2014 QEP Proposal
Cultural Awareness

According to author and anthropologist James Green, cultural awareness “refers to a kind of sensibility, a frame of mind about cross-cultural [experiences]. It has to do with qualities of openness, alertness, and in particular, flexibility in relations with others. It focuses on attitudes and values and is, in part, a matter of the inner state of the learner.”

Delta State University and the Mississippi Delta create such an amazingly rich convergence of history, culture, and diversity that an outside consultant recently remarked that this area is a “unique resource for discovering America.” In addition to the area’s abundant indigenous resources, the university supports cultural awareness through its university mission, general education curriculum, and various other programs and initiatives.

However, DSU could do much more to tap this deep well. In a recent Foundations of Excellence report, it was noted that there are only a few courses in the curriculum that address diverse ideas and worldviews, and none that are targeted directly to first-year students, with the exception of GST 100, a course designed to orient first-time, fulltime students to the University and college life in general, and the Social Sciences program, which tracks a diversity strand throughout its course of study. Also, in recent surveys, 25% of faculty rated curricular offerings in diversity poorly. Additionally, 35% of first-year students rated overall exposure to diversity poorly.

We propose that the university take deliberate measures to foster cultural awareness and responsiveness among faculty, staff, and students through the infusion of cross-cultural competence and training opportunities in the curriculum and campus-wide cultural activities linked to the curriculum.

Goals and Objectives

1. To infuse cultural awareness and sensitivity into the curriculum, particularly in the general education curriculum
   a. To encourage academic programs to identify culturally relevant strands in degree programs
   b. To encourage faculty to identify culturally relevant topics in individual courses and to develop activities, assignments and assessments to target cultural awareness and sensitivity
2. To link culturally relevant strands in degree programs and individual courses to campus wide events and programs.
   a. To encourage academic programs to plan and implement campus wide events and programs which are a direct outgrowth of program strands
b. To encourage faculty to plan and implement campus wide events and programs which are a direct outgrowth of course activities, assignments and assessments

**Proposed Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of cultural diversity in a global community
2. Students will demonstrate a knowledge and appreciation of the practices and norms of cultures other than their own.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate and interact effectively across cultures.
4. Students will demonstrate awareness and appreciation of cultural differences and the various viewpoints that emerge from these differences.
5. Students will demonstrate the ability to critically analyze and assess global events.
6. Students will acquire the knowledge needed to understand and respect the values, practices, and products of other cultures.
7. Students will demonstrate the ability to acquire information about cultural diversity from a variety of reliable sources.

**Proposed Actions for Implementation**

1. Initiate a program to encourage faculty members and departments/divisions to identify or create at least one course in each degree area that emphasizes cultural awareness and cultural responsiveness. This could be modeled after the initiative in writing across the curriculum.
2. Encourage faculty members and departments/divisions as they create culturally rich classes to work with Diversity Committee to coordinate programming with the objectives/activities/assignments in #1.
3. Evaluate the General Education curriculum in an effort to identify those courses in which cultural awareness is most relevant.
4. Identify a liaison from each college/school to coordinate with the Diversity Committee and the faculty to facilitate identification of courses, creation of course content, implementation of culturally rich courses, and monitoring and follow-up.
5. Require all academic and administrative units to establish an internal diversity mission statement and action plans that are consistent with the university-wide diversity mission statement.
6. Request that unit chairs require faculty to include summary statement on syllabus on how diversity is being incorporated into course material.
7. Incorporate required diversity and multicultural awareness component into freshman seminar/orientation courses (such as GST 100).
8. Allow courses in subject areas that facilitate an appreciation for underrepresented populations as options to satisfy general education or elective requirements (courses in areas such as African American Studies, Women’s Studies, etc.).
9. Promote study abroad opportunities for student exposure to diverse cultures and learning environments.
10. Support (already established) ethnic studies minor as well as courses contained therein.
11. Establish an ESL program in order to better support the international student population.
12. Hire full-time International Student coordinator to guide the recruitment, admission, advising, and retention of international students.
13. Provide campus-wide programs and seminars that focus on cultural diversity-related topics for faculty, staff and students.
14. Develop and implement campus-wide and unit-level reward system for creating/promoting diversity initiatives (e.g. Diversity Committee’s “Diversity Champions”).

Assessment

The campus Diversity Committee administered a survey on attitudes toward cultural diversity to staff, faculty and students several years ago. A subset of questions from the survey could be used as a pre and post measure of student, staff, and faculty attitudes as cultural awareness activities are implemented. The original survey subset question results can serve as a baseline. Surveys can be administered on a regular 2-3 year rotation. Other means of assessment will be outcomes of instructor-administered essays, quizzes, tests, journals, group projects, class discussion, research papers, fieldwork, and individual project assignments.