

## **Transforming the Classroom – and the World: Voices from a Culturally Inclusive Pedagogy Faculty Learning Community**

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### **Abstract:**

*Institutions of higher learning are not equally successful in educating all students. Faculty learning communities and the use of culturally inclusive pedagogies have been shown to help address this achievement gap between majority students and those from under-represented groups. This article provides an overview of multi-disciplinary faculty members' process to transform their pedagogies and curriculum to emphasize cultural inclusion. In addition, revitalized course materials reflecting culturally inclusive pedagogical strategies are made available to readers.*

### **Key Words:**

Faculty learning community, culturally inclusive pedagogies and curriculum, multi-disciplinary faculty development, eliminating achievement gap.

### **Authors' Note**

Authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to the creation of this article.

## Introduction

Institutions of higher learning are not equally successful in educating all of their students (Milem, Chang & Antonio, 2005; Williams, 2013; Gurung & Prieto, 2009). Research has documented that a so-called persistence or achievement gap exists when comparing the academic success of students of color, low-income, and first generation students with students from more privileged backgrounds (Anderson, 2008; Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown & Bartee, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2009). One factor in this achievement disparity is that too often classrooms are characterized by curricula and pedagogies that enforce the perspectives and cultural norms of more privileged students, thereby further marginalizing students from under-represented groups (Danowitz & Tuitt, 2011; Gurung, & Prieto, 2009; Harper & Quaye, 2009).

Culturally inclusive content and pedagogies are those that surface issues of equity, power and privilege that are rooted in our constructs of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, and other social identities (Brown, 2004; Torres, Howard-Hamilton & Cooper, 2003). By offering students the information and skills needed to consciously interrogate and change these social structures, our curricular and pedagogical work can help to transform the classroom and the world as students take these skills out into society (Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994; Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

Faculty learning communities have been identified as a promising practice that offer members an intellectually and emotionally supportive venue in which to examine and enhance their curricular and pedagogical approaches (Beach & Cox, 2009; Cox, 2004; Gurm, 2011; Petrone, 2004; Sandell, Wigley & Kovalchick, 2004; Ward & Selvester, 2012). While the literature on the topic is scant, it does suggest that faculty learning communities which focus on culturally inclusive content and pedagogies are useful in aiding faculty in effectively teaching all students (Decker Lardner, 2003; Koch, Hennessey, Ingram, Rumrill & Roessler, 2006; Petrone, 2004).

This article will add to the existing literature on culturally inclusive faculty learning communities. It offers readers the following: a broad outline of one faculty learning community which emphasized culturally inclusive teaching; a description from four instructors across disciplines regarding changes in their courses; and their revitalized, culturally inclusive syllabi and materials.

## Institutional Context

Bridgewater State University (BSU), a public comprehensive Master's I institution serving over 11,000 students in Southeastern Massachusetts, mirrored the achievement gap evident in higher education. In 2008, BSU's institutional data indicated that students of color and low-income (Pell-eligible) students lagged behind first-time, full-time student retention and graduation rates.

In order to achieve the institutional strategic priorities that address student success, diversity and social justice, BSU implemented data-driven strategies and culturally inclusive methodologies. Key among them was an intensive focus on faculty development. While an array of faculty development strategies and initiatives are utilized at BSU, only two will be mentioned in this article – an intensive summer

pedagogical institute and a year-long faculty learning community focused on culturally inclusive pedagogy (CIP).

In the summer of 2010, with funding from the institution and the Nellie Mae Foundation, BSU offered its first intensive faculty Summer Institute which included a series of pedagogical workshops focusing on culturally inclusive teaching.

In a competitive application process, accepted faculty were compensated \$2000 for their Institute participation and an additional \$1000 upon approval of a final report and course syllabi. Eighteen faculty members attended the Institute's workshops; there they explored the following: understanding how social identities of instructors and students influence classroom interactions; infusing culturally inclusive content in course materials; crafting course syllabi with attention to tenets of culturally inclusive teaching; examining classroom practices and pedagogies; engaging in anti-racist teaching practices; and moving from teacher to teacher-scholar.

