

ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF A DIVERSITY COURSE ON COLLEGE STUDENTS' READINESS FOR SOCIAL ACTION ENGAGEMENT

St. Lawrence University

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3:00 – 6:00 PM



Dr. Stephanie L. Burrell

- Is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Curriculum & Instruction in the Graduate School of Education at Fairfield University
- She graduated from the Social Justice Education at the University of Massachusetts in May 2008 and has taught undergraduate and graduate level diversity courses for 10 years.
- Her areas of interests include educational outcomes of diversity courses, multicultural/social justice education curriculum development, and teacher action research
- She participated in a faculty learning community focusing on diversity curriculum development during the 2007-2008 academic year



GOALS FOR TODAY:

- To present the methods and results of this study.
- To discuss knowledge, values and skills necessary for students to develop to promote diversity and equity.
- To score vignettes that focus on social justice issues using a rubric designed for this study.

AGENDA

- **3:00** **Overview of session**
- **3:10** **Introductions**
- **3:15** **Presentation of Research**
- **4:15** **Break**
- **4:30** **Scenarios & Rubric**
- **5:50** **Session Evaluation**
- **6:00** **Closing**



INTRODUCTIONS

- Name
- Discipline
- What is one thing you hope to walk away with today?



DIVERSITY COURSES

- What makes a course a diversity course?
 - Which elements of a course should be examined to determine whether it is a diversity course?
 - How is this determined at St. Lawrence?



DIVERSITY COURSES

- Diversity courses, in this study, are those courses where the dimensions of diversity found in the United States (i.e., race and ethnicity, age, culture, gender, social class, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, language practices, and physical disabilities) are the central focus for analysis in the course.
- Nelson Laird framework



PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of a social diversity course in increasing students' readiness for social action engagement.

DEFINITIONS

- Readiness in this study is defined as a person's willingness and ability to perform a particular task (Hershey, 2004).
- Social action engagement refers to students' willingness to combat social oppression within their sphere of influence (Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2003).



KNOWLEDGE, VALUES, & SKILLS FOR DIVERSITY COURSES

- What knowledge, values/attitudes, and skills do you believe students need to develop for active participation in a diverse society?
 - Please write down one example of knowledge, values/attitudes and skills on a 5X7 card.
 - Share with your neighbor.



EXAMPLES FROM THE LITERATURE

□ Knowledge

- Students knowing their identities and the identities of others; learning about the history and contributions of various social groups; understanding the sources of inequality in society

□ Values/Attitudes

- Valuing diversity, recognizing and reducing personal biases, feeling empathy and socially responsible for the public good

□ Skills

- Critical thinking skills, the ability to view the world from diverse perspectives, political and social action skills, communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution skills



SOCIAL DIVERSITY COURSE

- Broad student learning goals:
 - Increasing personal awareness: existence of social oppression, social identity groups, and socialization process
 - Expand knowledge: concepts such as privilege, social power, internalized oppression, and liberation
 - Encourage action: develop action strategies and intervention skills to respond to social injustice



