

Increasing Diversity Education at Cal Poly Through Intergroup Dialogues

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While serving previously as a senior university administrator and more recently as a CRP faculty member, David Conn introduced to Cal Poly an approach to diversity education known as Intergroup Dialogues (IGD). In writing about the experience to date, he is joined by psychology professor Jennifer Teramoto Pedrotti, who teaches an IGD course, and Alice Zanmiller, a CRP student who trained and participated as an IGD peer facilitator.

Based on compositional data (i.e., numbers of non-White students, faculty, and staff), Cal Poly is not a racially diverse campus, certainly not representative of the California population in this regard. For a variety of reasons, the university continues to struggle to attract and retain people of color, especially African Americans. Irrespective of the compositional makeup, however, as educators the faculty have a responsibility to prepare students to live and work effectively and harmoniously in an increasingly diverse world. Consequently, in 2008 the faculty adopted a set of “Diversity Learning Objectives” (DLOs) setting out what every student should know and be able to do upon graduation. The DLOs are stated as follows:

“All Students who complete an undergraduate or graduate program at Cal Poly should be able to make reasoned decisions based on a respect and appreciation for diversity.

Students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of relationships between diversity, inequality, and social, economic, and political power both in the United States and globally
2. Demonstrate knowledge of contributions made by individuals from diverse and/or underrepresented groups to our local, national, and global communities
3. Consider perspectives of diverse groups when making decisions
4. Function as members of society and as professionals with people who have ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that are different from their own.” (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, n.d.).

Although presently available evidence is not conclusive, there is reason to suppose—based on an assessment of the more broadly-based University Learning Objectives (ULOs) and findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement—that students’ attainment of the DLOs upon graduation is

generally at the “basic” level rather than at the sought-after “moderate” or “complex” levels which would indicate that significant learning had taken place during their college experience at Cal Poly. Although every student is required to meet a one course “U.S. Cultural Pluralism” requirement, the assessment results do not indicate that having done so makes a large positive contribution to diversity learning as defined by the DLOs.

Diversity learning is important not only for preparing culturally competent graduates but also for its potential impact on campus climate, and thus recruitment and retention. As reported in the University’s 2012 self-study (prepared for the Western Association of Schools and Colleges), available evidence suggests that while most students do not believe that the campus climate is a problem, there is a fraction that does (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, 2012). These data are somewhat confounded, however, by the large numbers of students at Cal Poly who identify as White or Caucasian American, heterosexual, and/or Christian in terms of religion, and the fact that these are not generally groups discriminated against. Looking specifically at the experiences of racial, ethnic, sexual, and/or other types of minority groups may tell a different story.

Though mostly informal, anecdotes and observations made by students of color, members of the LGBTQ community, and others suggest that microaggressions are not unusual, both on campus and in the surrounding community. Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace, daily, verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, 2010, p. 5). Other survey data as well as less formal observations contribute to a sense that Cal Poly is not as welcoming as it might be to students who are different from the majority.

Intergroup Dialogues at Cal Poly

As one of many possible approaches to increasing diversity learning at Cal Poly, in 2009 a small group of Student Affairs professionals together with a few faculty looked to a model that was developed over twenty years previously at the University of Michigan and subsequently adopted at many universities and colleges nationwide. Intergroup Dialogues (IGD) courses bring together members of two different social identity groups (e.g., People of Color and White people, women and men, individuals of high and low socioeconomic status, Christians and Jews, heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals). A guided and structured curriculum is used to engage members of different groups in face-to-face interactions, with the following objectives (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, & Zúñiga, 2009):

- To develop intergroup understanding by helping students explore their own and others' social identities and statuses, and the role of social structure in relationships of privilege and inequality;
- To foster positive intergroup relationships by developing students' empathy and motivation to bridge differences of identities and statuses; and
- To foster intergroup collaboration for personal and social responsibility toward greater social justice.

In the Michigan model, for the identity being examined, IGD courses include equal numbers of students (6–8) from each social identity group (12–16 in total). They usually meet weekly, for one 2 to 3 hour session, across a 10 to 12 week period. Two trained facilitators, preferably one from each identity group, guide the dialogues. Although students are often eager to jump into controversial hot topics, anticipating provocative discussions, IGD is not merely a space to talk about issues, opinions, and perspectives. It is an educational program that provides students with opportunities to learn how to communicate effectively across different perspectives in order to prevent the fatal pitfalls that can characterize intergroup interactions while promoting positive relationships, understanding, and collaboration. Consequently, IGD progresses through a series of stages, each building on prior learning and experiences (see Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007, for a detailed description of the IGD curriculum, and Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2011, for an examination of the training and role of facilitators).