## **Culturally Inclusive Faculty Learning Community**

Following the Institute, all participants were invited to join workshop facilitators Drs. Gentlewarrior and Anderson in a nine-month faculty learning community (FLC) to deepen our work on culturally inclusive content and pedagogies. Ten faculty members joined the FLC and explored issues including: addressing gender in the classroom; transforming difficult diversity moments in the classroom into teachable moments; and addressing intersectionality in the teaching-learning process. At the end of the academic year, four FLC participants agreed to continue their involvement and broaden their purpose to include the collaborative creation of this article. The FLC/authorship collaborative met for an additional nine months and supported one another's pedagogical development, course revitalization, and scholarly work on this article.

The authors are comprised of traditionally-gendered, middle-class females who are diverse along racial, ethnic, age, national, religious, sexual orientation identities. We frequently interrogated ourselves – and at times – each other, regarding the ways in which our societal power and privilege influenced our personal and professional practices. While these types of discussions occurred in the larger FLC, ours deepened; perhaps the length of time working together, as well as the smaller number of participants allowed this deeper level of personal and intellectual inquiry.

We also worked to define culturally inclusive pedagogies to help guide our work. We began by adapting a definition offered by Stewart, Crary and Humberd (2008): a culturally inclusive pedagogy removes the barriers that block teachers and students "from using the full range of their competencies and skills and is linked" with teachers and students' "ability to fully and effectively contribute" in the classroom and world (p. 375).

After spirited discussions, Dr. Savas, one of our members, sent the other authors the following unanimously-adopted definition of culturally inclusive pedagogies:

The ultimate goal of CIP is to help students fully develop competencies and skills in order to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world. Learning outcomes of CIP-based courses are thus to distinguish

facts, cultural assumptions, interpretations, and opinions relating to issues of diversity, to take a supportable position in the face of irreconcilable cultural differences, and to think about complex issues from different cultural perspectives. Finally, for the purpose of promoting culturally inclusive pedagogy, it is crucial to create a community of faculty whose members are encouraged to invest in a commitment to effective teaching. It is also important that a university's entire faculty regards pedagogy as a legitimate focus for disciplinary scholarship. Teaching for diversity should also be viewed as a process that strengthens intellectual communities and advances teaching in a scholarly way as well as a product of excellence that is amenable to peer judgment, scholarly examination, and replication of significant results (M. Y. Savas, personal communication, July 21, 2011).

What follows is the salient literature on culturally inclusive pedagogies in each of the instructor's disciplines, as well as an overview of the course revitalization each faculty member undertook as a result of their FLC participation. In addition, their course materials have been made available for download and potential use.

([http://vc.bridgew.edu/fac\\_articles/3/](http://vc.bridgew.edu/fac_articles/3/))

### **Infusing Cultural Inclusion in a “Foreign” Culture Class – Dr. Minae Yamamoto Savas**

Certain characteristics are often assigned to people associated with a specific culture. Why do people make such assumptions about other groups of people? Through studying a foreign culture, students are challenged to scrutinize their preconceived notions about the value systems of other cultures. Challenging students' assumptions about a foreign culture will help them think about complex and diverse social identities in their culture and that of others. Students may discover something new about their own identities and perhaps transform themselves. Learning new cultures and languages thus broadens students' horizons and helps them realize that other ways of living and communicating are just as real as their own. As a result, students become better prepared to succeed in careers and intellectual disciplines as citizens of a diverse and increasingly globalized world. Through my participation in the BSU Teacher-Scholar Summer Institute and FLC, I have deepened my knowledge of theory and research on CIP. I have discovered ways to incorporate my knowledge of CIP and its practice into my courses on foreign cultures.

Students in my courses on Japanese language, culture, and theatre are majoring in all areas of our curriculum: humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and natural sciences. Through my own experiences as a learner of English living in a foreign country, I empathize with students and understand that the ambiguity involved in learning a foreign culture can produce anxiety, stress, and frustration.

