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The Impact of Lectures by Diverse Professionals on Diversity Awareness:

Pre-Post Changes

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Despite the increasing diversity in the United States, minorities in the field of higher education continue to be disproportionately low. Worldviews on Education Lecture Series (WELS) was created to provide opportunities for students to have interactive dialogues with diverse professionals from around the world and nation. The effects of these lectures on diversity awareness were examined. Participants completed 12 items from the Miami University Diversity Awareness Scale (MUDAS) before and after the lecture. A series of paired samples t-tests were conducted to determine if the scores on the post-test were significantly higher than the scores on the pre-test. Compared to the pre-test, participants reported greater diversity awareness on the post-test. The writers conclude that given an opportunity to learn from a diverse professional, students can increase their knowledge and change their perceptions in relation to diversity. Implications for higher education and future research efforts are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Diverse professionals, diversity awareness, higher education

The most common implications of diversity refer to social difference, or differences among people. The United States Census Bureau (2015) projects that the country will continue to become increasingly diverse. In contrast to the demands created by an increasingly diverse country, minorities in the field of higher education continue to be sparse. To illustrate, the National Center for Education Statistics (2015) found that full-time faculty in institutions of higher education are predominantly Caucasian. Specifically, in 2013, of all full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, 79% were Caucasian, 10% were Asian/Pacific Islander, six percent were African American, five percent were Hispanic, one percent were American Indian/Alaska Native, and one percent were of two or more races. Similarly, most students in the field of higher education are Caucasian and have had limited interactions with individuals from underrepresented groups (Sleeter, 2007).

An examination of student experiences indicates that cultural content has not been integrated into the curriculum in a meaningful way (Weaver, 2000). These disparities amplify the need for higher education programs to incorporate culturally responsive training that facilitates the development of knowledge and skills of students to serve a diverse community. Previous studies have demonstrated that education plays an important role in influencing attitude (Schmidtke, Badhessa, & Moore, 2008). Consequently, the benefits of diverse faculty members have long been recognized (Ruggs & Hebl, 2012); however, research on this topic is sparse.

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Much of the existing research has focused on enhancing multicultural education in program curriculum and fostering community engagement by having practicum experiences in diverse settings (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay & Howard, 2000). In addition to these experiences, a diverse faculty member uniquely enhances the development of students' cultural competency by expanding students' awareness.

Lynch (2013) argued diverse faculty members not only provide a stronger role model, but also increase students' awareness of diversity. Presence of diverse faculty members exposes students to a wide range of perspectives derived from a multitude of life experiences (Turner, 2002). Not surprisingly, diversity among educators has been found to be associated with positive outcomes for students such as enhanced self-concept, increased motivation (Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011), higher academic achievement (Dee, 2004, 2007), and reduction of stereotypes (Marx & Roman, 2002). In this context, Gurin (2002) identifies two positive outcomes - learning outcomes and democracy outcomes - which directly result from incorporation of diversity, inclusion, and cultural awareness in educational practices. Learning outcomes refer to knowledge and information-processing, whereas democracy outcomes comprise perspective taking, citizenship engagement, and cultural awareness. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) state "...the actual experiences students have with diversity consistently and meaningfully affect important learning and democracy outcomes of a college education" (p.358).

Culturally Responsive Practices for Diverse Learners

To empower and engage culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom, faculty need to be aware of a student's family structure, immigration history, languages, and perception of education (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Social scientists and educators have laid the foundation for multicultural education and thereby offered the theoretical, conceptual, and pedagogical conventions that foster knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to culturally responsive and competent professionals (Banks, 2001; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2007; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). To illustrate, Villegas and Lucas (2002) emphasize the incorporation of worldviews impacted by culture, class and linguistic lenses into training. Awareness, examination, and reflection of worldviews have implications for teaching and learning. Multicultural education advocates (e.g., Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995) encourage the development of foundational, historical, and contemporary social knowledge bases during training. Although it maybe not realistic to expect students to possess knowledge of all cultural groups, they can certainly be prepared to acknowledge the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different groups (Gay, 2000).

Against the backdrop of the existing paucity of research, the present study aimed to examine the effects of a lecture series to increase diversity awareness using a pre-post survey. Specifically, it was hypothesized that after attending a lecture presented by individuals from underrepresented groups on topics pertaining to diversity participants would show greater diversity awareness on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test.

