May 16th, 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Diversity Climate Assessment of the Communication Studies Department

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The diversity assessment of communication instruction and curriculum, to date, is yet to meaningfully incorporate student voices (Halualani, 2010). In fact, Halualani (2010) is the first comprehensive empirical study in the classroom science literature that investigates diversity in communication instruction and curriculum. According to Staatsa (2010) and Hendrix and Wilson (2014), the White-washed curriculum in the communication discipline does not reflect the backgrounds of the scholars and the students it serves.

Accordingly, my research is meant to live up to the communication studies department’s mission—"We teach communication studies that nurture inclusive civil discourse, critical thinking, and co-operative solutions in a diverse global community" (WWU Comm. Dept. Mission Statement)—and to provide a meaningful assessment and understanding of the diversity climate. While all instructors claim their support for diversity in their instruction and research, the amount of attention devoted to this subject, alone, is abysmal. Still, the consequences of disregarding a diversity assessment are even more severe, as it leads to the perpetuation of dominance and normalization of Whiteness (Nakayama & Kitzik, 1995).

According to Staatsa (2010), empirical journals in the discipline refuse to publish perspectives of marginalized groups regarding racial and diversity issues. He evidenced higher publication acceptance rates among White researchers writing intercultural studies than among non-White researchers (Starosta, 2010). Kramarae’s (1981) claim of the White’s ability to publish his race-relations = 62), and nability = 53.4% (32 of the 60 syllabi mention race in communication, race-relations = 58.9%), and the terms that did not appear were race-relations = 62), and nability = 53.4% (32 of the 60 syllabi mention race in communication, race-relations = 58.9%), and the terms that did not appear were

In this study, I aim to observe the occurrence of such norms in the department community and to reveal how they may silence students’ opportunity to engage in deep, meaningful racial dialogue that disrupts White normalization.

The term that appeared most frequently among all 60 syllabi was culture (n = 109), followed by diversity (n = 62), and ability (n = 49).

The term that did not appear were diversity, absence, exclusivity, minority, race in communication, and race-relations.

The term culture also appeared in more individual syllabi than any other term, with an average occurrence rate of n = 53.4% (2 of the 60 syllabi mention culture at least once).

The second most apparent term was ability (n = 50%) with 50 syllabi including the term, and diversity (n = 53.4%) was the third most apparent with 52 syllabi.

The following terms only appear in one out of 60 syllabi: equity, ethnic identity, white identity, whiteness, each with an average appearance rate of n = 1.7%.

Student Responses:

1. Diversity is a standard of openly listening to the experiences of others and taking them for what they are.

2. Diversity is setting in people of different perspectives or backgrounds to share a common goal and space, such as a class.

3. Diversity is demographic representation, including groups of people who differ in race, ethnicity, age, gender, class, sexual orientation, and the like.

4. Given your overall experience, how would you describe the diversity climate at the department?

Student Responses:

1. Students reported a positive climate in need of improvement.

2. Because of diversity, I think it is a better place to have a lot of growth and to learn about the different cultures.

3. Students reported an appreciation of diverse courses, including courses that deal with issues of diversity and that are not taught in other courses.

4. Students agreed that their communication curriculum lacks diversity coverage and is in need of improvement.

5. The term culture has been used in the department and in a multiracial university on the U.S. West Coast. According to Starosta 2010, diversity can be seen in such a practice. Apparently, “It definitely forced me to expand my own view point and seek out multiple viewpoints when approaching any issue in life, not just racial issues, but… another thing it did for me was it showed me that issues that aren’t there in other courses and that seem actually be real good for us as students and future professionals in the workforce.” (Participant 9: p. 12-16)

5. In regards to curriculum, participants reported instructors’ use of classroom materials as White-washed, since predominantly White authors and White viewpoints are presented.

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7. Furthermore, students positively regarded the unique opportunity for comprehensive investigation and meaningful discussions about race.

8. In this study, I observed that I’ve really talked about diversity and diversity issues within the education system is the issue of Intercultural [Communication] (Participant 9: p. 4-10)

9. It requires spaces for students and professors of color, such as (Participant 5: p. 8; 1-7)

10. Students agreed that their communication skills improve as a result of such dialogue.

11. With my White professors, no because they’re not necessarily comfortable talking about... whereas they should be starting earlier, especially with the major being a professional degree.

12. I do not think I am the only one that I’ve really talked about diversity and diversity issues within the education system is the issue of Intercultural [Communication] (Participant 9: p. 4-10)

13. I don’t feel like I’ve increased my skills in working with diversity or inclusion or anything like that... (Participant 5: p. 23-25; 9: 1)

14. I think it is a better place to have a lot of growth and to learn about the different cultures.

15. It is really rare for me to actually be real good for us as students and future professionals in the workforce. (Participant 9: p. 12-16)

16. I think that I’ve really talked about diversity and diversity issues within the education system is the issue of Intercultural [Communication] (Participant 9: p. 4-10)

17. They noted that White professors provide more challenging coursework and exposure to topics.

18. The most commonly mentioned courses were upper-division ‘Intercultural Communication’ and ‘Issues in Intercultural Communication’ for several reasons.

19. Regarding the term culture, students reported that it has been used in the department and in a multiracial university on the U.S. West Coast. According to Starosta 2010, diversity can be seen in such a practice. Apparently, “It definitely forced me to expand my own view point and seek out multiple viewpoints when approaching any issue in life, not just racial issues, but… another thing it did for me was it showed me that issues that aren’t there in other courses and that seem actually be real good for us as students and future professionals in the workforce.” (Participant 9: p. 12-16)

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