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## **Implementing Multicultural Social Justice Strategies in Counselor Education Training Programs**

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### **Abstract**

*This article is based on the presentation on implementing multicultural social justice leadership strategies in counselor education programs. The George Mason University's Counseling and Development Program was used as an example to illustrate how to successfully infuse multicultural social justice values into an entire graduate counselor training program. The article is written from two perspectives: 1) faculty's discussion on the development and establishment of a multicultural social justice counseling program, and 2) current and past students' viewpoints of the impact of the multicultural social justice training program on their personal and professional lives. Recommendations are also suggested to assist counseling and psychology programs on the implementation of multicultural social justice leadership strategies.*

**Keywords:** social justice, multicultural, psychology training, counselor education, counselor training

Within the past two decades social justice and multicultural initiatives have been at the forefront of the counseling and psychology professions. Given the rapid diversification of our society, it has become increasingly important for counselors and psychologists to become competent in multicultural and social justice competencies (Helms, 2003; Vera & Speight, 2003; Zalaquett, Foley, Tillotson, Dinsmore, & Hof, 2008; Toporek & Vaughn, 2010). Counselors and psychologists are uniquely positioned to address social justice issues based on the profession's emphasis on prevention, strength based approaches, and multiculturalism (Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006). Despite this philosophy and growing need to accommodate the increasing diversity in our society, most counselor education programs continue to use traditional counselor training models that are based on European American norms (Zalaquett et al., 2008).

The intent of this article is to present a summary of a national conference presentation that focused on the implementation of multiculturalism and social justice values in counselor education training programs. The presentation discussed how to infuse multiculturalism and social justice throughout a counselor education program curriculum. The Counseling and Development Program (C&D) at George Mason University (GMU) was used as an example for the successful implementation of multiculturalism and social justice throughout the entire program curriculum and embed these concepts as the core program mission. To discuss how to effectively implement these values into a counselor education training program, presenters included both faculty and current and past students. The faculty's presentation included an overview of the development of the programs mission, how multicultural and social justice were infused into the entire curriculum, strategies for faculty and student recruitment and retention, mentoring of faculty and students, and fostering a racially and ethnically diverse faculty and student representation.

While faculty presentations focused on the development, successes, and challenges of developing a multicultural social justice-oriented program the presentation by the current and past students focused on the impact of multicultural social justice counselor education training on their personal and professional lives. Given the time limitation of the workshop and to ensure that there was ample opportunity for a dialogue with the audience, the career counseling course was highlighted as a case example of how multicultural social justice issues are infused in a counselor education course.

The article will begin with an overview of the GMU's C&D program that includes faculty perspectives on how social justice and multiculturalism were infused into the C&D counseling program. Next, a discussion on the career counseling course will be presented, followed by reflections from faculty and current and past students' perspectives of the program. Finally, specific recommendations will be presented on how counseling and psychology programs can infuse social justice and multiculturalism as a central program mission and as a major component of the program that is developed throughout the course curriculum.

## **Overview of the Implementation of Multicultural Social Justice in Counseling and Psychology Programs**

### **The Counseling and Development Program at GMU**

This section will provide a brief overview about the development of the GMU C&D program. A more detailed discussion of the program can be found in Bemak and Chung (2007) and Talleyrand, Chung, and Bemak (2006). The GMU C&D program trains master's and doctoral level students to become leaders in the counseling field by developing competencies in the areas of multiculturalism, social justice, advocacy, and global mindedness. To successfully achieve true understanding and implementation of multicultural social justice issues in the C&D program a series of intensive faculty retreats were held over a two-year period. These retreats consisted of both full day retreats and overnight retreats. The purpose of the retreats was four-fold: 1) to explore and assess faculty's views and definitions of multicultural social justice, 2) to establish faculty consensus regarding the definition of multicultural social justice, 3) using this consensual definition to create a mission statement that embraces multicultural social justice as the core value of the program, and 4) to examine how to implement these values into the entire graduate training curriculum.