Method

Participants

For the purpose of this study, 248 participants were recruited from the Worldviews on Education Lecture Series audience. This convenience sample consisted of 56 males and 192

females ranging in age from 18 to 74 years ($M = 28.63$). The sample was 79% Caucasian, 9% Hispanic, 5% African American, 3% Asian, and 2.1% identified their ethnicity as other. Approximately 85% of the participants identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, 2.8% as bisexual, 2% as homosexual, and 2.8% preferred not to disclose their sexual orientation. Fifty-two percent of the participants were undergraduate students, 24.6% were graduate students, 8.9% were faculty, 4% were staff, and 8.9% identified their role as other.

Measures

Demographic Information Form. All participants completed the demographic information form, which asked for information pertaining to gender, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation, and self-perceived most defining social identity. Additionally, participants responded to items that assessed their preparedness to work with diverse populations, role at the institution, major/program, reason for attending the lecture, attendance at previous lecture(s), and recommendation for future lectures/speakers.

Miami University Diversity Awareness Scale (MUDAS; Mosley-Howard, Witte, & Wang, 2011). For this study, the MUDAS was used to collect data to assess levels of diversity awareness. The MUDAS is 37-item survey designed to measure the level of student awareness about issues of culture, intergroup interaction, social justice, and the degree to which students believe these issues are presented in the college classroom. MUDAS items are statements that are rated on a five-point scale that is scored from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). An example of two of the items on the MUDAS are “I am aware of my own culture and ethnicity” and “I would welcome the opportunity to study abroad, if I was provided financial support.” To evaluate participants’ perception of the lecture, they responded to two items (“I gained new knowledge through this lecture” and “This lecture challenged my beliefs”) during the post-test. The 37-item MUDAS was reviewed and 12 items relevant to the purpose of the present study were selected and administered before and after the survey to determine the effects of the lecture on participants’ diversity awareness. Factor analyses (Mosley-Howard, Witte, & Wang, 2011) indicate that these 12 items assess the constructs of value/appreciation (perceived value brought by diversity to own life), learning/knowledge (knowledge of own culture, ethnicity, and privileges), and intercultural interaction (comfort level in discussing own culture and interest in learning about and interacting with people from other cultures).

In addition to the 12 items of the MUDAS, participants responded to lecture-specific items (generated by the speakers) that assessed their level of knowledge and awareness about the content of the presentation at the pre and post-tests. These items were phrased as questions (e.g., “How would you describe the level of your awareness of xenophobia experienced by immigrants from the global south?”) and were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = *Very Low* to 5 = *Very High*).

Procedure

Local, national, and international professionals in the field of education and human services from underrepresented groups were invited as guest speakers to share their expertise and experiences as part of the Worldviews on Education Lecture Series (WELS). This series aimed to: expand students’ views about education and wellness, increase awareness of and broaden perspectives of culturally and linguistically responsive practices, deconstruct the deficit views of diverse groups, apply collaborative learning models and community engagement to foster issues of diversity and democracy, and appreciate innovative uses of technology. The lectures

emphasized active learning and reflection to create “interaction, dialogue, and critical engagement,” constructs that have been identified by Stachowiak (2015) as critical in increasing diversity awareness (p. 126). During two academic years (2012 to 2014), 11 lectures were held; eight face-to-face and three in “real time” through the use of Skype. Topics included: international education, educational equity and social justice, multicultural practice, etc. The lectures lasted for approximately 90 minutes. The lectures were advertised on the school website, through emails and flyers to the campus community and external constituents. The lectures received funding from a campus committee that provides honoraria to outside speakers. All lectures were free and open to the public. Lectures were videotaped with the speaker’s consent.

Prior to the introduction of the speaker, participants were given a brief overview of the study. The principal investigator explained the nature, purpose, and goals of the study, and potential risks involved in participation. Additionally, the written informed consent noted,

“Your participation is completely voluntary. It is not required by your school. You can choose not to participate in this research and it will have no effect on your grades or treatment. Also, you can change your mind about participating at any time with no negative consequences.”