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

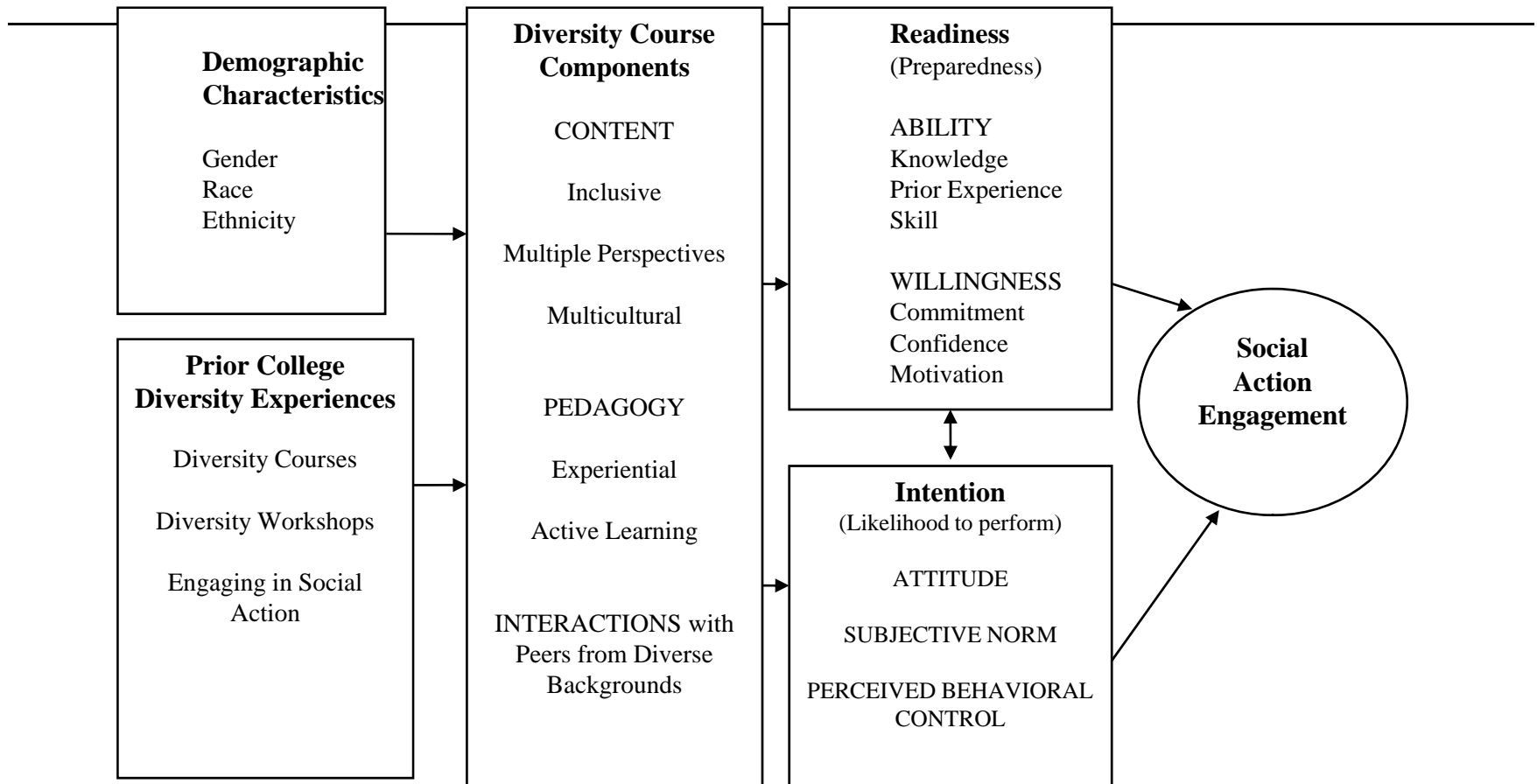
- Is there an increase in students' competence for social action engagement?
- Is there an increase in students' willingness to engage in social action?
- Is there evidence of changes in students' perception of risk involved in social action engagement?
- Is there evidence of changes in students' intention to engage in social action; and what are the factors students identify as influencing those intentions?



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- The theoretical framework of this study was drawn from:
 - Hershey's (2004) Follower Readiness
 - Chen-Hayes's (2001) Social Justice Advocacy Readiness
 - Love's (2000) Developing a Liberatory Consciousness
 - Azjen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior
 - Gurin et al. (2002) framework for examining the impact of diversity on student learning and development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK





PARTICIPANTS

□ Vignettes

- 60 Students
 - 50% women
 - 35% students of color
 - 57% first-year students
 - 33% prior diversity course

□ Interviews

- Six students
- Two sections

METHODS & ANALYSIS

□ Vignettes

- Pre/Post Design
- Survey
 - Four scenarios
 - Six open-ended questions; two Likert scales

□ Interviews

- Semi-structured protocol

□ Vignettes

- Content analysis w. Rubric
 - Inter-rater Reliability
- Descriptive statistics
 - Cross-tabs

□ Interviews

- Open coding

FINDINGS

□ VIGNETTES

- Competence to engage in social action
 - Identify Problem: Sexism (+)
 - Analyze Problem: Racism and Sexism (+)
 - Identify Action Strategies:
 - High Rating Pre and Post All
 - Identify Knowledge: Sexism (+)
 - Identify Skills:
 - Low Rating Pre and Post All
- Willingness to take action
 - Motivation:
 - High Rating Pre and Post All