In spring 2009, an IGD training team from the University of Michigan offered a 2-day workshop at Cal Poly that was a shorter but similar experience to the IGD courses taken by students. Approximately 35 faculty and staff (from Academic and Student Affairs) attended the training, giving it a very positive evaluation.

Throughout fall quarter 2009, about a dozen faculty and staff, including Counseling Center interns, participated in an IGD program in order to try out the materials and approach, and to undergo training as facilitators. In winter and spring quarters

2010, Dr. Sema Alptekin, then-University Honors Program Director, and Dr. Herlina Pranata, a member of the Counseling Services staff who had attended the two-day and quarter-long programs in 2009, partnered in piloting sections of HNRS 299 that employed the IGD approach. Subsequently, a group consisting mostly of Student Affairs professionals developed a proposal for implementing IGD on a continuing basis and submitted the proposal to Dr. David Conn, a professor in City & Regional Planning, who was then serving as the associate vice president spearheading the university's efforts (among other things) to promote diversity learning. Dr. Conn was concerned that the proposal would likely encounter resistance from both faculty (who, for the most part, had not been involved in its development) and the provost (since, as written, it would be very costly, requiring a large amount of faculty assigned time for implementation); consequently, following further consultation, he recommended a slightly different way of proceeding.

Following the submittal of a more limited, preliminary proposal to the provost, the group received funds under the auspices of Cal Poly's Inclusive Excellence initiative to bring a qualified consultant (Dr. Anna Yeakley) to campus to help address the issues involved in implementing IGD. During her daylong visit, Dr. Yeakley met with 27 members of the faculty and staff, including two deans, as well as the ASI president. Building on the visit, further discussions were held between individuals and groups on campus as well as with Dr. Yeakley and Dr. Jesús Treviño, another nationally recognized expert on IGD.

In winter 2011, with additional funds from the provost, Dr. Yeakley was hired to conduct an IGD "train-the-trainer" for 7 faculty and staff and 16 graduate students in Counseling & Guidance. She also conducted an abbreviated five-week training for nine other faculty and staff.

Graduate students in Counseling & Guidance and doctoral interns in the Counseling Center facilitated pilots of two models of IGD during fall quarter 2011. In the first model, two five-week IGD sections were offered as a mandatory component of AGB 401-03 *Managing Cultural Diversity in Agricultural Labor Relations*, taught by Dr. Eivis Qenani. In the second model, five nine-week sections were offered as an option for 15 percent of the grade in courses offered by Dr. Denise Isom and Dr. Jane Lehr (ES 112 *Race Culture and Politics in the United States*), Shohreh Niku and Dr. Doris Derelian (FSN 250 *Food and Nutrition: Customs and Culture*), and Dr. Clare Battista (ECON 303 *Economics of Poverty, Discrimination, and Immigration*). All of the courses involved in the pilot met the university's U.S. Cultural Pluralism requirement.

Intergroup Dialogues Becomes a Permanent Course

Following a positive assessment of the pilot and a follow-up workshop conducted by the Center for Teaching & Learning in winter 2012, Dr. Jennifer Teramoto Pedrotti in the Psychology & Child Development Department, working in collaboration with Dr. Conn, developed a proposal for a new, permanent IGD

course. The proposal was for a stand-alone four-unit course comprising two units of lecture/discussions and two units of dialogue, with the following catalog description:

Weekly semi-structured meetings of students from two distinct identity groups, with trained peer facilitators, in which readings, experiential activities, informed dialogue, and reflective writing are integrated as a means of encouraging self and group awareness and exploring ways to promote just community across difference. Supplemented by weekly lecture/discussions.

The proposal called for Dr. Pedrotti, who would serve as the course's instructor of record, to do some of the lecturing; to hold weekly debriefing sessions with the facilitators regarding the material, topics, and ensuing discussion; and to assign grades. Each section of the course would be peer facilitated by two students, initially graduate students from the Master's program in Psychology for Marriage and Family Therapists [MFTs]). These students would be trained extensively in advance of serving as facilitators, and would receive credit for this training via other application-based courses available in both undergraduate and graduate programs (e.g., Independent Study courses PSY 400 or PSY 500).

In addition to Dr. Pedrotti, those delivering lectures in the course would include various invited staff/faculty/community experts as appropriate, based on the topic(s) being discussed in a particular week. Guest lecturers might include, for example, a Communication Studies faculty member, a Multicultural Center representative, a Pride Center representative, a Gender Equity Center representative, an Ethnic Studies faculty member, and/or a member of the 5 Cities Diversity Coalition.

