

By Debbie Baker
Staff



Multiculturalism: The Need To Diversify Curricula

Striving to incorporate a minority view into the traditional college setting

Racial bigotry is spreading on college campuses across the nation. Ethnic and racial minorities have become the victims of ever-increasing numbers of hate crimes at these universities. Hate crimes are disturbing because the nature of the country is becoming more and more diverse as people of color begin to comprise a larger proportion of the population. Several college campuses around the country have realized the importance of examining the cultures of minorities in their courses. Some universities have also decided to incorporate a minority view into their curricula because too many are taught from a Eurocentric perspective. Multiculturalism has become a standard across the country as colleges attempt to address the needs of its increasingly diverse student population.

The Rise in Bigotry and Biasness on College Campuses

The reports of racial harassment and other incidents have increased across the nation. On today's college campuses, the problem is no longer just racial — there is also an increase in ethnic discrimination, sexism and homophobia. The bigotry that exists on campuses indicates the need for better understanding among dif-

ferent groups of people.

"Racial incidents on college campuses have made people aware that prejudice still exists in our society," said Dr. Greg Ricks, a multicultural educator at Stanford University. "One way for people to reach another level of consciousness would be to develop a more diversified curriculum."

The National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence, a non-profit organization, has catalogued hate crimes in the country for several years. These crimes include many that occurred at the nation's institutions of higher learning. Over the past five years, more than 174 campuses have reported incidents. At Malacaster College in St. Paul, Minn., five Asian students found their dorm vandalized and "KKK" written on their door. A black counselor found the words "death nigger" carved on the office of his door at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. At Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., an anti-apartheid shanty was set on fire while two student protesters sat inside. At the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Miss., the Phi Beta Sigma fraternity house there was destroyed by arson. These are just a few of the hate crimes that have occurred on college campuses, and

the numbers seem to be growing every day.

Some 20 percent of minority students surveyed by the institute said they had been harassed at least once, and some had encountered multiple harassments.

One institution that has experienced an increase in hate crimes is the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. UNC is a place that can be examined as a case study in how groups of people get along. Several hate crimes have occurred over the past few months, which show that UNC is not indeed the "southern part of heaven." All people at UNC are not allowed to live freely.

Provost Dennis O'Connor said hate crimes have increased because some students have not been exposed to different groups of people. "I think that a lot of our students still come from areas where they have never had to socialize or deal with minority students. Some of them may become scared or even intimidated by the presence of other students who are, for the first time, different from them."

Deep-seeded prejudice and hatred must also be seen as reasons for the growing number of hate crimes on campus. Some students are taught from the time they are young to dislike people

based on skin color, religion or ethnicity. Historical prejudice must be taken into account when trying to explain the recent batch of hate crimes on campus.

Hate crimes at UNC probably occur every day, but several over

Cover Story

the past few months have really stood out. The defacement of a Harvey Gantt campaign poster initiated a wave of hate crimes at the University. Laura Anderson, the 1990 homecoming queen, received racist notes on her car. The Cube in front of the Student Union seemed to be an open forum for the expression of bigotry. More recently, a poster announcing the Martin Luther King Jr. celebration was defaced with slurs linking King and the questioned plagiarism of his doctoral thesis. An announcement by the Carolina Gay and Lesbian Association was defaced with homophobic slurs. Posters belonging to UNITAS, a multicultural living and learning program, were also defaced.

UNC's renowned reputation has been threatened with the racist environment that exist on campus.

Universities across the country, including UNC-CH, must make attempts to ensure that all students are allowed to live peacefully on their campuses.

Defining Multiculturalism

Universities usually have a difficult time defining exactly what multiculturalism is. Everyone says it's a good policy but no one really knows what it means. The inability to define multiculturalism seems to be one of the biggest obstacles facing students and administrators who want to diversify their curricula.

Dr. Ricks said multiculturalism may not even be the appropriate word. "One of the biggest problems with multiculturalism is that multiculturalism includes everyone. The term is expanded to include the culture of white Americans, when the primary purpose is to educate them about the culture of nonwhites," he said.

In a general sense, multiculturalism is an attempt to include aspects of nonwhite cultures that had not previously been included in the curricula. The incorporation of multiculturalism involves the development of courses that include a minority perspective within an established course. In other words, you could possibly take a history course that now exists and include a minority perspective. A second aspect of multiculturalism requires that students take a course dealing specifically with the his-

tory or culture of a different group of people. AFAM 40 would be an example of a survey course aimed specifically at examining the history and culture of a racial minority.

Dr. Darryl Gless is the associate dean of general education in the College of Arts and Sciences. Dr. Gless gave his own definition of a multicultural curriculum.

"It is one in which faculty in any discipline are aware of teaching strategies that are best used in classes where students come from different racial and ethnic groups. No matter what the subject matter, the courses should be taught in ways that satisfy minority needs which have not been done before."

As students and administrators work to initiate multicultural programs, they should also develop a universal definition of multiculturalism.