Developing Pedagogies to Enhance Excellent and Diversity Summer Seminar Sponsored by the Office of Institutional Diversity

Pedagogical Innovation Report Linh Nguyen Littleford June 9, 2010

Background: Two of the goals I have for my undergraduate Social Psychology course (PSYSC 316) are:

- 1. Students will gain awareness of and become knowledgeable about various cultural identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, socioeconomic status, abilities) and their influence on people's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and experiences.
- 2. Students will know and be able to accurately apply the basic terminology and key principles, theories, figures, and research findings in social psychology.

Thus far, I have attempted to infuse cultural diversity issues in this course by discussing psychological research that included various cultural identities and their intersections, by providing examples that deviate from the dominant culture's assumptions, by showing videos that illustrate stereotyping and discrimination experienced by minority group members, and by leading discussions on required readings (e.g., Life on the Color Line: The Story of a White Boy who Discovered he was Black). Although not without merits, all of these strategies have allowed me to maintain control over the content of what students learn about and discuss. The first reason I have exerted so much control in my classroom is because of the negative feelings, resistance, and hostility that invariably arise when students learn about oppression and privilege. The second reason is that there are basic social psychological concepts, theories, and studies about which students need to know before completing the course. Thus, to accomplish goal #2, I am usually not able to devote the time necessary to discuss in depth issues of oppression and privilege with my students. The third reason for my reluctance to relinquish control of my class is because I assumed students expected me to be the source of course content and knowledge.

After completing the readings and hearing the points raised in this seminar, I have decided to take some risks. I particularly found relevant to my teaching the issues related to intrinsic motivators (e.g., public demonstration of knowledge, social interactions, and self-generated learning) and controlled failure. Thus, during the 2010-2011 academic year, I plan to implement the following pedagogical changes:

At least once every two weeks, students will work in groups during class to solve a social
problem, a hypothetical personal problem, or other tasks relevant to college student
life. My objective is to have students learn about, apply, and illustrate social
psychological concepts through self-generated learning (with some guidance from me).
 So I will refrain from always telling students what the concepts, theories, and studies

mean and how they are applied, in that order. Instead, students will generate their own theories and ways to test the concepts. I believe this process will help students differentiate among similar concepts and will provide me with feedback about which concepts are unclear to students. In addition, I think this process will make learning more interactive and fun.

- During these activities, students will be expected to include cultural diversity issues and various social identities in their applications (e.g., bystander effect involving victims who appear to be Muslims).
- Each group will briefly present their work to the entire class.
- So that I will not rely so much on PowerPoint and to encourage students to read the book, I will provide them with a list of concepts and theories they are expected to know before coming to class.
- I will continue to encourage students to share their experiences with cultural diversity (E.g., Students introduce themselves by talking about their names—their meanings, cultural origins, or anything else they know about their names).
- I will utilize a clicker classroom response systems to ensure anonymity when responding to sensitive questions and to gauge whether the classroom atmosphere feels safe for students to speak about class concepts as they relate to non-dominant groups.