

Celebrating Diversity and Welcoming Differences

What does it take to create an environment that is safe and welcoming for everyone? Here are a few ways to begin the process of welcoming new people, ideas and backgrounds into the mix!

Diversity is Just That...Diverse

Sometimes it is easy to just think about race and heritage when the terms *diversity* and *multiculturalism* are mentioned. However, your campus community includes diversity beyond cultural backgrounds. What about the diversity of the community in areas such as: gender, physical ability, geography, economics, sexuality, faith, age, and family backgrounds?

You truly are living in a salad bowl and every year new members bring new diversity to your college community. Celebrate it!

Learn About Multicultural Campus Resources

Student leaders are often seen as resources regarding services on campus for non-majority students. Become familiar with the diversity of your campus—the names of the offices, organizations, and clubs on campus who have “multiculturalism” at the core of their mission. Also consider what opportunities exist on campus for YOU to immerse yourself in different cultural experiences.

Use Inclusive Language

Tune into cultural cues when you consider your use of language. Inclusive language sends the message that you value, accept, and respect all people. Here are a few tips:

- Direct eye contact is considered disrespectful by some Asian cultures. Don't assume that an averted gaze is a sign of disinterest or disrespect.
- Don't comment on people's bodies directly or indirectly. You never know who may be struggling with body image issues.
- Make sure that when you talk about siblings, you also include only children in the conversation.
- Don't assume that all romantic relationships are heterosexual. Figure out comfortable language that includes all different types of relationships.

Can You Answer These Questions?

- What is the college's diversity population? What populations are represented?
- What initiatives are being taken to increase diversity enrollment and to support non-majority students on campus?
- How do students find support groups or special population groups? What groups are represented on campus?
- Who are the key contacts on campus for non-majority students?
- What courses are offered that explore multicultural topics?
- What programs are offered that introduce students to different cultures?

- If someone is late, it may be a cultural thing rather than a purposeful lack of respect. Don't criticize them publicly.
- Use examples from a variety of religions and don't take it as a fact that everyone believes in God.
- Don't just use student culture references (i.e. celebrities, musicians, trends, etc.) that apply to traditional-aged students. Non-traditional students may feel excluded if you do.

Watch your Words

Be aware that language is very powerful and can make or break an experience for someone. Consider alternatives to commonly used “exclusive” words:

Instead of...	Replace with...
Freshmen	New Students
Boys/Girls	Men/Women
Parents	Family Members
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	Partner or Significant Other
Handicapped	Person with a Disability