Background Information

Eighty-three Tallahassee Community College (TCC) Division of Student Affairs employees from the following departments attended and evaluated a two and a half hour Diversity and Customer Service Training session: Achieving the Dream, Athletics, Business Office, Campus Life, Career Services, Cashier’s Office, College Reach Out Program, Educational Talent Search, Enrollment Services and Testing, Financial Aid, One-Stop Center and Student Success Center. Results reveal the majority of participants indicated the training session attended provided a good working knowledge of diversity and customer service issues faced by TCC Student Affairs staff. A central belief related by participants was the importance of promoting a philosophy of cultural inclusiveness when providing services within all departments of the Division of Student Affairs. More specifically, a general consensus was conveyed that through educational training programs, individual consultation and group advising Student Affairs staff can educate TCC students about ethnic, regional, gender, disability, sexual orientation, generational and faith based differences.

A focus on intercultural sensitivity in all areas of human endeavor is critical for future success at creating an enlightened and competent global citizenry. The term intercultural sensitivity generally refers to sensitivity to the existence and value of cultural differences
and to the opinions, beliefs, mores and traditions of people in other cultures. “To be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures” (Bhawak & Brisline as cited in Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman, 2003, p. 416). This is especially true for postsecondary education. Very little research exists within the intercultural literature addressing faculty or staff intercultural sensitivity within a college environment. Research is practically non-existent regarding the intercultural sensitivity of the student affairs practitioner.

Specific challenges face community college and university practitioners as they attempt to accomplish the diversity missions of their institutions. These challenges can not be overcome unless those who govern and influence higher education environments are themselves sensitive to cultural differences and possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes of an interculturally competent individual. The diversity agenda of higher education may only be accomplished by focusing on intercultural awareness through sensitizing higher education practitioners to comprehend, accept, and value the cultural differences of people. It is imperative that institutions of higher education and divisions of student affairs embrace the proposition to ensure the intercultural sensitivity of practitioners is the nucleus for accomplishing the core diversity mission of higher education.

Individuals and organizations in the approaching global society will be required to demonstrate “tolerance for difference and mutual respect among cultures as a mark of enlightened national and global citizenship” (Belray, 1993, p. 439). Thus, a focus on
intercultural sensitivity in all areas of human endeavor becomes critical for future success at creating an enlightened and component global citizenry. This is especially true in postsecondary education. Diversity of college campuses across the nation are increasing annually (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1991). The TCC Student Demographics Report (2007) indicates 43% of students enrolled in 2006-2007 were classified as either minority or international.

Winston and Creamer (1997) point out that at the core of an institution of higher education are the people who exist within it. “Through its staffing practices, an institution acts out its fundamental values about the importance of and worth of people and the ultimate purposes of the institution” (p. 1). Extraordinary expectations for creating diverse climates for learning are placed on student affairs practitioners. Nevertheless, the student affairs profession continues to play a significant role in creating and maintaining environments that promote and ensure knowledge and respect of differences. It is also the responsibility of student affairs to assist students in feeling comfortable, being involved in the life of the campus community and providing them with the support and encouragement to become full members of the institution (Kuh, et al., 1991). As central contributors, student affairs shares equally with faculty, governing boards, and other staff in providing students with a culturally sensitive environment in which differences are acknowledged and understood, and where every culture is important and respected.
Methodology

Participants included 83 Division of Student Affairs full-time staff members at Tallahassee Community College. Full-time Student Affairs practitioners were targeted because they represent a range of exposure to the college campus. A total of 68 participants were women, while only 15 participants were male.

To measure the perceptions of participants—regarding the presentation of the diversity and customer service training session—principal investigator Dr. Lisa McBride (with the assistance of Trainer Rosezetta Bobo) developed the Student Affairs Assessment Instrument. An earlier study (Kelso, 2006) using a student affairs evaluation instrument after scheduled diversity training sessions suggested that to assess whether student affairs practitioners were sensitive to the issues which define or control a multicultural or intercultural environment, researchers should have participants indicate their overall satisfaction with the training and presenter by measuring the level of agreement with the statements featured in the evaluation instrument. This involved the participants selecting the following level of agreement: strongly agree, agree, neither agree/disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, to answer the following questions in the TCC Student Affairs Assessment Instrument:

- Presenter knowledge of material
- Ability to respond to participant’s questions
- Presenter skills
- Encouragement of participants
- The information presented was practical
- The program provided a good working knowledge of the subject matter
- The training has allowed me to acquire practical skills and awareness to work more effectively and efficiently
- Additional training of this nature would be beneficial
Additionally, participants selected the following rating: excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, very poor, to assess their overall satisfaction with the training. At the bottom of the Student Affairs Assessment Instrument, participants were provided space to write in their own words specific comments relevant to the training session and presenter.