As a result of this process a mission statement was developed based on Davis's (1996) definition of social justice: "a basic value and desired goal in democratic societies and include equitable and fair access to societal institutions, laws, resources [and] opportunities, without arbitrary limitations based on observed, or interpretation of, differences in age, color, culture, physical or mental disability, education, gender, income, language, national origin, race, religion, or sexual orientation" (p. 1). This earlier mission statement was expanded to incorporate later developments in defining social justice such as Goodman's et al. (2004) inclusion of "scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination" (p.795). The C&D mission statement created included five key components: Social Justice, Multiculturalism, Internationalism, Advocacy and Leadership and consisted of the following:

The Counseling and Development Program is committed to preparing counselors who promote the social, psychological, physical, and spiritual health of individuals, families, communities, and organizations in order to contribute to the advancement of global well being. The program strives for national and international excellence in implementing a counseling perspective which provides a foundation in basic counseling skills and focuses on social justice, multiculturalism, international, advocacy and leadership. It is our belief that a global perspective on development across the life span, and an understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice are integral to the preparation of professional counselors, requiring that professional counselors are prepared to assume leadership roles, be proactive change agents and become advocates for social, economic and political justice. The program is committed to accomplish this mission by working through interdisciplinary teams as well as promote the interconnectedness of teaching, research, service and professional practice. Through this mission faculty will facilitate a continued tradition of international, national and

regional leadership through the development of collaborative partnerships and projects, research, publications, presentations, consultation, and training.

Coincidentally during the time that the C&D Program was revamping the program the College of Education and Human Development, where the C&D program is housed, was also undergoing a re-examination of the College's core values. One of the C&D senior faculty (second author) was on the College committee that was involved in an examination of core values and strongly influenced the College to adopt social justice as a core value. Given that social justice is a core value of the College, the C&D program's mission was fully endorsed and supported by the Deans. Furthermore, the first two authors had a hiring agreement with the Deans that with a goal to update and revamp the C&D program along the lines of multicultural social justice work. Given the goal to infuse the mission statement throughout the entire program curriculum, 98% of the course curriculum was redesigned.

Numerous courses required modification in both course content and assignments. For example, the Diagnoses course was redesigned to incorporate cross-cultural biases and misdiagnosis, while the Research class was revamped to use examples of research focused on cultural diversity, social justice, and work with marginalized populations. This required usage of content within the counseling and psychology fields, as well as, materials that came from public health, multicultural education, sociology, social work, anthropology, etc., consistent with the call in professional psychology to work across disciplines (Bemak, 1998; Dale, 2008; Helms, 2003; Toporek & McNally, 2006). New and unique courses were also added as core program requirements such as Counseling and Social Justice (a required course for all students that is in addition to the Multicultural Counseling course), and Counseling Children and Adolescents (for school counseling track students). The overhaul of the curriculum resulted in the implementation of multicultural social justice issues throughout the entire program from the beginning Foundations in Counseling class to the Practicum and Internship courses. For example, a text used in the Foundations of Counseling class is the *Journeys to Professional Excellence* book (Coyne & Bemak, 2005) which tells the stories of 17 leaders in the field of counseling and psychology emphasizing a multicultural social justice perspective. It is important to note that the intensive faculty retreats and consensual commitment to the new mission of multicultural social justice counseling built a solid foundation for collaboration and dedication to redeveloping the entire program along these lines.

Consistent with the multicultural and social justice mission statement, recruitment of Faculty and Students of Color also began. Previously the program had an all White faculty including both full time and part time professors and a 98% White student body despite the university being located just outside of Washington D.C. in one of the most culturally diverse geographic regions in the country. The recruitment of faculty who were committed to the new mission resulted in a transformation to 50% Faculty of Color (three out of six full-time faculty) from the previously all White faculty. Similarly, given the growing reputation of the program as one committed to multicultural social justice and the ethnic and racial diversity of faculty the student population changed from 98% (over 200) White students to over 35% (70 plus) Students of Color on the masters level and 90% Students of Color on the doctoral level.

In addition to Students of Color applying to the program in increasing numbers based on the changing ethnic and racial composition of faculty, the visibility of faculty doing work focused on multicultural social justice issues, and faculty and program commitment to the new mission

statement, the change in the student population was also influenced in the admissions policy changes that were made by the new faculty. Faculty determined that the prior admissions procedures were based on Western standard criteria that relied heavily on test scores and grade point averages (GPA's). Given that faculty were knowledgeable about test biases for some groups when using Western traditional criteria, the admissions procedure evolved into a more comprehensive approach that included not only test scores and GPA, but also evaluating various aspects of the applicants' personal, social, educational, and work experiences, as well as, their perspectives and attitudes towards multicultural social justice (Talleyrand et al, 2006). Thus, a student with a low GPA or test scores who had a record of leadership and accomplishment in undertaking social justice work with diverse populations would be considered as a potentially strong applicant rather than automatically be rejected based on the GPA or test scores. Faculty agreed that it was unfair to admit any student who they did not believe could succeed at the graduate level and therefore maintained a clear mandate not to admit any students who may fail in the program regardless of their ethnic or racial background. This required faculty to carefully scrutinize every student's potential for success in the program.