Course learning objectives and assessment methods were listed in the proposal as follows:

Course Learning Objectives	Assessment Methods
Know more about their own and others' cultures, histories, and experiences	Journal assignments
Participate effectively in the four stages of an intergroup dialogue	Facilitator observation
Explain how dialogue is differentiated from debate or discussion	Journal assignments
Communicate with others about controversial subjects in a supportive and nonjudgmental way	Facilitator observation
Build alliances and address injustice	Journal assignments

Journal assignments would normally be expected to be 1-2 pages, single-spaced, reviewed initially by the facilitators, and graded on a rubric of several points based on their demonstration of attainment of the week's process/content goals, as applicable. After the facilitators' review, the instructor

would herself review a sample of the journal assignments each week, and would discuss these as appropriate in the weekly facilitator debriefing sessions. The instructor would review all of the final journal assignments.

Facilitators would also grade students' participation in the lecture and dialogue sessions based on a rubric. An unsatisfactory score on the rubric would reflect a student's absence or failure to contribute in a significant way to a dialogue or discussion (one of the roles of the facilitators is to ensure that all students have the opportunity to be engaged), while a satisfactory score would reflect active participation and clear understanding of the readings. However, it was made absolutely clear that grades would not depend on the particular values or opinions expressed by the students.

Following review at department, college, and university levels, the course was approved and the head of Psychology agreed to assign Dr. Pedrotti to teach it for the first time in spring 2013.

In preparing to launch the new course, the organizers faced something of a chicken and egg situation with regard to peer facilitators. The hope was that, in the long term, students who had already taken the IGD course would be recruited to participate in training to become peer facilitators. At this point, however, few, if any, students were still around who had taken the IGD pilot in fall 2011. Furthermore, the question of who might provide the facilitator training on an ongoing basis was not yet decided. The immediate issue was resolved for the time being by recruiting as would-be facilitators four graduate students in Psychology and four newly hired members of the Student Affairs staff, none of whom had participated previously in IGD courses although several had some experience with diversity learning, including the use of dialogues.

Two faculty members (Dr. Dianne deTurris and Dr. Conn) and an administrator (Dr. Cornel Morton) who had participated in the original—winter 2011—training by Dr. Yeakley volunteered to train the facilitators, and did so over a ten week period in winter 2013. All four of the Psychology graduate students and two former Counseling & Guidance graduate students (previously trained) went on to facilitate (in pairs) in PSY 303 during the following quarter.

Once enrolment had settled down (after the drop/add period), a total of 36 students took the class. The majority of the class were Psychology majors (n=22), though majors from Ag-Business, Business, Child Development, Economics, Electrical Engineering, English, Journalism, Kinesiology, Nutrition, and Wine and Viticulture were also represented. There was no pre-selection, meaning that there was no control over the mix of social identities. As it turned out, it was only possible to have two groups with mixed social identities (half White, half People of Color) while the third group was all-White. The topic for all three groups was Race. Four of the six facilitators identified as White, one as Biracial (Latina/White), and one as Latino.

An assessment of the course provided evidence that the students' knowledge, awareness, skills, and commitment/passion all increased from pre to post test. Furthermore, IGD was effective regardless of both the type of group (intergroup vs. intragroup) and a student's racial status (White vs. Person of Color).

In light of these encouraging results, plans were then made to offer PSY 303 again in spring 2014. This time, two former Counseling and Guidance graduate students (now Cal Poly staff members) who had previously served as facilitators themselves offered facilitator training in the winter quarter. Sixteen Psychology students (undergrads/grads) and one undergraduate in City & Regional Planning took the training. Of these, seven applied to serve as facilitators in PSY 303 and, following interviews, all were appointed to do so. Enrollment in the spring course grew to 42, allowing for three groups of approximately 15. Once again, the topic for all groups was Race and the breakdown was similar to the previous year as well, with two groups having approximately equal numbers of Students of Color and White students, and the third group being entirely White. This year two of the seven facilitators identified as Asian American, two as Biracial (Asian American/White), and three as White. Majors were again primarily from Psychology ($n=34$), but with 13 other majors represented this time (Child Development, City and Regional Planning, Communication Studies, English, Ethnic Studies, Graphic Communications, History, Liberal Studies, Mathematics, Modern Languages and Literature, Philosophy, Recreation, and Theatre).