Principal investigator Dr. Lisa McBride administered the Student Affairs Assessment Instrument after the training sessions scheduled on June 8th, June 15th, June 22 and July 27th of 2007. Four training sessions were scheduled to insure there was a cross-section of TCC Division of Student Affairs employees from each of the departments. Additionally, the design of the training session allowed her to collect qualitative data discussed by participants in an open classroom format about their perceptions and experiences regarding the following training topics:

- Culture
- Diversity
- Ethnicity
- Communication skills
- Communication pitfalls
- Good customer service skills
- Generation Y

Listening to the participants’ own voices is very important to crafting effective diversity initiatives and creating truly inclusive campus communities.

**Key Findings**

Review of the data yielded five major areas which support emerging literature review, student affairs practitioners need to develop skills to address cultural issues and the changing demographics on community college campuses: (1) 63 of Student Affairs
participants (76%) either strongly agree or agree the information presented in the training session was practical, (2) 55 of Student Affairs participants (66%) either strongly agree or agree the training program provided a good working knowledge of the subject matter, (3) 57 of Student Affairs participants (69%) either strongly agree or agree the training allowed him/her to acquire practical skills and awareness to work more effectively and efficiently, (4) 49 of Student Affairs participants (59%) either strongly agree or agree additional training of this nature would be beneficial, and (5) 46 of Student Affairs participants (55%) indicated they would overall rate the training session as being excellent or very good. (see Appendix A)

Additionally the principal investigator gathered the Student Affairs participants’ feedback regarding the training topics: culture, diversity, ethnicity, communication skills, communication pitfalls, good customer service skills and Generation Y. If a Student Affairs participant provided their personal account of how a particular training topic impacted them—detailed written notes of their comments were prepared. The following statements were made by multiple participants (at least three) relevant to the aforementioned training topics:

**Culture**

- Multiple participants defined “culture” as the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions
- Multiple participants commented that understanding another person’s culture is problematic
- Multiple participants defined “culture” as what people think and what they do
- Multiple participants asserted cultural values and interpretations by TCC students are not universal across demographics
- Multiple participants related it is important Student Affairs staff develop an appreciation for cultures other than their own
Multiple participants related that culturally, TCC students do not accept traditional dress codes (i.e., those that would prepare them for a future career)

Diversity

- Multiple participants asserted it was assumed TCC students who have experienced diverse educational environments whether in high school or college embraced cultural diversity or differences
- Multiple participants related Student Affairs staff must be willing to embrace TCC’s diverse student population and by doing so they can improve the delivery of customer service
- Multiple participants asserted the term “diversity” encompasses more than race
- Multiple participants conveyed related it is important that TCC has cultivated a campus climate valuing an atmosphere that is welcoming and comfortable for all students to succeed, regardless of race, gender, ethnic background, age, sexual orientation, religion, citizenship, or disability
- Multiple participants indicated their individual goal is to ensure that TCC students will have equal access to Student Affairs resources and services

Ethnicity

- Multiple participants were confused and wanted clarity from the trainer on what the differences were between culture and ethnicity
- Multiple participants related that despite color differences, African-Americans, Africans, Hispanics, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and Arabs share an ethnicity

Communication Skills/Communication Pitfalls

- Multiple participants asserted that when communicating with a TCC student, they are mindful that to get respect, one must give respect
- Multiple participants conveyed TCC students like to be valued
- Multiple participants related that by greeting students by their name, one develops an immediate rapport
- Multiple participants stated Student Affairs staff have to give their undivided attention to those students who come to their office needing assistance
- Multiple participants explained it is important when communicating with TCC students to remember “the golden rule”: treat students like you would want to be treated
- Multiple participants acknowledged age barriers can impact the communication process when providing one-on-one service to TCC students
**Generation Y**

- Multiple participants asserted technology is speedily growing with Generation Y students and some may want Student Affairs resources emailed, downloaded, or texted to their cellular telephone.
- Multiple participants related Generation Y students are brilliant at multi-tasking, therefore, it is important to not take it personally when they are accessing their text messages, voice mail, or telephone calls while meeting with Student Affairs staff members.
- Multiple participants conveyed Generation Y students are “visual learners”.
- Multiple participants indicated they would like to learn more about dealing with a generation of students who have a different set of values, attitudes and beliefs than many of the Student Affairs staff members.
- Multiple participants asserted it is important to recognize what customer service means to Generation Y students. For example, they have been able to get whatever they want, whenever they want at lightning speed and in reality that is not possible when providing Student Affairs services.

