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What is the Cultural Competency Council?

The Cultural Competency Council was started as a goal for the Diversity Impact Program, which is a part of NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The Diversity Impact Program supports professionals from underrepresented institutions by helping them:

- Expand capacity
- Grow study abroad programs
- Increase student competencies

The Cultural Competency Council is under the umbrella of the College's Multicultural Programming Advisory Council. This council sponsors and hosts many educational and cultural opportunities that embrace diversity.

Three JCCC employees make up the Cultural Competency Council: Jaya Daniel (Coordinator, International and Immigrant Students), Farrell Hoy Jenab (Director, Faculty Development), and Robbie Miller (Diversity Recruiter). The council has three primary objectives:

1. Create a "safe space" to have a dialogue, educate and inform that diversity has benefits and a positive effect on the community.
2. Respect and acknowledge the traditions and practices of different cultures and people without judgement.
3. Reduce unconscious bias and embrace one another's uniqueness.

Council Structure

Since its inception in September 2018, the Cultural Competency Council has held six discussions. The topics of these discussions included: Ageism, #MeToo Movement, Religion, Mental Health Awareness, Implicit Bias, Family History, and LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+). Each discussion lasted 90 minutes and took place in the CoLab Collaboration Center, specifically the Big 10 Conference Room and the Learning Studio.

Guests who have attended the discussions include staff and faculty members who work in various departments across campus: Access Services, Admissions, Grants Leadership & Development, Humanities, Human Resources, International and Immigrant Student Services, KSBDC (Kansas Small Business Development Center), Nursing, Records, Science Resource Center, Sustainability Initiatives, and Veteran and Military Student Services.

When a guest attends one of our discussions, they are given a copy of our disclosure statement. It states that participants will:

- Be respectful and civil to each other's opinions
- Avoid using disparaging or discriminatory language
- Not interrupt when others are speaking
- Recognize that diversity is constantly evolving with societal norms
- Understand the concept of diversity is broad and includes age, cognitive style, culture, disability (mental, learning, physical), economic background, education, ethnicity, gender identity, geographic background, language(s) spoken, marital/partnered status, physical appearance, race, religious beliefs and more.

Generally, our discussion begins with a short presentation by the facilitator – either Jaya, Farrell or Robbie. We start with a presentation so we can give our guests some context about the topic we are discussing. Some common elements included within our presentations are short videos (YouTube or media outlets), definitions and articles.

Following the presentation, the facilitator begins by asking guests questions about the topic at hand. Typically, our guests raise their hands if they would like to share, or we go around the table to make sure everyone receives a chance to talk. We usually have three to five questions to ask about the topic. If there is enough time, we attempt to email the questions to our guests before the discussion so they can have a chance to think about each one.

Each discussion has been well received by our guests and has often led to some of them asking to come to another discussion. We believe our discussions have been successful so far, with the help of the three components of cultural competency:

- Active listening
- Demonstrating empathy
- Effective engagement

These have helped – and will continue to help – create a welcoming environment in relation to our discussions. They will also help us to continue to establish the appreciation, similarities and differences among cultures.

Discussions

Ageism

The Cultural Competency Council's first discussion topic was **Ageism**. Held on October 12, 2018, and facilitated by Robbie, guests from various departments on campus attended this discussion. These departments included the Success Center, International & Immigrant Student Services and Foreign Languages.

To begin the meeting, we each answered a few warm-up questions related to age such as, "What is your favorite childhood memory?" and "What do you enjoy most about your life presently?" Next, we learned the definition of "age" as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

Following this, we played a game called "Which Generation Is This?" During the game, participants were given clues to assist them in figuring out which generation was being represented. Examples of the generations included in the game were Generation Z, Traditionalists and Baby Boomers. After the game, we

discussed an ageism-related question: "Have you ever experienced or witnessed ageism?"

The primary takeaway from this discussion was that a person's age does not determine their value as a human being. Simply put, age is certainly a number, but it is also a state of being that can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

#MeToo Movement

November 8, 2018, was the date of the council's second discussion, **#MeToo Movement**. This discussion was carefully facilitated by Farrell, as this topic has become an important part in the fight for awareness and equality within American society in relation to sexual misconduct.

It did not take long for our guests to share their thoughts and opinions after we watched a YouTube video at the beginning of the discussion. The video talked about the #MeToo Movement and featured clips from attorney Anita Hill's testimony about alleged sexual harassment toward her by Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Clarence Thomas.

As soon as the video was over, everyone in the room shared their opinion about Anita's story, how far the #MeToo Movement has come since the 1990s, the movement's current state, and what the future holds for the United States in terms of eliminating sexual misconduct. This part of the discussion was so impactful that as a result, we also unknowingly answered the questions that Farrell had prepared for us to answer.

Everyone who attended this discussion walked away feeling more knowledgeable about the #MeToo Movement. We also left prepared to condemn all forms of sexual misconduct, no matter when it took place, what a victim was wearing, or any other factor that causes people to seemingly disregard or condone sexual misconduct.

Religion

Religion was the council's third topic of discussion and was facilitated by Jaya. This discussion was held on December 7, 2018. We were fortunate enough to have a variety of different religions represented among our guests. The religions represented included Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. We also had guests who identified as Atheist and Spiritual.