The admissions process in the C&D program is rigorous. Typically, there are three times as many applicants as admitted students to the program. Students' written application materials are thoroughly screened with less than 2/3 of the applicants selected for group interviews. The group interviews are conducted with two faculty in order to garner two opinions. The interviews clearly define the program mission on multicultural social justice and encourage students not interested in this focus to consider applying to other programs. During the interview a series of challenging questions related to applicants' commitment to the mission are asked, followed by a writing sample with a provocative social justice question. Writing sample topics have included responses on issues of immigration, racism, oppression, and LGBT issues to name a few. The interview process helps with the selection of students who are committed and open to the multicultural social justice mission, so that students from top universities in the world with outstanding grade point averages are frequently rejected. Interestingly every student in the program, years later, remembers who interviewed them and the exact questions they were asked during the interview, reflecting the rigor of the interview and elicitation of multicultural social justice values during the interview process.

It is important to note that admission into the program is only the first step in changing the demographics of a program. The retention of Students of Color was also critical to faculty. It should be noted that the graduation rate in the program is approximately 98% based on a highly selective and rigorous selection process coupled with retention and support for students. The intent of the program is to support every student to graduate. In addition, students who enroll in the program clearly understand from the interview point on that they are entering a program with a very specific mission and focus, which has a tremendous impact on retention.

Another aspect of retention is that students are presented throughout the program with information and materials with which they can identify. Both course materials and extracurricular activities are not foreign to them, but rather based on the cultural, ethnic, and racial populations that many of the students identify with, many of which are oftentimes ignored in traditional non-multicultural social justice programs. In contrast, in the GMU C&D program these groups are addressed in a proactive manner. For example, in addition to their required coursework, students engage in community-driven social justice projects outside of the classroom that focus on providing services to marginalized populations. These projects are

strongly encouraged and supported by the faculty and are typify the kinds of activities and experiences that have drawn students to the counseling field in the first place. This is complemented by faculty who also were drawn to the program because of the program mission and the implementation of multicultural social justice values. Senior faculty in the program have provided culturally responsive mentoring of junior faculty and all faculty in the program have offered culturally responsive mentoring to Students of Color taking into account mentoring styles and preferences of different cultural groups (Chung, Bemak, & Talleyrand, 2007).

As a result of the training and similar to faculty students have multiple professional identities. Students are associated with numerous general professional organizations such as the American Counseling Association or the American Psychological Association and also join divisions within each organization such as the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development or Counselors for Social Justice. Faculty and student also identify with specific ethnic and racial counseling and psychological organizations such as the Asian American Psychological Association, the Association of Black Psychologists and the National Latina/o Psychological Association.

As mentioned above students are screened during the admissions interviews and oriented to the C&D program mission beginning in their first course, Foundations of Counseling through in-depth discussions and assignments. It is clear to students from the onset that if they are not in agreement with the C&D mission then the GMU program would not be a good fit for their training. Even so, there have been a few situations where students “think” they are aligned with the C&D mission without fully understanding what it entails to be a multicultural social justice counselor. Subsequently students undergo an intensive in-depth self-reflection and personal transformation related to social justice and cultural diversity throughout the program, which on occasion results in a student leaving the program. To ensure that there are guidelines for social justice multicultural training, the second author developed a set of professional dispositions specifically aligned with the C&D mission. The professional dispositions include: commitment to social justice, multiculturalism and diversity, demonstrate openness and willingness to learn, ability to receive and reflect on constructive criticism, and acceptance of personal responsibility. For more detail of the C&D professional disposition see <http://www.gse.gmu/programs/counseling/resources>.

