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

Diversity Climate Assessment of the Communication Studies Department

Annapurna Beavon  
Western Washington University

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The diversity assessment of communication instruction and curriculum, to date, is yet to meaningfully incorporate student voices (Habulaniak, 2010). In fact, Habulaniak (2010) is the first comprehensive published study in the communication discipline that investigates diversity in communication instruction. According to Stastos (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 non-coercive dialogues in a diverse global community" (WWU, Comm. Dept. Mission Statement)—and to provide evidence of diversity 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 & Tzek, 1995).

According to Stastos (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 poor diversity climate also points to students’ transition to college. The Review of Higher Education, 31(3), 270-285. Moreover, Kwame (2008) chose subscales that best fit the purpose of this study: (a) to examine students’ perception of classroom climate and the impositions of the dominant group, and (b) to investigate interactions between students and professors that encourage or silhouette the voices of subordinate groups. Although campus climate assessment data are available, the data are not specific to students who take communication classes (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson & Young, 2014; Locke, Hatt, Goerdon, & Osagie, 2010). Thus far, I have conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 13 students who have taken at least four communication classes and been attending the classes in the past two academic quarters. These selection criteria are imposed to ensure that the participants are familiar with the perspective on the diversity climate of the department. Students’ feedback, thus, can be used to encourage conversations and actions. Recommendations proposed by students may be used to enhance cultural, curricular, and administrative matters in the department and the whole campus community. In short, this diversity assessment indicates the need for the department to move toward racial equity. Students’ voice, thus, can be used to encourage conversations and actions. Recommendations proposed by students may be used to enhance cultural, curricular, and administrative matters in the department and the whole campus community. In short, this diversity assessment indicates the need for the department to move toward racial equity.