

Diversity Committee:

College Studies Instructor Interviews

During the past few weeks I visited with several EWC instructors who are currently teaching college studies, or who taught it in the past.

I asked the general questions about how they addressed the subject of diversity in the class.

They all said that diversity is specific topic that is written into the course syllabus, but it appears they all had leeway on how much they would choose to emphasize that particular subject.

In the committee meetings we've heard *Diana Ouealy-Berge* approaches diversity in her class. I'm sure she can speak for herself, but I got the impression that she places a very high priority on addressing diversity issues.

As I mentioned in earlier meetings, I visited with *Rick Vonburg* about College Studies earlier. From his perspective as long-time EWC instructor (over 30 years) he sees the inclusion of diversity as a very positive effort on the part of the college to address an important issue for all first-year students. Before College Studies EWC didn't specifically address the issue of diversity in a classroom setting. Of course some instructors have always had elements in their particular courses.

J.D. Sexton taught two sessions of College Studies this semester, with both having about 20 students. This is the second year he's taught the class during Fall Semester. One of his classes was heavily loaded with ag-related students, while the other was a much wider mix of students. He said diversity is one of the key elements of the class, but is also one of the most difficult to address, especially in the classes that don't have much of a racial or age mix. He also pointed out that the diversity related materials are out-of-date and.

He believes that his age (only four-years out of college) enables him to relate to the students very well on some subjects – such as lifestyle (alcohol, sex, etc...). However, like so many of the students, he has a typical small-town rural background. He expressed a general sense that his students are actually pretty open to discussions about ethnic diversity, but the most negative comments he sometimes hear have to do with age differences. Most of his students are traditional aged, first-year teenagers, and they don't relate to non-traditional aged students.

I found JD to be enthusiastic about College Studies in general. It's apparent to me that he makes a real effort to address the diversity topic in a realistic manner that his students can relate to.

Tom Anderson taught one section of College Studies this semester with 25 students. He said most of his students were females, but only four were athletes. As to be expected, most of his students were traditional-aged freshmen. Tom said he always includes the diversity lessons in his classes.

He believed the general covering of the topic was sufficient to make new college students aware, but a lot was very dependent on the makeup of the class. He said his students don't seem to view this as a particularly important.

I had the impression that Tom dutifully followed the course syllabus, but wasn't overly excited about diversity in particular. He does believe that a better mix of student in the class makes for better discussion, which is very worthwhile.

Andrea Bryant was another instructor who seems very passionate about College Studies and the topic of diversity. She taught two sessions this semester, although one was specifically designed for the "Bridge Program" students that start school early. She said she tries to place additional emphasis on diversity, going beyond the general materials (videos and exercises) that are provided.

She expressed many concerns about College Studies in general, and acknowledged that diversity is a major problem on our campus. She mentioned the Student Center in particular, and talked about the change of atmosphere in the Learning Skills Lab that may be helping to make that area more welcoming to older students. She is hoping that a major revamping of College Studies will happen.

I didn't get in touch with Kelli Gooder, Darci Davis or Rhonda Meyers.

But I did visit with Jan Lilletvedt, who taught the class for years and years. She expressed concerns about how College Studies is structured in general. She noted that sometimes her students didn't take the course until their second year, and that the set curriculum wasn't always appropriate for some of her students (such as budgeting exercises for returning adult students who had been handling their own money for years). She is also concerned about how the instructors for this class are selected.

Diversity, she said, was one of the most difficult topics to address in the classroom, but she feels it is a crucial subject to expose first-year students.

When I visited with Dr Holcomb, he said that one of his goals is to complete a major restructuring of the College Studies. His intention is to use a "Strength Finder" approach, in which each student learns about their own learning styles, and abilities – while becoming aware of others.

I wasn't real clear about how he sees diversity fitting into this model, but he did say that any redesign of the course would include feedback and involvement on the part of the instructors who will teach it.