Within foreign language and culture education, CIP is an emerging area of study. The lack of attention to CIP discourse in these specific fields of study might suggest that there is a need to raise awareness of the differences between contents and pedagogy that explicitly address issues of cultural inclusion. CIP is not necessarily germane to specific course subject matters. One of the most challenging aspects of designing CIP-

embedded courses is thus to *link CIP principles with* subject matter in order to facilitate student progress toward achieving course goals.

While literature on this topic in Foreign Languages is scant, one of the earliest scholars, Brooks (1968), argues the meaning of the word “culture” was uncertain, he still endeavored to elucidate what culture means in language teaching. Brooks describes culture referring to “the individual’s role in the unending kaleidoscope of life situations of every kind and the rules and models for attitude and conduct in them” (p. 210). Thus, he sheds light onto the dynamic, interactive, and complex nature of culture. Twenty years later, Murphy (1988) draws attention to the issue between language and culture, pointing out that learning languages and cultures of other communities is expected to lead to a better knowledge of self and others (p. 150).

More recently, Kubota, Austin, and Saito-Abbott (2003) have pointed out foreign language study should enable students to critically understand their native culture and its underlying ideologies (p.12). However, their study suggests that foreign language teaching, in general, has not sufficiently explored the diverse backgrounds and learning experiences of students and their perceptions about diversity and the relation between foreign language learning, race, gender, class, and social justice (p. 14). Schulz (2008), in reviewing many definitions of culture or culture learning, stresses that culture learning is a process that is dynamic, developmental, and ongoing and that has cognitive as well as behavioral and affective dimensions. She further points out that cultural patterns are systematic and shared; that they express culture-specific meaning; they differ according to such variables as gender, age, ethnicity, race, education, power, income, religion, and other social and geographical variables; and that cultural patterns can change over time (p. 12). All remind us of the ongoing challenges educators face in the transition from theory to practice.

### **Description of Course Revitalization**

*Japan Through Film and Literature* is a course I designed to explore the foundations of Japan’s cultural expressions through poetry, prose, and performance works from pre-modern Japan as well as their continued influence on modern Japanese literature and culture. The course illuminates some of the broad themes of traditional Japanese literature and highlights the historical, cultural, religious, and socio-political developments that had essential influence on the expression of these themes.

The course introduces readings of selected traditional Japanese literary works. In the readings we pay particular attention to the point-of-view, context, and perspective from which the texts were written. In this course I assign some selected chapters from *The Tale of Genji*, an account of romantic court life in the ancient capital Kyoto, Japan, in the early 11th century, a story attributed to a noblewoman known only by her sobriquet Murasaki Shikibu (Tyler, trans., 2001). The lifestyle described in this so-called first novel in the world is remote from almost every aspect of students’ lives; the characters live in a society that is totally different from their own, not only culturally and temporally, but also socioeconomically.

First, I provide historical context of the Heian court society where *polygyny* was commonly practiced. Men had the exclusive privilege of having more than one spouse at a time, and producing an heir was the purpose of marriage in the view of the Heian

aristocrats. Even with this historical background, some students became emotionally censorious of the hero Genji's numerous relationships with women. No description of Genji's sexual encounters with women is given. Some male students paid more attention to the number of women or the kind of women with whom the hero has relationships or how the relationships start. In contrast, more female students commented on the 'genuine' caring that Genji shows toward all his women. In order to help deepen their thinking, I generate discussion about some issues on human relationships described in the narrative and ask students how these issues are related to us today.

One of the important findings of the CIP-embedded courses that I taught is that when students encounter totally unfamiliar cultural practices, they tend to focus on similarities, mostly because they search for an anchor to hold on to while venturing into a new world. The differences are so visible and apparent that they might feel either intimidated or uncomfortable, not being sure whether they can comprehend the unfamiliar and unknown world. Thus they strive to cultivate familiarity with an unknown culture. Even if they understand the historical, cultural, and social context in which a story was written or a film was produced, they still seem to find it hard to internalize the simple fact that 'other' ways of living are just as real as their own.