### **Walking the Talk**

Another reason for successful recruitment and retention of both faculty and students is that the program is committed to not just talking about multicultural social justice issues in class but also applying what has been taught in the classroom in the field. The Classroom Without Walls approach (Bemak & Chung, in press) emphasizes the hands-on out of the classroom experiences for students. For example, the Counselors Without Borders (CWB) is an organization founded by one of the faculty at GMU. CWB emphasized multicultural social justice work with disenfranchised and underserved populations in post-disaster situations. The CWB has provided opportunities for advanced level graduate students to work alongside faculty in post-disaster situations, such as, in the Mississippi Gulf coast three months after Hurricane Katrina, and in San Diego after the wildfires to work with Native American and low income migrant populations that were affected by the fires. More recently CWB was invited to bring a team to Haiti to provide counseling training and to do post-disaster counseling with survivors following the January 2010 earthquake. Students have been active within CWB and regard the

organization as an extension of the multicultural social justice mission in the C&D program and also as an example of how there is a responsibility and commitment to multicultural social justice work.

In addition, some of the courses, such as, Counseling and Social Justice require students to work in partnership on a collaborative project with regional community agencies which service disenfranchised populations. For example, one class project involved raising awareness and developing an educational community program on the challenges and skills of recently arrived immigrants and refugees. The section below which discusses the Career and Educational Counseling class will provide more specific examples of classroom applications in the field.

In line with the program mission, faculty research is based on the precepts of multicultural social justice counseling and conducted both nationally and internationally. In addition, there are periodic Town Hall meetings with faculty and students with an aim to promote a platform for student feedback, input, and ideas about how to improve the quality of the C&D program. By contributing their ideas students feel greater participation and ownership in the program. Moreover, the implementation of multicultural social justice values are evident in the GMU's C&D program's chapter of Chi Sigma Iota (the international counseling student honor society) which hosts numerous multicultural social justice events, such as monthly multicultural dinners, collecting food and clothing for the homeless, collecting items for the troops to participating in annual reclaim the night, breast cancer and suicide prevention walks, and adopting social justice counseling projects in the community.

### **Career Counseling Using a Social Justice Framework**

This section provides a discussion of the implementation of multicultural social justice issues using the Career and Educational Counseling course as a case example. This course was specifically highlighted given the roots of social justice in counseling originated with Frank Parson's advocacy work with underserved populations in regards to vocational counseling. In the early 1900's the vocational movement grew out of Frank Parson's efforts to provide employment services to underrepresented and underserved immigrants, thereby impacting the field on a systemic level. However, the career counseling field soon evolved to reflect more dominant White cultural values regarding work including an emphasis on autonomy and individualism, of work being central in people's lives, the notion that individuals have equal access to opportunities, that wealth is a core value for everyone, and that the career development process is linear and rational (Niles & Bowsby, 2009). Today's presence of an increasingly diverse multiethnic, multiracial and multilingual population in the U.S. has been and will continue to impact our labor force, thereby increasing the critical need for counselors to provide culturally relevant career counseling services (Blustein, 2006; Flores & Heppner, 2002). The rapidly changing demographics, the widening gap between the upper and lower socioeconomic classes, and our current global economy underscore the need to return to the career counseling field's roots including understanding how all clients make meaning of work based on their contextual experiences rather than solely on individual talents and personality expression (Blustein, 2006).

Given the dramatic changes in the cultural, ethnic and racial demographics, the C&D program's focus is on how to train future counselors to provide effective multicultural social justice competent career counseling services. The C&D program therefore has incorporated several

innovative activities into the Career and Educational Counseling course, which challenge students to think outside of the many assumptions embedded in traditional career counseling theories and practice. Although students in the course are still exposed to traditional career counseling theories and assessment (e.g., Super, Holland), they are also exposed to newer theories/perspectives (e.g., Blustein's Psychology of Work, Narrative/Constructivist Theories, Relational Theories, and Ecological career counseling approaches) that focus on the career development process through a more inclusive lens. This includes examining the barriers clients face based on their identification with oppressed demographic groups; the many systems involved in the career development process; and the fact that choice is not always a part of an individual's/group's career decision making process.

