

A Diversity Training for Faculty and Graduate Students

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Outline

- The Process, and some Ground rules
- Case 1: reading and discussion
- Case 2: reading and discussion
- Takeaways

The Process

- Get in groups of 3 or 4 and introduce each other.
- Read *The case of Luis*.
- Discuss in groups.
- Share with the whole group.
- If time allows, read and discuss *The case of Sue*.

Ground Rules

- We all have different view points, we may not all agree, but we need to respect each other.
- Be respectful of students, whatever their circumstances.
- We are here to think together about these issues, and learn.
- Can you think of anything else?

Luis Ramirez is a Latino student at a large public university – a research 1 university with 17% Hispanic/Latin@ student population. He transferred from a community college where he took the following mathematics-related courses: college algebra, introduction to computer science, calculus 1-2 series, vector calculus, and linear algebra. Since transferring to the university, he took a formal proofs course and a statistics course during his first semester. He enjoys mathematics and is currently an undergraduate mathematics major enrolled in differential equations. His current grade point average is 3.31 on a 4.0 scale.

He is a non-traditional student in that he is a transfer student, age 26, married with children, and works 30-35 hours per week as a manager at a local restaurant. He needs the work because he is from a low-income family; however, he has been supported emotionally by his family as he may become the first member of his family to graduate from college. He has limited quality study time.

Luis is passing differential equations with a grade of “C” – a combination of incomplete homework assignments and 80% plus on exams. Because of mediocre grades, Luis is sometimes viewed as a minimally capable student and is sometimes dismissed as a participant that can contribute valuable thinking to class discussions. He is feeling discouraged to continue as he is feeling disconnected with the intellectual community of the class and has not developed many personal friendships with other students.

Discussion questions for The Case of Luis

- 1 Is Luis's situation common at other universities? What are some statistics around the graduation rate of Hispanic/Latin@ students in STEM fields?
- 2 How would you help Luis improve his opportunities for successfully completing the current course?
- 3 How could you make sure Luis's contributions are seen and heard in class?
- 4 How would you advise Luis to encourage him to continue and not leave the university?
- 5 How do we encourage our students to share their stories with us?

Sue is a sophomore. Last year, in her math class, students were regularly asked to present proofs at the blackboard in front of other students in their section. Sue's section had 12 students. Below is the order in which the students presented the first time:

Travis, Alex, Sue, Liz, George, Jimmy, Bob, Paul, Mark, Rick, Zack, Vlad.

Here is what Sue had to say about her experience:

Last year, in my math class, all the students had to present a proof at the board during section. The first time this happened, Liz started her proof and made a minor mistake (like the kind that Travis had done). The majority of the men in the class put their heads down, groaning. But a few students actually wouldn't let Liz correct herself and attempted to do the proof for her from their table.

Afterwards, I noticed the guys only started talking to me after I had presented perfectly. I had the feeling that, to be taken as seriously as the average guy, a woman would have to perform above and beyond the norm.

Discussion questions for The Case of Sue

- 1 What do you think made Sue feel that “in order to be taken as seriously as an average guy, a woman would have to perform above and beyond the norm”? What is it about the situation that could have made her draw such a conclusion?
- 2 How do you think the class dynamics might have affected Sue, other than what she tells us in the second paragraph?
- 3 As a teacher in the room, what would you have done if you had noticed such a dynamic? What about if Sue, or Liz, or another student, had come to talk to you about it afterwards?
- 4 Think of other factors that might make a student feel different, isolated, self-conscious, ostracized, uncomfortable, etc. How many can you list?
- 5 Have you ever witnessed sexism, racism, etc in a school setting?

Takeaways

Was it helpful for you to look at diversity in terms of individual cases?

- This is hard stuff! Difficult to deal with on the spot, so talking about such things in advance with our colleagues, as hypothetical situations, can help prepare us for when real stuff happens.
- We all have different ideas on how to deal with this. There are many appropriate ways to address such situations.
- We also need to take care of ourselves.
- In the end, we need to be sensitive and respectful.
- As professors, do we have a civic responsibility to look out for our students' best interest? And to what degree?