By creating a classroom as a forum for discussion, students learn how to process new ideas in an interactive and collaborative manner; through discussions, we can guide students to a deeper level of understanding of the unfamiliar and unknown world and help them reflect upon their preconceived notions about the values systems of other cultures. After examining the eleventh century romance, *The Tale of Genji*, I shift our focus to its modern reworking in contemporary anime. Centering discussion on issues related to the anime version of *The Tale of Genji* is effective in investigating how the media affects the modes of representation and how some of the most famous stories came to be reinvented and reinterpreted in later ages, reflecting shifts in social contexts and attitudes. While challenging students' preconceived notions of Japanese culture, I have endeavored to create a learning community that empowers students. I have helped students find critical resources to learn more about cultural and historical background knowledge in which the tale was written. During class presentations, students shared their findings, which greatly deepened our understanding of the historical fiction written by a Japanese woman.

### **Closing Thoughts**

From vigorous and productive discussions about teaching courses on cultural inclusion in the FLC, I have learned how to be a more effective teacher for students with diverse social identities. I believe flexibility of teaching methods and teaching styles will help me meet the needs of various groups of students in a more effective manner. I strongly believe that continuing discussions on the vital issues within CIP will help us find ways to negotiate the transition from ideology to praxis.

## **Bringing Ideals to Life in A Social Work Practice Course – Dr. Barbara E. Bond**

As a profession, social work is premised on the values of cultural inclusion and social justice (Marsh, 2005; Pearlmuter, 2002; Pelton, 2001). Social work pedagogy and curriculum are guided by values established by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2007), and professional competencies delineated by the Council of Social Work Education (2010). Yet these documents offer educators limited guidance about reaching these ideals, and pose an ongoing challenge for social work educators to create courses which translate these principles and standards into classroom practice.

Group work is one of the basic modalities of social work practice, grounded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century social reform movement. Immigrant workers established settlement houses for other immigrants to engage in group based activities and receive help while they learned about life in their new surroundings (Andrews, 2001). While group work's popularity in social work has waxed and waned, in the current social work literature this legacy is reflected in the directive that group workers must be multi-culturally competent (Anderson, 2007; Burnes and Ross, 2010; Singh and Salazar, 2010). There is a growing awareness that many of the group work models and educational tenets used to educate students are deeply Euro-centric, and not informed by diverse cultures and lived experiences (Bemak & Chung, 2004; DeLucia-Waack & Donigan, 2004).

Culturally inclusive group work education must attend to all the factors essential to creating and facilitating a successful group, while also emphasizing issues of cultural diversity, and the social identities of the facilitator and group members (Singh, Merchant, Skudrzyk, Ingene, Hutchins & Rubel, 2012). It must also address how the experiences of power, privilege and systemic discrimination associated with race, gender, sexual orientation and other social locations, both influence the individual members' lives and group process as these dynamics are brought into the group session (Burnes and Ross, 2010; Hays, Arrendondo, Glading, Toporek, 2010; Ibrahim, 2010; Singh & Salazar, 2010). Social work educators must ensure that students have opportunities to develop self-awareness regarding their own social identities and cultures, learn information regarding diverse groups of people, and practice the skills needed to create and implement groups that both honor the cultures and identities of the group participants while achieving other educational or therapeutic goals specific to the participants' needs (DeLucia-Waack & Donigan, 2004; Smith & Shin, 2008).

### ***Description of Course Revitalization***

As a social work clinician and educator with over thirty-five years' experience facilitating diversity and cultural inclusion work, I understood the necessity of integrating cultural inclusion in teaching the group work course. However, I had not really mapped how diversity might best be woven into the content and process of teaching group work or how I actually worked with issues of cultural diversity in my own group work practice. With the concentrated focus and coaching in the Summer Institute and FLC, I refined my ability to infuse culturally inclusive content and pedagogies in my group course – as well as in all my other courses.

The course discussed here is a graduate-level introductory course in group work which acquaints students with multiple aspects of facilitating treatment and task oriented groups. The group course meets once weekly for two-and-a-half hours and is divided into discreet didactic and experiential segments. Course assignments enable students to demonstrate their culturally inclusive knowledge and group work skills in papers and competency-based demonstrations.

