct instructors for the school (who also teach some required courses and many electives) receive the same type of message over time. An equally important part of that conversation is to hear from those instructors (typically, practitioners in the field) about their experiences with diverse clients that enrich the school's understanding of diversity in the community. Providing a forum for this conversation is another scheduling challenge.

A final challenge encountered by the school is growing too comfortable with the process and progress that has been made. For example, educational seminars have continued for a number of years, and it is convenient to maintain this same format. Just because they are offered, however, does not ensure that they are actually meeting the needs of the faculty (or students) in terms of knowledge and skill building and pedagogical connections. Similarly, students complete an exit survey at the time of graduation, which asks about their perceptions of the school being culturally sensitive and responsive. Overall, on average, these items are scored high (*very good* or *excellent*), suggesting that there is little need for changes. However, it is not possible to analyze these data to determine if students of color or those from other marginalized groups agree with this rating. Anecdotal conversations with the authors suggest that, at a minimum, some students of color do not typically share those same positive perceptions. As a result, the school is once again discussing strategies to conduct a more comprehensive assessment.

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES

Although most of the strategies of the cultural competence journey were focused on faculty, some institutional strategies were also implemented to ensure that structures within the school

represented its commitment to diversity and inclusion. These visual reminders serve as a reflection of the school's culture and environment to anyone entering the building or reviewing its materials. For example, changes to publicity materials, the school's website, and language in student policies were made to specifically identify and promote the culture of diversity and inclusion that the school embraces. At the time of acceptance into the school, students are asked to sign a statement indicating that they have read and understand a statement on the school's culture respecting diversity and are willing to abide by it. By school policy, every course outline includes guidelines for discussions to remind faculty and students of the importance of differences and respectful ways to acknowledge and talk about them in the classroom setting. A continued focus on diversity efforts is also found in the school's strategic plan.

An environment that is respectful of diversity is also visually evident walking through the halls of the school. Most faculty office doors display a "safe zone" placard indicating completion of a voluntary workshop focused on GLBT individuals and a commitment to providing an environment in which every student and university employee is free to thrive in a community that is based on respect and dignity. On student bulletin boards, a faculty member is clearly identified as a "diversity support coordinator" that is available to talk with any student about perceptions or incidents of discrimination, or to freely discuss one's journey toward cultural competence outside of the classroom setting.

When reviewing this school's cultural competence journey, it is clear to see that when organizational changes did occur, the two key requirements identified by Weiner (2009), commitment change and commitment efficacy, were very evident Both internal and external factors influenced these requirements; at times it was faculty identifying a need, and at others it was an outside body (e.g., CSWE) that gave impetus to the change commitment. When no specific need was identified, there was little commitment to complete the work necessary for a major change and they did not occur. Other schools of social work or organizations need to be cognizant of these requirements and assess their school climate.

The literature suggests that each school of social work has the option of incorporating cultural competence content into its curriculum either at the discretion of each faculty member or in a more systematic manner. This case study identifies some of the advantages and challenges of using a systematic process that keeps the relevance and importance of preparing students for culturally competent practice central in the academic environment. The school found it most effective to institutionalize a mechanism, the diversity committee, for monitoring the organizational climate and cultural competence of the faculty and students and for leading the discussion on additional strategies. As faculty integrated content on diverse groups into their courses, the formal and informal opportunities to discuss related issues, personal and community attitudes, and values related to these populations increased. Although a course focused on diversity easily lends itself to readings and discussions about diverse populations, faculty realized that even readings for a research course can strategically include studies that focus on a sample from a diverse population.

It is also critical to assess the culture of the organization to develop effective strategies that will also be feasible. Given the differences in governance structures and the interests of students and faculty, schools of social work might achieve the same or similar goal using strategies different from those described here. Oftentimes, "homework" is required to understand the culture of the organization not only to identify possible strategies but also to successfully present them. For example, a plan presented by a more senior faculty member or administrator might be more likely

to be well received than if a junior faculty member presented the same plan. As found in this case study, the process of assessment, in itself, can become tedious and seemingly overshadow the goal of trying to understand the best steps to move forward—the dangers of a journey that has no clear end.

Schools wanting to develop a plan for institutional changes should be prepared to draw on the expertise of others in the formation of that plan. Reviewing the literature for suggestions and possible models and using any university resources available increase the likelihood that any plan proposed will fit the needs of the department. For this school of social work, it was advantageous to seek an outside expert to begin the discussion and to propose strategies. Pursuing opportunities to include all members of the university community in a cultural competence journey, such as inviting all students to complete a certificate in critical cultural competence and service learning projects, is yet another way to promote the social work values of social justice and cultural competence. This school of social work is fortunate to be within a university that appreciates and supports diversity and advancing cultural competence for all students and that welcomed the addition of certificates in cultural competence. Without this level of support, social work administrators and faculty would need to be prepared to make a concerted effort to convince administrators of the importance of diversity training and certificate programs, for example, prior to getting their approval.

CONCLUSION

Looking back, it is clear that even though this school of social work has worked on cultural competence as an organization for a long time, we have not yet arrived at that elusive goal. At times, faculty still ask, "Are we there yet?" clearly understanding that the answer is "no." For this reason it is an inherent necessity to understand cultural competence as a journey that requires ongoing assessment, reflection, and modification with no theoretical end in sight. It is helpful to review the journey from the perspective of an organizational change model to understand what strategies were most effective, the importance of the organization being ready for change, and to identify the next steps for moving forward.

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