

Strengthening Programs to Reach Diverse Audiences

Introduction to Curriculum

Background and Rationale: Why focus on strengthening Extension programs to reach diverse audiences?

The need to provide Extension agents working for Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) with strategies and skills for more effectively working with ethnically diverse and limited resource audiences became evident in a CYFERNet Needs Assessment Survey. When asked what issues CYFAR State Strengthening Programs needed to address at the community level, Extension agents ranked “working with multi-need, diverse audiences” second in terms of its importance, and Extension assistants ranked it fourth. Furthermore, many Extension agents and assistants wrote qualitative statements that specifically listed the type of information and training they needed in order to work more effectively with multi-need, ethnically diverse audiences. For example, the agents and assistants indicated that they need to know “what programs to use to address diverse populations,” “how to motivate diverse populations to participate in programs,” “how to handle diverse populations in communities,” and “how to work across cultural differences” (CYFERNet Needs Assessment Summary, 1999-2000).

The results from an Environmental Scan conducted by the CYFERNet editors can serve as further evidence of the need for training and resources for CYFAR professionals and paraprofessionals involved in the State Strengthening and/or New Communities projects. Agents and assistants working with CYFAR projects were asked to indicate what information they would use if it were available. The rating scale was numbered one (1) through five (5), with one being the lowest and five being the highest ranking. Information on working with diverse audiences (averaging 3.063) and forming and formulating a support group (averaging 3.449) scored high, falling between “probably would use” and “definitely would use.” The agents and assistants also wrote comments about the need for “any and all information related to diversity, ethnic practices, and cultural differences” (Environmental Scan Summary).

This curriculum was developed by a multi-state, multi-university, multidisciplinary team in order to increase the knowledge and skills of Extension professionals and paraprofessionals who work with Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR and Extension staff in general) on how to design more effective programs to reach ethnically diverse and limited resource audiences. This curriculum will serve as an excellent beginning point, but it cannot and will not teach everything needed to understand how to design and implement programs with diverse audiences. Much experience, knowledge, and skills will be derived from working with those groups over time.

Focus of Diversity in the Curriculum: What is meant by “diverse audiences?”

The United States is a pluralistic and multicultural society consisting of individuals from very different backgrounds. The term diversity is used frequently in a variety of contexts in the United States, often synonymously with race. The biological, genetic and anthropological fields have taught us much about race as a category for classifying individuals into distinct groups.

Advancements in those three fields have shown that the category of race is arbitrary for the most part. For example, human genome research suggests that there is no biological basis for racial categories (Graves, 2002), and it is widely reported by geneticists that all humans are 99.9 percent genetically alike. Therefore, in the scientific world, race is a social construct that is not sufficient to classify groups of people. While race is still commonly used in our society, it will not be used in this curriculum.

Ethnicity is a term that is rapidly being used to replace race. Unlike race, ethnicity classifies individuals into groups based on cultural characteristics. Culture encompasses the values, beliefs, practices, norms and languages of a group that have been learned, shared, and transmitted intergenerationally; it influences a person’s feelings, thinking, and behavior (Hogan-Garcia, 2003 and Pedersen, 2000).

In this curriculum, the diverse audiences that we will focus on include the four primary ethnic groups in the United States: African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino American and Native American. These groups are seen as primary for many reasons; among those reasons are their current population levels and projections for their future growth when compared to other

ethnic groups (as discussed in Unit 1). There will, of course, be differences among individuals within an ethnic group (as explored in more detail in Unit 2). People within an ethnic group will differ based on many factors, such as level of education, socioeconomic background, and religion, to name a few. We will also learn about how one's level of ethnic identity can contribute to the variations found in individuals within the same ethnic group (as discussed in Unit 3). However, there is a large body of literature that documents some similar cultural attributes among members of specific ethnic groups, and this information cannot be overlooked. This curriculum will explore those cultural attributes in the context of planning and implementing Extension programs. This curriculum will also address, though not as extensively, strategies for educational programming to limited-resource audiences.

Finally, this curriculum focuses on increasing cultural competence in three domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Sue (1996) suggests that ethical and effective multicultural education evolves from specific practices.

“First, helpers must be aware of their own assumptions, biases, and values to become increasingly aware of the cultural values, biases, and assumptions of culturally different clients in nonjudgmental ways. With this knowledge helpers will begin to develop culturally appropriate, relevant, and sensitive strategies for intervening with individuals and with groups” (Corey & Corey, 2003).