**Recommendations**

As student affairs professionals become partners in the governance and influence of decision making on campus, they should be in an increasingly stronger position to bring about positive change. This role obviously requires several kinds of knowledge and abilities. However, an important one for the student affairs professional, is to become a competent generalist who has a basic understanding of the campus ecology (Barr et al., 1993; Creamer et al., 1990; Komives, Woodard, & Associates, 1996) including cultural differences. There is increasing acknowledgement that student affairs practitioners need to develop skills to address cultural issues and the changing demographics on their campuses (Dixon, 2001; Pope, 1995; Ramirez, 1993; Talbot, 1996). Similarly, discussions have emerged in the literature regarding the need to formally prepare student affairs practitioners through campus training (Ebbers & Henry, 1990; Wright, 1987).
After reviewing the “best practices” utilized by various college student affairs divisions to systematically and effectively participate in creating diversity-positive campus climates and diverse campus environments, the following recommendations were made for TCC Student Affairs staff members to work together on during the 2007-2008 school year:

- Develop and deliver three (3) culture campus training sessions for TCC Student Affairs (each individual employee will select the training session in which he/she is most interested):
  
  A. Cross-Cultural Communication for Student Affairs Practitioners
  B. What does Customer Service mean to Generation Y students?
  C. Respecting Diversity in Student Affairs

- Schedule inter-departmental dialogue sessions to discuss what strategies the TCC Student Affairs division can employ to create a diversity-positive campus climate for students. More specifically, discuss how the Student Affairs departments can support a culture of learning where students, faculty, and staff work together to maximize student learning in terms of opportunities for learning and learning outcomes.

Report prepared for review by “Achieving the Dream” core team members
REFERENCES


Please use the following scale to indicate your response to the statements below: SA = strongly agree;  
A = agree;  
N = neither agree/disagree;  
D = disagree;  
SD = strongly disagree.

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29 participants  
18 evaluations
EVALUATION COMMENTS:

6/8/2007

• Good Training

• Great training, need more on Diversity! This was an excellent session I really enjoyed it. Rosezetta made this topic more interesting than other trainers. Especially liked her comparison of the generation concerning what was important to them.

• The information given was not specific to the diversity issues at TCC some of the explanations on stereotypes were incorrect and there appeared to be a lot of stereotyping done by the presenter. It would have been helpful to have background information on all of the cultures of the students that represent TCC’s student population. The presenter needs to update her information on diversity and multiculturalism. A helpful read is Black Psychology.

• Too anecdotal --- did not cover objective. Did not increase my knowledge.

• Presenter appeared to simply “scratch the surface” of the diversity topic. She presented material that I’ve presented myself to teenagers – too simplistic. Maybe a level 1 and Level 2 to cater to the diversity of the staff (those with training in this area and those without).

• The group discussion was very beneficial. It was a good safe place to “air-out” concerns and opinions without undue worry/ stress.

• I didn’t leave the workshop feeling like I learned any new additional information to help me in my field.

• Good job Rosetta, need more time.
Please use the following scale to indicate your response to the statements below: SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree/disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.

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Overall rating of the training

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Tallahassee Community College
Office of Student Affairs
Diversity Training & Customer Service

June 15, 2007 EVALUATION
Trainer: Rosezetta Bobo
EVALUATION COMMENTS:

6/15/2007

- The majority of the information was good but it would have been nice to see how we can put the information to use. Overall it was enjoyable.
- Enjoyed the workshop.
- Great Presentation.
- I loved it. Rosezetta is a great speaker and I hope to hear her again.
- Entertaining
- Was not a bad time
- Excellent presentation. Relevant and entertaining
- More training on how to handle difficult students; role playing.
- Very entertaining
- Very funny lady
- Great
- Excellent speaker, very energetic! Truly keeps your attention!
Please use the following scale to indicate your response to the statements below: SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree/disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.

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Tallahassee Community College
Office of Student Affairs
Diversity Training & Customer Service

June 22, 2007 EVALUATION
Trainer: Rosezetta Bobo
EVALUATION COMMENTS:

6/22/2007

- It is not helpful that the presenter isn’t comfortable in some topics and wouldn’t hold people accountable for their comments. Also, the topics were all over the map. Assumptions were made and stereotypes basically encouraged. Disappointing.

- Thoroughly enjoyed the presentation; I wish we could have spent less time on disability services and more on gender, race and age.

- Thank you

- I felt that there were a lot of stereotypes actually perpetuated by this session i.e. religion, sexual orientation, age, etc.

- I really enjoyed the training and hope to attend another in the future.

- Too much info in short time. Need 2 sessions. Some interjections from class kept instructor from getting into important info that I saw on her PowerPoint slides.

- Disability topic was good with student and hands on materials.
Please use the following scale to indicate your response to the statements below: SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree/disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.

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Overall rating of the training

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EVALUATION COMMENTS:

7/27/2007

- Time went by quickly, always a good sign!
- Great job!
- Was fun but information was so basic I would expect all professional staff to be at this level. Thanks.
- Great! Thanks
- Very informative, it was nice.
- Very engaging and entertaining
- This was fun and insightful, thanks for lunch.
- I attended two other workshops with basically the same information. All is useful but I already was familiar with most of it.
- Like speaker
- Good Job!!
Please use the following scale to indicate your response to the statements below: SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neither agree/disagree; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.

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<td>4.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Encouragement of participants</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The information presented was practical</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The program provided a good working knowledge of the subject matter</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The training has allowed me to acquire practical skills and awareness</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.90</td>
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<td>to work more effectively and efficiently.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Additional training of this nature would be beneficial</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
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Overall rating of the training

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<th>Very good</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Very Poor</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.13</td>
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