While the group course had previously included case scenarios and role plays with diverse characters, the new syllabus challenged students to probe more deeply into understanding how diversity might influence group members' and facilitator's behavior. The didactic/content and course readings emphasized the influence of different aspects of diversity and the facilitator behaviors which could maximize cultural inclusion, communication and interactions. In every class, students also talked about their own experiences in groups, as well as the possible impact of their own social locations (i.e. gender, class, race, sexual preference, language, ethnicity, religion, ability and educational status) on their interactions with group members and co-leaders. This self-awareness then was utilized in students' application of the group work theory and research, as they practiced strategies for managing dynamics of diversity in their group role plays.

For example, in the early stages of group formation, the critical and customary goal of establishing safety and trust may go unmet if a group facilitator with societal privilege is unaware of the ways in which this privilege can influence the group process. Clients from historically marginalized groups may not feel safe or fully trust therapy or counseling groups, especially when they include facilitators and members from dominant social groups (Smith & Shin, 2008) and unfamiliar cultural conventions about interaction. As an example of managing this dynamic and make developing safety and trust more responsive to diverse participants, students were asked to consider that "public" self-disclosure about emotional issues, which comes easily to some, is quite contrary to the cultural philosophy of others. To be more inclusive, students learned to substitute more private dyad conversations, instead of large group processes, and to invite sharing of less intimate facts about one's family rather than feelings in early group stages.

Group scholars assert that groups operate with a set of values and standards from the dominant culture without awareness that these standards even exist; this dynamic -- of assuming that the dominant cultural norms are the correct ones -- has been named "the absent standard" (Green & Stiers, 2002; Sampson, 1993). Failure to understand this can result in a group culture base on norms not conducive to equal participation and growth for all members.

In an exercise designed to help students address the absent standard in group interactions and expectations, students are asked to role play group characters from diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g. an Asian immigrant daughter, a Latino son, an African American husband, a devout Irish Catholic wife). While care is taken to avoid stereotyping, each character vignette includes some of the cultural differences in health beliefs and health behavior one might see in people from these cultures. The group's co-leaders facilitate the group and in processing it with students, guide them to

recognize these cultural differences, facilitating learning and acceptance and support of each individual's unique growth process.

### ***Closing Thoughts***

Including issues of diversity was a challenge to both students and instructor in that it required both learning (and teaching) the basics of group facilitation while at the same time analyzing the execution of those basics using the lens of diversity and cultural inclusion. At the conclusion of the class, students commented in anonymous feedback forms that they had begun to understand the complexity of including all cultural realities into a group process, but most stated they still did not think they fully understood *how* to facilitate it in future group practice. This is a very reasonable conclusion for students in an introductory group course and a sentiment many seasoned group leaders would probably echo. I have taught the course several times now, and along with other faculty teaching the revised course, have focused more successfully on integrating understanding the impact of diversity on group formation, communication and process, into implementing foundation group facilitation skills.

### **Changing the Playing Field: Cultural Inclusion Applied to a Games Course – Dr. Deborah A. Sheehy**

The Summer Institute was a powerful experience for me because I realized that even though I have firmly-held beliefs about equity and inclusiveness, I have kept those beliefs somewhat hidden—I have been “playing it safe.” I struggled with the frequently-voiced notion identified by Armstrong (2011) that “my course has nothing to do with diversity” and there is little time to cover all of the necessary content, so culturally inclusive practices were not overtly emphasized. This realization reminded me that it was important to take action, make changes where I could, and understand that implementing culturally inclusive teaching is a “learn-as-you-go” proposition (Griffin & Ouellet, 2007).

#### ***Description of Course Re-vitalization***

The genesis of the concept for my course re-vitalization occurred early in my preparation as a teacher-educator when I realized that the traditional ways in which physical educators are taught to teach games are inherently discriminatory. Each time my students of unequal abilities and skills step onto a court or field, the outcome is typically already determined—meaning that one’s physical skill and decision-making capabilities are highly visible and rarely impacted by instruction. Once play begins, everybody knows who’s “got game” and who doesn’t. The ensuing “competition” is but a farce in which prejudice can be unknowingly fostered with the highly skilled students allowed to dominate.