Looking to the Future

The vision of the authors of this article, which some (and perhaps many) other faculty, staff, and students seem to share, is that all students at Cal Poly should have the opportunity to take degree-applicable IGD classes, and that they should be encouraged—and maybe even ultimately required—to do so!

Consideration is already being given to the next steps needed to expand access throughout the campus. One obstacle is the fact that students can count PSY 303 toward earning a degree in certain majors (including Psychology, Child Development, Ethnic Studies, and City & Regional Planning) but not in others (such as majors in Engineering, which allow no free electives). The possibility of seeking credit toward meeting the university's U.S. Cultural Pluralism requirement has been considered but not pursued (at least for the time being) in part because IGD is seen as a complement to (not a substitute for) existing USCP courses. Instead, in the curriculum review for the next (2015-17) catalog, application has been made—and is pending, as of July 2014—for the course to count toward the Area D5 (Society & the Individual) upper division requirement in General Education. Another means of expanding access would be to increase the pool of faculty offering IGD courses. To this end, approval is also being sought for Dr. Pedrotti's course (now re-numbered PSY 304) to be cross-listed with CRP

304, to be newly established and offered by Dr. Kelly Main in City & Regional Planning.

Attention is being given to other issues, such as those surrounding the ongoing provision of facilitator training (e.g., by whom, with what funding, and with what incentive—if any—for participants). It is recognized that the vision will not be accomplished overnight. Instead, the strategy is to continue to take small steps in the right direction until IGD is permanently established as a major contributor to diversity learning at Cal Poly.

A Peer Facilitator's View of Intergroup Dialogues

Alice Zanmiller

When Dr. Conn sent out a solicitation for City and Regional Planning students to enroll in a facilitator training for Intergroup Dialogues during winter 2014, I didn't think twice about signing up. The training was advertised to help participants gain "multicultural competence, diversity experience, and insight from others who are different from you," which to me sounded like a fun, engaging way to spend Tuesday evenings. I became slightly more tentative about this notion on the first night, when I discovered I was the only student in the training without prior experience in Intergroup Dialogues, psychology, or both. Nonetheless, I was greeted with kind smiles and earnest encouragement from my peers and the group trainers. Every week, we spent two hours discussing the role of race and social identity in our own lives and in the world around us. We carefully crafted ground rules as a group, such as agreeing to confidentiality and being open to constructive criticism when we made mistakes. While I initially feared that my lack of prior experience would make me irrelevant in the conversation, I found myself reveling in the eye-opening stories and mature insights shared by my peers and the welcoming environment for me to process my own emotions and gaps in understanding without fear of taboo or judgment.

As the quarter came to close, I felt my understanding of topics and issues I had never heard of before Intergroup Dialogues had flourished, but still felt entirely under-qualified to lead a similar group in the upcoming class (PSY 303). I was in such constant awe of the eloquent parallels my group mates studying psychology could draw that I couldn't imagine being able to do the same. It was only after kind encouragement by the trainers and my peers that I decided to interview for a facilitator

position. When I was accepted to lead a group for spring quarter I was still tentative about my ability to be successful. However, paired with a brilliant and compassionate peer from the winter training, a well-crafted curriculum, and weekly check-ins with other group leaders and Dr. Pedrotti (the class instructor), I had one of the most transformative, fun, and inspiring quarters of my college career. The structure of the course allows for both academic and personal growth, and the split between lectures and dialogue mirrors this. I was constantly amazed by the insights of the students in my group, and watching them transform was as equally rewarding as the growth I was experiencing. In addition to my increased understanding of social inequality, being an IGD facilitator has taught me invaluable lessons in leadership, especially by increasing my experience in being an empathetic listener and fostering patient, intentional dialogue.

I believe that the implementation of Intergroup Dialogues is an essential step for Cal Poly to take in the pursuit of fulfilling the Diversity Learning Objectives. The course provides a phenomenal opportunity to teach students about inequality while encouraging them to include themselves in the discussion of the problem. The ivory tower can serve as an effective way to shield us from the harsh reality of how the world really is, but by providing students with reputable academic infrastructure as well as room to discuss and explore these deeply personal topics, we can begin moving towards conversations on race and social identity that are smart and compassionate without impersonally intellectualizing the issue. The training that IGD provides is, in my opinion, essential for everyone. Teachers, parents, professionals, and students all must interact with a wide range of people, and encouraging identity development and respect for diversity is essential for improving the lives of all. By encouraging students to view discrimination as an issue that belongs to everyone, not just minorities, widespread implementation of this program would ensure that Cal Poly's graduates are not just technically adept in their fields, but also emotionally and socially equipped to serve as neighbors, allies, and leaders.

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