

Difference, Power, and Responsibility – A History in Progress

In 2002, just as staff at Chemeketa Community College were discussing how best to further expand our commitment to diversity, an important event occurred: an invitation to participate in Oregon State University's Difference, Power, and Discrimination faculty seminar. Three faculty and one administrator volunteered to engage in what was the "first step" in a journey that has resulted in the college's own approach to personal and curricular transformation entitled, Difference, Power, and Responsibility. To-date, over 110 participants have engaged in considering what it means to diversify their curricula.

The overall process, itself, was inclusive from the start. The Academic Standards committee, the college's advisory committee on academic policies and procedures, had been grappling with the implications of our increasing student diversity and global interconnectedness. There was strong discussion related to creating a degree requirement tied to ensuring that students exited the college with a better understanding of the diverse society they inhabit. The heart of this work would lie in course content and in teaching and learning experiences. A small sub-group was charged with returning a proposal for a potential degree requirement. Immediately, substantive research and long conversations ensued, followed by an all staff discussion paper to engage the campus community, focus groups to consider feasibility, and information to our Board of Education to seek support for a proposed plan to transform curricula so that students would not only be exposed to information about diversity, but would be able to respond thoughtfully to it. With positive feedback from all interested stakeholders, the development process got underway.

Influenced by the thoughtful work at OSU, criteria were developed for faculty to consider in designating their courses. Information and orientation sessions, and a six-part seminar were designed to explore how issues of difference and power are embedded in our curricula, and how teaching strategies can engage or marginalize our students. Of great import, was the notion that in order for our content and strategies to change, *we* would change as well. As Parker Palmer suggested... "as soon as we admit pluralism, we are forced to admit that ours is not the only standpoint, the only experience, the only way, and the truths we have built our lives on begin to feel fragile" (*The Courage to Teach*, 1998, p. 38). The sessions would, if successful, engage and challenge our personal and professional perspectives and enable us to construct new insights into our lives and our teaching.

The DPR seminar was piloted in spring of 2003 with instructional directors in order for them to both understand the principles and support their faculty's involvement. Following this, faculty sessions have been offered annually. Development funds are made available for curricular change and faculty are provided with a modest stipend for their participation. A small band of developers designed a facilitator training and a guidebook, provided a process and forms for the college's Curriculum Committee to use in designating courses, wrote a chapter in the book *Teaching for Change*, and continues to facilitate and revise seminars. Currently 39 courses are DPR-designated with more to come. In 2008, Difference, Power, and Responsibility received the National Council of Instructional Administrators Exemplary Initiatives Award for Curriculum Innovation. The goal of the committee is to ensure that DPR courses are available to students throughout the college to meet the cultural literacy requirement of the newly-revised Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer (AAOT) degree.

Without question this process is a deep initiative that is succeeding with the support of our administrators and the participation of faculty. We are challenged daily to continue to improve and expand the Difference, Power, and Responsibility initiative and to gather critical mass in order to serve our students fully. We are encouraged by the collegiality that has formed through the seminar experience and by the curricular transformation that has followed. Margaret Wheatley affirmed, "There is no power equal to a community discovering what it cares about" (*Turning to One Another*, 2002, p. 22).

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