In this course, students also are challenged to assess their own biases and stereotypes regarding the world of work. For example, early on in the semester students engage in an in-depth group processing exercise focused on assessing students' beliefs regarding what "types" of people occupy particular positions in the workforce. Students are asked to write down the racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic status characteristics that first come to their minds when various occupations are listed (e.g., CEO's, sanitation workers, etc.). By doing this exercise, students become increasingly aware of their personal values and cultural beliefs regarding workers' demographic characteristics and are asked to consider this information and how it relates to the counseling process. In addition, students learn about non-traditional and creative forms of career assessment (e.g., career genograms, career collages, guided imagery) since traditional career assessments have been normed primarily on White samples and do not always reflect the experiences of diverse groups (Flores & Heppner, 2002). Use of role plays have also been effective, particularly by including "real life" client characters who are dealing with current societal problems (e.g., the recent BP oil spill effects in New Orleans, high school students' transition to the world of work, racist and ethnic group discrimination for many People of Color seeking employment or in the workplace).

Finally, the inclusion of a semester-long service learning project, because of its emphasis on community learning, has been most influential in encouraging students' passion for bringing about social change in the world of work. Students in the Career and Educational Counseling class have been engaged in service learning experiences that allow them to use their career counseling skills and advocate for clients in the community. Specifically, these experiences have consisted of groups of three to five students providing traditional and non-traditional methods of career assessment and planning to a wide array of clients in both community and school settings. Students have collaborated with various school and community agencies servicing the homeless, alternative high school students, substance-abusing mothers, foster children, and previously incarcerated individuals to develop brief culturally appropriate career interventions that address client needs at each site. Career counseling activities have included resume writing skills; addressing conflict at work; interviewing techniques and role plays; interest, values, and skills assessment; finding and keeping a job; college planning and self-esteem building to name a few. Students are also responsible for getting feedback from clients and site supervisors regarding the counseling experiences they have provided, which allows the clients to feel like they are part of the learning process. Responses from clients and site supervisors have been overwhelmingly positive with several clients indicating their desire to receive additional services of this kind.



## **Reflections**

This section will include reflections about the C&D program from a faculty and a current and past student's perspectives. The reflections are written intentionally in the first person.

### **Faculty of Color Recruitment: One Faculty's Story**

The following is the personal story of one Faculty of Color who made a decision to take a position in the C&D Program at GMU.

My desire to pursue a faculty position at GMU was driven by the C&D program's strong emphasis on multiculturalism, social justice, leadership and advocacy. I still remember one of my internship supervisors showing me the position announcement and how fascinated I was by the program's innovative mission statement. I interviewed with the program faculty in 2001 with mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension – were they willing to “walk the talk?” It had been my experience that many counseling and psychology programs espouse social justice and multiculturalism as core program values, yet offer no more than a stand-alone course on multicultural counseling. In addition, I was looking for an environment that would support my focus on multicultural research rather than dismiss culture as a “fuzzy” construct. I was pleasantly surprised to witness that the GMU C&D faculty were truly dedicated to working collaboratively with junior faculty members to assume leadership roles in the field and to become advocates for social, economic, and political justice. In fact, during my first semester in the program I was invited to collaborate on a research study focusing on multicultural perspectives on mentoring. I was also encouraged to develop an elective course focused on multicultural perspectives of eating disorder – something that I had been passionate about studying throughout my doctoral training since this perspective seemed to be lacking in the eating disorders literature. What has been most meaningful throughout my journey has been the genuine faculty reflections and mentoring that have occurred that included time spent during faculty meetings, retreats, and informal gatherings processing what social justice means to each of us on a personal and professional level and how social justice values can be implemented into our coursework and professional identity. This time has been invaluable in better shaping my own views as well as collectively coming to consensus about these key concepts. It has given me a new outlook on what it means to be a counselor educator. Indeed, I feel that now I have learned how to “walk the talk” and can pass this philosophy down to the next generation of counselors.

### **A Current Student's Multicultural Social Justice Journey**

During the presentation, I discussed my personal journey as a student in the C&D at GMU. I shared how the program has changed my life and made me much more aware of social justice and the need for advocacy. My intentions when entering the program at GMU were not focused on becoming culturally competent, but to solely become a school counselor. My goal really wasn't to become a strong advocate or even to go through much self-reflection. The program took me in and through continuous course work relating to oppression, social justice, multiculturalism, and advocacy, I become much more than just a school counselor.