Intercultural competence includes the development of one's:



Cognitive

What we KNOW
about diversity



Affective

How we FEEL about diversity



Behavioral

How we ACT around
diversity

Theoretical Framework:

Strengthening Programs to Reach Diverse Audiences is a curriculum approach to content delivery that is grounded in the cooperative learning and constructivism theory of knowledge. Both theories position learners as active agents in the learning process, not passive receptacles into which knowledge is poured (Ahearn et. al, 2002). The role of the educator is that of a facilitator. Also, this curriculum is based on the experiential learning model (think, do, reflect). In keeping with these theoretical frameworks, there are interactive interest approaches and application exercises accompanying each lesson. These hands-on activities promote learning through discussion, interaction and reflection.

Scope and Organization:

The Strengthening Programs to Reach Diverse Audiences curriculum is composed of six units. This curriculum is intended for Extension professionals who are interested in training their staff to work with diverse audiences. There is a guide for the Extension professional who will serve as the facilitator/leader of the training. This guide precedes each lesson. Note that culture and diversity can be challenging and emotionally charged topics. If the Extension professional is not knowledgeable about issues of diversity, it is highly recommended that the Writing Team train him or her in becoming a facilitator for this curriculum. Training will be held periodically as part of the annual Children, Youth and Families At Risk conference.

It is recommended that the curriculum be taught in its entirety, with each unit being taught in six individual half-day or full day (“optional” exercises are used and more time for activities required) sessions. Due to the wealth of information in each unit, it may be overwhelming to cover all units in one week. Therefore, it is recommended to teach the curriculum over the course of three to six weeks. Dividing the unit into sessions can also serve to provide more reflection time for the participants and/or allow them to generate more ideas to bring to the next session.

Each unit focuses on different aspects of program planning and design to give Extension professionals the knowledge and skills necessary for working with diverse audiences. Although it is unrealistic to expect that in-depth knowledge of all cultural backgrounds will result from this curriculum, it is feasible for participants to gain a much better grasp of general principles for

working successfully amidst cultural diversity. Below is a brief description of each unit. A more detailed overview precedes each unit within the curriculum.

Unit 1: This introductory unit lays the foundation for the rest of the curriculum by expanding on our understanding of differences and the many dimensions of diversity in our society today. The unit provides a broad look at the impact differences make on our lives, as well as a glimpse at considerations for diverse audiences. Finding commonalities and common ground is discussed briefly in this unit. However, the literature notes that misunderstanding and conflict is based on differences (values, norms, meanings, etc.), not commonalities.

Unit 2: Cultural competence is a continuous process of assessing and broadening our knowledge of, and respect for, diverse individuals. Knowledge and understanding, sensitivity, and respect for these cultural differences can significantly enhance the effectiveness of Extension professionals serving diverse ethnic communities.

Unit 3: This unit shows how to make marketing to diverse populations more successful by making Extension marketing campaigns more personal. This can be accomplished by tailoring marketing strategies to the distinctiveness of different ethnic groups and by establishing marketing as a long-term stable process for building firm relationships with diverse populations.

Unit 4: This unit discusses key strategies for uncovering and accessing the assets within a community to further the interests of that community. It also brings to light how the application of these community assets, resources, supports, and networks can help a community grow stronger by connecting to its diverse audiences. This unit also reveals how assets can be used to maximize and enhance programs.

Unit 5: Learning ways to connect with a diversity of people when designing Extension instruction is critical to serving all communities. This unit focuses on strategies and techniques for effectively instructing/teaching diverse individuals. The concepts apply to all audiences.

Unit 6: This unit focuses on key issues that Extension professionals may face when they seek to

work with ethnically diverse or limited-resource audiences. Strategies are provided for dealing with issues such as burnout and stress in order to really work with a given audience.

The Strengthening Program to Reach Diverse Audiences Curriculum provides key and in-depth information in a concise manner. However, it truly is just the beginning for individuals committed to providing culturally relevant programs to meet the needs of diverse audiences. The next step is to begin building relationships with diverse individuals to continue the process of learning. After all, becoming culturally competent in an increasingly multicultural society is an ongoing process, not a destination with a clearly marked beginning and ending. We, the writing team, hope that this curriculum will assist Extension faculty in integrating culture-specific awareness, knowledge, and skills into their program design and development process.

Resources

- Ahearn, A., Childs-Bowen, D., Coady, M., Dickson, K., Heintz, C., Hughes, K et. al. (2002). *The diversity kit: An introductory resource for social change in education*. Providence, RI: Brown University.
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- Hogan-Garcia, M. (2003). *The four skills of cultural diversity competence*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Oregon State University, National Extension Diversity Center. *Strengthening our Capacity to Serve a Diverse Society*. Retrieved March 21, 2003, from the Diversity Center Web site: <http://natldiversity.extension.oregonstate.edu/staff>
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- Sue, D., Ivey, A., & Petersen, P. (1996). *A Theory of multicultural counselling and therapy*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.