During the discussion, we learned the definition of religion as defined by the Oxford Dictionary: *The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.* After learning about the definition of religion, our guests shared their thoughts and beliefs about the impact of religion

within their lives. A summary of these thoughts and beliefs was that religion or a belief in a higher power gave hope, moral guidance, compassion, rituals, connection to their culture, a way of life and cohesion to a social group. Participation in a religious ritual or meditation also gives a sense of peace from the stresses of life.

While everyone seemingly agreed that religion has positively impacted their lives at some point, some of the younger guests spoke of how they view religion today. They spoke of how, as an adult, they are questioning religion, which seemed to be the opposite view of the older guests. They also mentioned how it seems that people are slowly moving away from organized religion as they feel the power and control is misused by religious leaders.

However, even as a practitioner or a questioner of religion, all of us agreed with sentiments from the Dalai Lama (primary Gelug spiritual leader): "Whether one believes in a religion or not, and whether one believes in rebirth or not, there isn't anyone who doesn't appreciate kindness and compassion."

In conclusion, our discussion about religion was both impactful and insightful. We also agreed that working for the common good as humans is what connects those who are religious and non-religious. As U.S. President Woodrow Wilson stated, "There is no higher religion than human service. To work for the common good is the greatest creed."

Spring 2019 Semester

Mental Health Awareness

The council's first discussion of the spring 2019 semester was about **Mental Health Awareness**. Held on Friday, January 18, 2019, and facilitated by Robbie, the discussion began with a definition. Mental Health as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary is "*the condition of being sound mentally and emotionally that is characterized by the absence of mental illness and by adequate adjustment, especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life.*"

Following this, we viewed a short YouTube video about the discussion's topic entitled, "What is Mental Health?" The video gave a short, but detailed, overview about what mental health is, the continuum relating to it and disorders.

Next, we learned about people who are no longer alive due to alleged mental health reasons, concerns or disorders. Toward the end of the discussion, we

discussed questions relating to mental health, such as the stigma that surrounds it and people we know who suffer from mental health disorders.

We learned that mental health is just as important as physical health and should be taken very seriously. Attendees heard how it is integral to our overall well-being, and that we should recognize when our mental health is doing well and when it is not doing so well.

Implicit Bias

On February 22, 2019, we held a discussion about **Implicit Bias**, facilitated by Farrell. Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner (The Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University).

To assist with understanding this topic, we took a test about implicit bias. The purpose of the test was to help us discover whether we have any implicit biases. Here is a link to the test: <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/iat/racframe.htm>.

At the beginning of the discussion, we talked about the quiz and listened to the feedback of those who volunteered to share their results. We also discussed a few questions related to the topic at hand. This discussion was really insightful, as it encouraged us to be vulnerable and honest about thoughts and ideas that may have run through our head at one point in time with regard to implicit bias.

Family History

Family History was the topic for the council's third discussion of the semester. This discussion was facilitated by Jaya, and not only allowed us to discuss the histories of our families, but also our cultural identities. Attendees represented Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The beginning of the discussion revolved around the idea that America is considered a "melting pot" as people from around the world have settled here. We talked about how, although the primary culture is Western European, other cultures include African, Native American, Asian, Polynesian and Latin. We reaffirmed how each culture brings a unique prospective to this diverse nation.

Throughout the discussion, we shared our origins of which country or countries we came from, as well as family traditions and customs. As proud Americans, we understood that our diverse backgrounds inspire simple learning from each other. We also confirmed how it helps transform lives when we acknowledge that people are more alike than different and strengthens community by having better and informed citizens.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+)
The last Cultural Competency Council meeting of the semester was held on May 24, 2019. The topic of the discussion was **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+**. The discussion was facilitated by Robbie and began with each part of the aforementioned acronym being defined according to Merriam-Webster and Oxford Dictionaries.

Following the definitions, we watched a video entitled, "Defining LGBTQ." Courtesy of YouTube, the video gave an overview of the first five letters of the acronym, as well as the letters that make up the plus: Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Ally, Pansexual and Two Spirit. *(It should also be noted that there may be other letters that are part of the acronym of which the editor, Robbie Mitchell, is not aware.)*

After the video, we discussed questions related to same-sex marriage legalization, bisexual erasure, transgenderism and queer. This discussion proved to be very eye-opening as not everyone was aware of what some of the terms meant. It was even suggested that perhaps a second discussion on this topic would be warranted.

Reception

We are so fortunate that all of our discussions have generated meaningful conversations amongst ourselves

and our guests. Going forward, we are definitely going to continue having our enriching discussions. We are excited to introduce even more topics with which our future guests may not be familiar.

Thank you so much to all of our guests who attended our discussions. You openly talked about topics that can be considered very personal. You listened to other people who you have never met before and truly showed how we – as humans – are more alike than we are different.

Thank you to our honorary members who took such an interest in our council that you attended multiple discussions. You made – and continue to make – us feel that we are doing something positive on campus.

Thank you to the Multicultural Programming Advisory Council who has supported us since we came to fruition last year. You have been a great system of support and encouragement for us.

Lastly, thank you to MargE Shelley, Assistant Dean of Enrollment Management, and Kim Steinmetz, Program Director for International & Immigrant Services, for your continued support. We truly appreciate it.

If you are interested in learning more about the Cultural Competency Council, please feel free to reach out to Jaya Daniel, Farrell Jenab or Robbie Miller.

Meet the Cultural Competency Council Members



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