In the presentation, I discussed my journey of becoming self aware of my own race and explained what white privilege meant to me. I had never been forced to consider this idea

before coming to GMU. For the first time, I realized I was part of a race with a given privilege and it was going to become my responsibility to figure out how to use that privilege to speak out for those oppressed. During this journey, I confronted my family, social groups, and co-workers on the issue of race. My journey, for a moment, was extremely lonely as many didn't want to hear me or my thoughts on awareness. I continued to "plant seeds" as my professor, Dr. Chung, instructed and believed that through this courage I had, those close to me would start to listen. It became my own personal mission to help others, take off their blinders to social injustices that were occurring daily.

I still want to be a school counselor; however, my goal in that role has completely changed from when I entered into the program. My mission will reflect change, awareness, advocacy, multiculturalism, and social justice when working with students in the school system. My goal, when presenting, was to let those attending the workshop hear a story of personal growth made during the multicultural program that GMU is offering to its students.

The feedback received after presenting was empowering. There were students, professors, and professional counselors in attendance and all were interested in how such program could come to be. I was asked for my email address by a professor from the Midwest who was hopeful that she would be able to inject such change in her own university. It was amazing to see my personal journey touching the lives of others who were much further along in their professional career than I.

To create such a program, I believe the first step would be to create a support system of faculty and students. Building a team that is on board with making change happen and initially, changing an entire program, is important. Dr. Talleyrand stated during the presentation about making sure you build a staff that can walk the walk of what they state they are trying to do with their program.

There were many barriers that I faced personally when going through this program. The first barrier was that of my own willingness to speak up and admit to my own personal biases. Once I had gone through the process of realizing my own stereotypes and personal history with race and family values, I then had to hurdle my own resistance to speak up. My family and friends were resistant at first to my new self-awareness, but would eventually begin to hear me. My co-workers and administrators were very resistant to the idea of making change happen. I often spoke up to my principal at my current school where I am a teacher and would feel unsupported due to his resistance to change. The key for me is to know these barriers will always be there in every field I'm in, yet how I approach them and work through them is what seems most important.

A big part of the process for me became understanding the importance of group process. When I took the Multicultural course at GMU, the class became a counseling session for me. In the Social Justice class, Dr. Chung would probe and inject thought into class discussions and raise our attention to facts and statistics occurring today that showed social injustices and issues of oppression in society. Discussions between students were encouraged and we worked through the process together. Assignments that required thinking of ways to speak up or advocate for social justice were also helpful in making students aware of ways they can make change happen. Professors offered role-plays for students that required students to take on the role and then act out the part for a character who was completely opposite of themselves.

Emotionally connected assignments created a sense of passion for why we were here together in this program.

The experience of presenting to colleagues was fulfilling. I would look ahead to next year with the hopes of providing syllabi, text lists, and assignments details to provide to those interested in borrowing ideas to inject in their own counseling programs.

### **A Graduate's Multicultural Social Justice Journey**

In my presentation, I spoke about my growth throughout my time in the counseling program at GMU. I attribute that growth to the fact that the program engrains the values of social justice and multiculturalism into each of the courses from beginning to end. Coming into the program, I did not have a strong understanding of what it meant to be a social justice multiculturally competent counselor. Due to my lack of understanding and awareness, I was very closed and somewhat resistant during the first stages of the program. I expected that the curriculum would simply teach me the techniques and theories I needed to be a successful counselor. With each course, my belief system was challenged and I began to step outside of my comfort zone. By the end of my first semester I realized that I was about to embark on a journey of a lifetime.

During my Foundations in Counseling course I gained an understanding of my worldview and how it would impact me as a counselor, which was the beginning of a turning point in my life. Throughout each course I gained more self-awareness. Looking back on my experience, I would have to say that the self awareness opened the door for me to understand the social justice and multicultural aspects. Once I was able to understand who I was as a person and what my values were I was able to understand and accept the importance of being a social justice advocate for myself and others. Statistics were no longer just numbers that impacted other people. I began to understand how things that occurred on the other side of the world did in fact impact me. I started to become more appreciative of the freedoms that I have living in the United States and the realities of being a Person of Color. With this new appreciate came a sense of responsibility for others who were not as fortunate.