In my 20 years of work, I have noticed those who are attracted to teaching physical education are typically “the jocks”—athletically endowed, usually highly skilled, white, middle class, English-speaking, male students—the upper ten percent (in terms of skill) of the class. Those students have long enjoyed (perhaps unknowingly) positions of power and privilege in the larger culture which is further

solidified in physical education classes; these students are often allowed to dominate other smaller or less skilled students.

It is no secret that the scars left from oppressive physical education game experiences run deep and in fact have contributed greatly to the marginalization of physical education (Sheehy, 2006; Sheehy, 2011). As an educator who is interested in social issues education, I want to make sure that the Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) candidates I teach develop an attitude of cultural inclusion and understand that there is a richness achieved in respect and acceptance of all. My aim is to teach PETE candidates to create nondiscriminatory games focusing on equal opportunities giving all students an equivalent chance to succeed. Games may be used as an "access point" for a broader conversation about power, privilege, and prejudice.

I chose to imbed culturally inclusive resources into my *Theory & Practice of Games*. One goal of the course is to prepare PETE candidates to teach games in a developmentally and instructionally appropriate manner using the Tactical Games Model (TGM) (Mitchell, Oslin, & Griffin, 2006). Course objectives called attention to power and privilege as it plays out in traditional games teaching and to include a focus on culturally inclusive pedagogy for use within TGM.

The first third of the course focused on students' personal experiences while playing games, the impact of their social identities on their participation, and called attention to their stereotypical perceptions of each opponent. Students began by completing a form which provided an opportunity for reflection on their own social identities. Thought-provoking questions were posed with regard to the visibility of each category of social identity and the value assigned to it by society. Sample questions included: How important is this identity to you? How highly regarded is this identity by society as a whole? Additionally, students were asked to contemplate the ways in which their social identity might be viewed in relationship to playing and teaching games.

Notions of power and privilege were then introduced, and students discussed their understanding of the relationship of these concepts to the playing and teaching games. One turning point occurred when the instructor presented an innovative way of modifying games, called "modification by adaptation" (Hopper, Sanford, & Clarke, 2009): the game is modified to increase the challenge to a successful player based on the outcome of the previous game. Changes can be made in relation to the constraints of the game such as space, scoring, rules conditioning play or number of players. This interactive process creates constraints in the game that match the optimum challenge for both players. For example, playing in a quarter of a badminton court in a volleyball-like game called "Space Adapt", after one student scores 2 points; the other player increases the opponent's play area by changing the boundaries such as adding on a quadrant of the court to increase the space. The students play again. The student who does not win then increases the opponent's play space or decreases their own space. Then they play the game again (Hopper, Richardson, & Sheehy, in press). Adaptation, allows students even with disparities in skill to engage in meaningful, yet unpredictable game-play (Hopper, 2011).

Inclusion of the adaptation games became an eye-opening experience for the students. Students could recognize and process that no one type of player was privileged over others. As power shifted, the game took on a life of its own; consequently, a change began to occur in how and what students were learning. For many of these highly-skilled, athletically-inclined students the adaptation games provided a first-time experience of being less powerful and privileged while playing games.

The final two-thirds of the course focused on students teaching games in a culturally-inclusive manner to their peers. For example, attention was called to the poster design students used to supplement each lesson. Students were asked: What messages are you as a teacher sending when displaying posters, pictures, and materials that are geared toward the “dominant” social groups? In addition, lessons were audiotaped, and peer-teachers reviewed the lesson to identify where their speech or actions may have been exclusive. To coincide with the peer-teaching episodes, several readings were assigned that specifically addressed issues of cultural inclusion in physical education and discussions were facilitated in which course participants related the information to the playing and teaching of games. Each reading or class discussion or type of game event was followed by a journal entry, ink-shedding, or some other pedagogical technique for processing the information.