FINDINGS

- Willingness to take action
 - Confidence: Sexism, Classism, Heterosexism (+)
- Potential risks when taking action
 - Identify Potential Risks:
 - High Rating Pre and Post All
- Intention to engage in social action
 - Attitude Toward SAE: Sexism (+)
 - High Rating Pre and Post: Racism
 - Likelihood to Take Action: Sexism, Classism, Heterosexism (+)



FINDINGS

□ **INTERVIEWS**

■ Six themes:

- Lived Experiences
- Perspective-Taking
- Critical Thinking
- Personal Awareness
- Empathy
- Confidence

LIVED EXPERIENCES

- **Student Voice**

- **Open, Safe, Supportive Environment**

- “In the beginning a lot of people weren’t talking, but by the end they were and brought up instances in their lives. We were like oh yeah that’s an instance of racism or socialization. People really changed and the more they opened up they would tell people about what happened in their lives. Everyone kind of trusted one another because we are all learning together. That was pretty eye opening at the end. I guess that was pretty strong for me to talk about how you feel emotionally.”



PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

- **View social justice issues from multiple perspectives**
 - “Sometimes it was kind of fun hearing different people trying to argue their point and trying to figure out while their arguing that they are wrong. Not wrong but that they aren’t understanding it from other peoples point of view.”



PERSONAL AWARENESS

- Self-Knowledge and Social Justice Issues
 - “You will learn a lot about yourself, where you came from. At the end of it, you are going to know who you are or you are going to make decisions on who you are going to be. It’s a big life changer.”

CRITICAL THINKING

- **Promote analysis and evaluation**
- **Self-examination/correction**
 - “You look only not more around you but you definitely look more internally too. You do learn more about your identity, not so many more answers, but definitely more questions. It gets you thinking a lot more about other things. It’s a different subject instead of going through life not thinking about things...without going to this class I wouldn’t have thought about homosexuality, if I’m being homophobic.”

EMPATHY

- **Make connections between self and others**
- **Gain a deeper understanding of challenges targeted groups face**
 - We had to write on note cards things we loved, your family, your best friend and then it said imagine you came out and say you were gay and you didn't have this and you didn't have that and then how would you feel? It's kind of like the walls close in on you. It's eye-opening. It must be tough for someone to come out and have everyone not want to be associated with you anymore. That had a big impact on me because I was like oh you just come out, you just come out, but people can just really cut you off. It gives you another perspective. You take for granted the things you don't have to go through when you see what others do have to go through. You feel for that person a lot more than you normally would.

CONFIDENCE

- **Practice skills**
- **Information and tools needed to take action**
 - “A movie we saw about a white guy and a black guy in the South. The white guy would apply for the job and the black guy would apply for the job and the white guy would get it. The white guy would apply for a house. After the documentary the people making it confronted one of the guys ‘cause they looked at two apartments and they actually confronted the couple and I was in shock. I thought they were going to show the situation and not really do anything about it, but they took action and actually confronted the guy and his wife and you know I was like more people should do that. I know a lot of people do it and seeing the way these people handled it was like I can do it when I know something’s wrong, maybe I can’t prevent it but I can do something about it after it happens.”



SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

- ❑ Less likely to deny that a problem existed in the scenarios
- ❑ No evidence of decline: action strategies, motivation, risks identification, and attitude (racism)
- ❑ More confident in taking action; more likely to take action
- ❑ Students who responded to the sexism vignette were more prepared to take action than any other
- ❑ Multiple perspectives in content; pedagogy that used experiential activities best prepared them for SAE
- ❑ Vignettes and Interview data: confirmed for half of students



RECOMMENDATIONS

□ TEACHING

- Assess whether students can identify oppression accurately before the course commences.
- Require a social action project as a final class assignment—synthesize information

□ FURTHER RESEARCH

- Measure all three constructs from theory of planned behavior.
- Examine the impact of empathy development on students readiness for SAE



SESSION EVALUATION

Three words describing today's session	
What was most helpful about today's session	
One thing I wanted more of	
One thing I would change about today's session	



THANK YOU

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