The most beneficial experience that I had in my program was the opportunity to take action and be a part of something outside of the classroom. During my Social Justice class I had a group project where I assisted Dr. Bemak in putting together a global conference to bring attention to unaccompanied minors and separated children. This experience was life changing for me. I met Deputy Directors of federal agencies, ambassadors, and refugees--all of whom shared the same passion for social justice. This experience left me speechless for days. Hearing the stories of so many people, who had survived such traumatic experiences and still found the strength to persevere, was inspiring. Children who had been separated from their mothers for years, victims of civil war and oppression were now speaking to me about their stories. After this experience I felt liberated yet obligated. I had to remind myself that it was unrealistic to think that I could save the world. However, I can do my part by getting involved in my community, speaking out against social injustices, and advocating for my clients.

Having a program that not only teaches social justice and multicultural principals, but gives its students the opportunity to go into the community and take action was critical to my development as a person and a counselor. Words cannot express how grateful I am to be in a

program that truly immerses its' students in the values of social justice and multiculturalism. I am the person I am today because of this program, its mission, and its values.

The next section will provide recommendations to assist counseling and psychology programs in implementing multicultural social justice strategies in the program mission and course curriculum.

### **Future Action Strategies for Incorporating Multiculturalism Social Justice into Counseling and Psychology Programs**

During and after the workshop many participants wanted to learn about specific strategies that could enable them to develop a social justice agenda within counseling and psychology programs. Below we have outlined several action strategies for incorporating multiculturalism social justice into counseling and psychology programs:

1. Hold faculty retreats to generate consensus about the definition and meaning of multicultural social justice counseling.
2. Hold faculty retreats to discuss how to promote a commonly agreed upon definition of multicultural social justice throughout the entire course curriculum.
3. Promote classroom discussions regarding how multicultural social justice can be applied to the current topic content for each class.
4. Promote classroom discussions to examine how students' own life experiences have shaped what they view as important in the profession of counseling and psychology. How could this impact their career as counselors or psychologists? Include discussions to explore personal biases regarding the race, gender, privilege, oppression, and socioeconomic status of individuals.
5. Clearly outline to students, throughout the training curriculum, opportunities and challenges for psychologists and counselors to do social justice multicultural work.
6. Include throughout graduate training program service learning experiences that include working with underserved and underrepresented populations in the community that focus on social justice and multicultural issues. This can be accomplished through implementing service learning projects/advocacy projects in each course, student group leadership team involvement (e.g., CSI leadership team) in creating service projects for students.
7. Develop practicum and internship placements that are incorporate activities that focus on multicultural social justice work and counseling. Collaborate closely with field-based supervisors to provide supervision and mentoring consistent with multicultural social justice values and constructs.
8. Develop program-based external projects that emphasize multicultural social justice work. This can be in the local community, statewide, nationally, or internationally utilizing faculty as role models for doing this work.
9. Utilization of real life situations and current news (e.g., clients impacted by the BP oil spill, hate crimes, immigration laws, limited benefits received by clients involved in same-sex relationships, etc.) to facilitate real life role plays in class and class assignments and projects.
10. Not all faculty are committed to multicultural social justice counseling. Faculty and students must take small steps and accept that change is slow. For example, student honor societies can develop multicultural social justice projects or faculty can individually

develop a community-based or school-based project focused on multicultural social justice work and invite students to become involved with the project activity. Multicultural social justice work does not need to include all faculty or students in order to take root in a graduate program.

## Summary

The C&D program faculty at George Mason University has spent the past decade developing a multicultural social justice-focused counseling program that can be used as a model for other programs. The GMU C&D program trains graduate students to be leaders in the field of counseling and to advocate for those who lack equitable access to resources and who remain marginalized in our society. The transformation of this program has included a strong emphasis on diversifying the faculty and student body, implementing a rigorous and holistic admissions process, and reconstructing the program's curriculum. In addition, it has required that faculty members and students remain open and committed to continued personal growth and professional development experiences. In order to accomplish our goals, we have fostered a supportive atmosphere that creates learning experiences within and outside of the classroom, we have engaged in difficult dialogues that challenge students to critically examine and reflect upon their worldviews, their privilege, and their biases, and have stressed the importance of engaging in service-oriented collaborative projects with the surrounding communities, as well as regionally, nationally and internationally (e.g., Counselors Without Borders organization). We acknowledge that the program's journey to multicultural social justice competence remains an on-going process yet our belief is that social change can and does happen we look to our students to join us in this mission as they move forward on their professional journeys as the next generation of multicultural social justice counselor educators, practitioners and leaders.

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