### ***Closing Thoughts***

Once PETE candidates possess a heightened awareness and can begin to truly understand that not all students experience game play in similar fashion, then they are often enthusiastic and passionate about the use of culturally inclusive practices. The students were able to question in earnest the stereotypical assumptions that they held about people who have different social identities than they do. In addition, they could see the impact of teaching practices on equality and justice and identify the need for a language of possibility when working with the diverse students they will teach in the public schools.

## **Incorporating Culturally Inclusive Teaching Techniques into Accounting & Finance Classes: Moving Towards Social Justice - Dr. Jeanean Davis-Street**

Although the global economic meltdown that occurred in 2008 resulted in the largest elimination of financial wealth in the history of the U.S., not everyone was as adversely affected by the downturn as were Women, Minorities, the Poor, the Elderly and Youth (the WMPEY groups) — individuals who have traditionally been economically disadvantaged. In fact, the very investors and bankers who created the risky financial instruments that caused the collapse were spared from most of the losses; many of them actually received bonuses and experienced overall wealth increases in the time period immediately following the collapse (Freifeld, Bloomberg News 2009). As a direct result of the unequal impact of the downturn, the WMPEY group experienced the largest decrease in wealth as the wealth gap rose to its highest level in the past two decades (Taylor, Fry & Kochbar, Pew Research Center 2011).

Following the ethical scandals of Enron, WorldCom and other large corporations in 2000, business schools became more serious about including cultural diversity into the

business curriculum. The new belief was that by building a more diverse workforce and promoting them to higher levels of decision-making within the firm, businesses would better appreciate the cultural values that different groups brought to the table.

Researchers began examining ways to build more cultural inclusivity into the financial sector, (Imboden, JIA, 2005) However, there was still no embrace of true cultural inclusion; business professors were still teaching the same wealth maximization concept but to a wider, more diverse body of students. The devastating economic downturn of 2008 proved how ineffective their efforts were and how naïve and destructive was the emphasis on wealth maximization.

As someone who identifies with three historically disadvantaged groups (I am an African-American woman who grew up extremely poor), I can appreciate firsthand the benefits of instilling a sense of cultural empathy within the very business students who are expected to become the financial and corporate leaders of the business world. Rather than simply emphasizing the profit and wealth maximization goals of the corporation, I have incorporated culturally inclusive teaching into my upper-level investments course to ensure that the business graduates I prepare for the corporate arena are culturally aware and socially responsible individuals who exhibit a high level of corporate ethics and social justice.

### ***Description of Course Revitalization***

My desire to incorporate more cultural inclusion and social responsibility into my class was not a decision that occurred overnight. Rather, it was the culmination of multiple initiatives that I instituted in my finance courses following the collapse of Enron. I was determined to encourage ethical and socially responsible behavior by business students taking my courses. However, when the economic debacle of 2008 occurred, I realized that there was a systemic problem within the business curriculum that was not being addressed, even by me. Although I taught students about ethical decision-making, it was only in the abstract; I still focused mainly on wealth maximization without forcing the student to look at the underlying ethical foundation of corporate decisions and how their own ethical worldview influenced their choices.

Thus, I decided to adjust my course content and structure to emphasize the rights and responsibilities of financial investors and accountants. I was aided in my efforts through my participation in the 2010 Teacher-Scholar Summer Institute and FLC.

When implementing culturally inclusive techniques in my investments course, I taught students that the most successful corporation is one that maximizes the potential of all stakeholders (e.g. employees, consumers, suppliers, government, the broader society, etc.). Rather than focus solely on wealth accumulation, the student was taught how to consider all aspects of the firm's impact on society and to purposely weigh the firm's social behavior against the firm's profitability. Thus, a firm that was highly profitable but socially "irresponsible" may be deemed less valuable than one which had lower profits but practiced "good" social behavior. By encouraging students to view the company holistically, students began to develop a greater awareness and sense of empathy towards all stakeholders in a capitalistic society.

