

Embracing Diversity Education through Curriculum, Connections, and Culture

Martha T. Nesbitt
President
Gainesville College

“Stepping Up to the Plate in Diversity Education” requires developing a culture on campus that values diversity. One single approach will have limited effect, but implementing several priority activities with buy-in from faculty and staff in academics and student development can make a significant impact, one that can continue to promote an inclusive environment that benefits the entire campus community.

The foundation of a healthy and diverse college community must rest on a culture that truly values diversity. This must be evident in the values of the institution, its mission, and in its strategic goals. Gainesville College, a two-year institution in the University System of Georgia, values diversity and incorporates it into all aspects of campus life. One of the institution’s strategic goals is “to foster an environment that values and reflects diversity.”

The institution has shown its commitment to diversity by allocating resources to promote programs and activities that reflect the value of diversity. The College created an Office of Minority Affairs and Multicultural Programs with three staff members who work with students, faculty, and staff to enhance a culture that values diversity and promotes the success of minority students.

In the academic area, diversity is infused into Gainesville College’s curriculum. In addition to incorporating diversity issues into a broad spectrum of courses, faculty members developed a course in the core curriculum titled “Issues in Diversity.” It is a two-hour elective course that involves an interdisciplinary approach to a variety of issues. Currently, three professors, representing the disciplines of English, Political Science, and

Education/Religion, focus on the Civil Rights Movement of the United States from a social, economic, and personal perspective. The course objectives include:

1. Examining the constitutional and legal foundations of civil rights in the U.S.
2. Providing the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement through film and guest speakers.
3. Examining the political rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement through speeches and written documents.
4. Examining various organizations that were instrumental in shaping the Civil Rights Movement.
5. Providing an opportunity to visit historical sites germane to the Civil Rights Movement.

Because the College’s region of the state has experienced a large influx of Hispanics, plans are underway to develop a course with more emphasis on Hispanic issues.

Gainesville College also reaches out to the Hispanic community through a special summer English as a Second Language course for high school students. The components of this course include graduation test preparation in social studies, science, U.S. history, and mathematics. Students take this course free of tuition and enrollments have grown from 40 to over 120 students over a four-year period.

Another outreach activity that is educationally based and reaches out to the diverse community Gainesville College serves is known as “Summer Scholars.” Incorporated into the University System of Georgia’s Postsecondary Readiness and Enrichment Program (PREP), the program actually predates PREP and was designed to

promote diversity as well as academic preparation. The four-week program targets middle school to 10th grade high school students and currently enrolls about 200 students; the large majority is Hispanic. The results of the program show increases in student learning, student completion rates from high school, and student enrollment in college. Pre- and post- tests indicated about a 20% improvement in both language arts and computational skills during the four-week program. These students are also more likely than their counterparts not participating in Summer Scholars to complete high school. While not all graduates from Summer Scholars attend Gainesville College, the institution experienced an increase in Hispanic enrollment from 10 to 208 over an 11-year period.

Thanks to a grant from the Goizueta Foundation, the College also began a scholarship/leadership program for Hispanic students. Full scholarships to Gainesville are provided to outstanding high school graduates. The students are required to participate in leadership training and outreach activities to the Hispanic community, and are paid a stipend for their participation. Their course in leadership training includes (a) developing a personal philosophy of leadership, (b) gaining an awareness of moral and ethical responsibilities, (c) becoming aware of his or her own style of leadership, and (d) studying contemporary multicultural literature. The first group of students completed one year at Gainesville College and demonstrated the strength of this program. These students performed well academically and worked with K-12 Hispanic students in the community through reading circles, mentoring, special trips for young children, and theatre programs.

Curricular programs must be complemented with extra-curricular activities that both promote and reflect the value of diversity on campus. At Gainesville College, these activities take the

form of minority student organizations that sponsor various activities, as well as inviting a diverse group of speakers to campus through the Colloquium Program. An illustrative list of activities and programs at Gainesville College includes:

1. The Black Student Association's volunteer projects with the Boys and Girls Club, a Chili Cook-Off with proceeds helping a needy family, a step show, speakers, and a mentor program for local high school and college African-American males.
2. The Latino Student Association's faculty/staff/student Salsa Dance Contest, an evening for Latino parents that focuses on the value of a college education, a Ropes Workshop (a mentor program for Latino youth in county and city school systems and in college), an Hispanic Alumni Luncheon, and speakers.
3. The International Student Association's annual International Fair that features the cultures, including food, from many of the countries represented by the College's international students.
4. The organization for non-traditional students' Second Wind Club's workshops to help with test taking, dealing with stress, and managing multiple tasks.

Gainesville College also takes seriously its responsibility to educate the community it serves. By promoting the value of diversity. Successful activities in this realm include hosting an Annual Women Leaders of Hall County Luncheon that includes nominated high school juniors, seniors, Gainesville College students, and community female leaders. One of the major themes of this event is the diversity of the community and the value that diversity adds. Another event, known as Unsung Heroes, features African-American community leaders who have been

nominated by students and people in the community.

A nationally recognized program of Gainesville College is the Gainesville Theatre Alliance (GTA). The GTA is a collaboration among the College, Brenau University, and the community. Funded by both institutions with community support and small grants from the Georgia Council for the Arts, this organization brings a diverse community together and features plays that deal with issues of diversity and that promote tolerance. GTA has played a major role in educating the community about diversity. The more notable plays that have significantly impacted the community are “Coup/Clucks,” “The Grapes of Wrath,” “West Side Story,” and “Ragtime.” While the plays themselves delivered strong messages, community activities connected

with the productions reinforced the messages and resulted in a positive impact. An example of such an activity is a community forum held after the production of “Ragtime.” Discussion of the play occurred in the context of the Gainesville/Hall County community.

Through programs both on and off campus, Gainesville College demonstrates its commitment to diversity and created a welcoming culture on campus that has resulted in a more diverse student body. Even as the College’s overall enrollment growth increased 50% in the past three years, the percentage of minority students increased as well. Though pleased with these gains, the College continues to explore new ways of promoting diversity education and reaching out to those traditionally underserved by higher education.



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