

## Diversity 101: Understanding Diversity by Experience

### Learning Objective

To enhance students' cultural competency via personal experience.

### Introduction

Experiential learning has become a key educational tool as a means to educate through personal experience. The concept of experiential learning is based on the notion that conventional teaching does not reflect real world scenarios and can lead to a lack of understanding, particularly in subjects that students may find abstract. Further, "hands on learners" may struggle with educational concepts that lack a "Learn by doing" aspect.

The demographics of both the North America and higher education are changing. Along with these changes, new challenges in the area of diversity and inclusion are ascending. Universities are being challenged to prepare their graduates to work in a diverse environment upon graduation. Key among these preparations are strategies to be inclusive of those differing in socio-demographic traits, academic preparation, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, political stance, and race/ethnicity.

The Kansas State University (K-State) College of Agriculture is committed to educating students who are prepared to thrive in a diverse work environment. Through the K-State College of Agriculture Diversity Programs Office, several programs, trainings, and courses are offered to improve the cultural competency of faculty, staff, and students.

A semester long course offered at K-State, GENAG 210: Human and Cultural Diversity in Agriculture, offers insight into diversity and multiculturalism within the agricultural sphere. The course is designed to introduce agriculture students to the topics of diversity by teaching cultural awareness and providing information about agricultural contributions made by different ethnic groups. The material covered in this course includes basic information about self-awareness, multiethnic agricultural contributions, and general cultural competencies. Throughout the semester, students are introduced to various topics in diversity. At the end of the course, students should leave with an improved sense of self-awareness and improved cultural competency and understanding.

### Procedure

The objectives of this assignment are to a) develop students' cultural awareness, b) demonstrate key course concepts, c) improve students' interpersonal skills, d) improve student's critical thinking as a result of participation. Students are responsible for managing their personal diversity experience by attending at least four multicultural

events on campus or within the community per semester. Students are requested to attend events that showcase cultures outside of the ones they identify with. Thus, at the selected event, the student in attendance would be part of the underrepresented identity. At the conclusion of the selected event, students were required to complete a short post-activity assignment.

**Diversity 101 Template**

The following is the assignment form used to describe the activity attended.

**Figure 1. Diversity 101 assignment**

<p><b>Diversity 101: Promoting Diversity &amp; Enhancing Awareness Activities Profile</b></p>
<p>Fill out the activities profile form enclosed for <b>each</b> separate activity as proof of completion. We ask that you turn in your completed activity profiles on the assigned monthly due date. In addition to the activity profiles, please include any pamphlets, programs, tickets, etc. We also encourage you to provide photographs or evidence of social media posts.</p>
Name of Participant _____
Name of Activity _____
Signature of Activity Coordinator _____
Description of Activity <i>**Please include time, date and location**</i>
_____
_____
Why did you choose to attend this activity?
_____
_____
After participating in this activity, how did you feel?
_____
_____
How did your participation in this activity improve your understanding of the cultural competency concepts presented in class?
_____
_____

**Assessment**

Students indicate that participation in the Diversity 101 activity improves their perspective about underrepresented groups. The activity has a positive impact on the development of cultural competency throughout the semester. Students are able to empathize with others through direct experience that they do not receive on a daily basis.

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