The pedagogical tools that I used to increase student awareness of cultural inclusion and social responsibility were surveys, course-specific articles that were informed by

cultural inclusion, social responsibility and social justice tenets, investment portfolios, class discussion and guest lectures. In the first class meeting, before students were exposed to CIP, students completed a survey on their self-awareness of factors related to cultural, ethical, environmental, global issues and how they impact the corporations included in their investment portfolio. This gave me a baseline idea of the initial level of cultural/social awareness that students have. The survey results indicate that the majority of my students have limited awareness of the role of cultural inclusiveness within the corporation and/or do not consider it to be a major factor when choosing portfolio assets.

Through their creation and management of an investment portfolio, my students recognized that their cultural values could be expressed in their choice of investment assets. I emphasized the importance of advocating socially responsible values through the selection of company stocks. More importantly, students learned that in their role as stockholders of the company—as investors, they were no longer outsiders and bystanders but were in fact, owners of the company and as such had the right to promote and advance their vision of a culturally inclusive corporation via their proxy vote. Finally, students were required to critically examine the corporations they decided to include in their portfolio and to determine if that corporation met the cultural, ethical, environmental, and global standards that the student stood for and that were covered during the course.

### ***Closing Thoughts***

One of the first results I noticed was that there seemed to be a disconnection between students' assessment on their own cultural awareness and the companies they chose to invest in. Many students rated themselves as giving some consideration to culturally inclusive and social responsible characteristics of a company, yet when creating their portfolio, they often included popular companies that are known to have significant culturally inclusive and social responsible characteristics flaws. For example, one student gave high consideration to "paying fair wages, avoiding child labor, reinvesting back in the community" yet that student still included Nike in the portfolio despite the fact that Nike has a record of using child labor and conducting operations in foreign country sweat-shops. This indicated to me that the student saw no dissonance in their personal stance versus their investment objective.

Students also were highly cognizant of the ethical lapses of Enron but seemed to think that newly passed regulation was sufficient to address these issues and therefore they did not have to investigate the corporate responsibility of firms as closely as in the past. This unwillingness to research the business practices of a firm could lead students to once again focus only on profitability and wealth maximization.

Going forward, I would like to have students understand the long term implications that occur when firms make decisions that support low levels of cultural inclusiveness, corporate responsibility and/or social justice. My 5-week summer course was not long enough to instill a strong sense of social responsibility nor did students have enough time to evaluate or adjust their portfolio to reflect newly-acquired knowledge on cultural inclusion. In a regular 15-week course, I could address these shortcomings and also incorporate a session highlighting the fact that socially responsible firms have financially

outperformed their socially “irresponsible” counterparts in the long run (Davidson, Forbes 2011). This validation that being socially responsible has financial as well as societal benefits should lead professors in the accounting and finance disciplines to focus more heavily on corporate and social responsibility.

## Conclusion

Over the past six years, Bridgewater State University has substantially decreased the achievement gap between students of color, first generation students, and students from low income families, as compared to our first-time, full-time students. While multiple factors led to this institutional achievement, the use of culturally inclusive pedagogies is widely regarded as being a primary factor in our student success efforts.

As shared earlier, the FLC members believe that “teaching for diversity should . . . be viewed as a process that strengthens intellectual communities and advances teaching in a scholarly way, as well as a product of excellence that is amenable to peer judgment, scholarly examination, and replication of significant results” (M. Y. Savas, personal communication, July 21, 2011). Members of this learning community have actualized most of these goals, as illustrated in the foregoing narratives. Going forward, these authors plan to continue to collaborate. Some possibilities include the following: generating additional scholarship, facilitating faculty development workshops, consulting to campus teaching & learning circles, and providing personal/ professional support.

It is hoped that our colleagues in higher education will examine the pedagogy and course materials made available in this article ([http://vc.bridgew.edu/fac\\_articles/3/](http://vc.bridgew.edu/fac_articles/3/)) and combine them with their own culturally inclusive pedagogical innovations. Together we can work toward the “significant result” of effectively teaching *all* of our students the skills and perspectives needed “to live responsible, productive, and creative lives in a dramatically changing world” (M. Y. Savas, personal communication, July 21, 2011).

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