To be included in the study, audience members were asked to provide informed consent. Audience members were excluded from the study if they refused to provide informed consent and/or were under the age of 18. All consenting participants, who were 18 year of age or older, completed the 12 items of MUDAS and lecture specific questions before and after the lecture using a repeated measures design. This study comprised a single experimental group. Survey data were collected over a period two academic years, which included 11 lectures (See Appendix A for a list of lecture topics and brief description). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the institution approved this study.

Results

Defining Social Identity

In response to the question, “Which social identity most defines you?” 58.5% of participants reported being defined by age, 38.1% reported being defined by ethnicity, 15.3% by sexual orientation, 11.7% other, and 2.8% by disability.

Preparedness

Forty-four percent of participants reported feeling very prepared to deal with diversity issues, 40.7% reported feeling slightly prepared, 8.5% reported feeling unsure, 2.4% reported feeling slightly unprepared, and 1.6% reported feeling completely unprepared.

Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison

A series of paired samples t-tests were conducted to determine if the scores on the pre-test and post-test were significantly different. Specifically, it was hypothesized that participants would report greater diversity awareness on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test. The pre-test mean score on all but two items (“I am aware of my own culture and ethnicity” and “I would welcome the opportunity to study abroad, if I was provided financial support”) was significantly different from the post-test mean score. To illustrate, item two (“I seek to learn about different cultures”) participants reported greater willingness to learn about different cultures on the post-

test ($M = 4.50, SD = .58$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 4.34, SD = .63$). The difference between pre- and post-test was statistically significant $t(218) = -4.98; p < .001$. Similarly, on item three, participants reported that they are more likely to consider cultural issues in their daily life on the post-test ($M = 4.06, SD = .83$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 3.86, SD = .89$) demonstrating a significant difference $t(214) = -5.04; p < .001$. On the post-test ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.28$), participants were significantly less likely to view integration of different cultural customs and traditions as detrimental to learning in relation to the pre-test ($M = 4.09, SD = 1.90$), $t(212) = -2.72, p < .01$. Participants reported greater awareness of the effects of own culture on other cultures on the post-test ($M = 4.10, SD = .75$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 3.84, SD = .74$), $t(212) = -5.60, p < .001$. Participants were significantly more likely to identify addressing social injustice as one of their professional goals on the post-test ($M = 4.08, SD = .86$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 3.92, SD = .87$), $t(21) = -4.03, p < .001$. Participants reported greater appreciation for opportunities to hear perspectives from diverse faculty members and students on the posttest ($M = 4.63, SD = .60$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 4.52, SD = .63$), $t(214) = -3.17, p < .001$. Participants' view on the role of diverse faculty members for a rich learning experience was significantly more favorable on the post-test ($M = 4.47, SD = .67$) in relation to the pre-test ($M = 4.36, SD = .71$), $t(211) = -2.96, p < .01$. Participants reported greater willingness to incorporate cultural expectations in schools and/or classrooms on the post-test ($M = 4.51, SD = .65$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 4.41, SD = .71$), $t(215) = -2.67, p < .01$. Lastly, participants reported significantly greater awareness of own privileges on the post-test ($M = 4.37, SD = .71$) in comparison to the pre-test ($M = 4.21, SD = .82$), $t(211) = -3.65, p < .001$. Overall, the mean score on the post-test ($M = 47.21, SD = 4.84$) was significantly different from the mean score on the pre-test ($M = 46.07, SD = 4.79$), $t(187) = -5.60, p < .0001$. These data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of T-Tests for the Pre and Post-Tests

Item	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	t	df
Awareness of Own Culture	4.49 (.65)	4.51 (.60)	-0.93	219
Desire to Learn about Different Cultures	4.34 (.63)	4.50 (.58)	-4.98**	218
Consider Culture in Daily Life	3.86 (.89)	4.06 (.83)	-5.04**	214
Welcome Study Abroad Opportunity	4.09 (1.21)	4.12 (1.20)	-1.02	216
Integration Reduces Learning	4.09 (1.28)	4.30 (.90)	-2.72*	212
Awareness of Impact of Own Culture	3.84 (.74)	4.10 (.75)	-5.61**	212
Social Injustice	3.92	4.08	-4.03**	213

	(.87)	(.86)		
Diverse Perspectives	4.52	4.63	-3.17*	214
	(.63)	(.60)		
Diverse Faculty are Essential	4.36	4.47	2.96*	211
	(.71)	(.67)		
Teach Cultural Expectations	4.41	4.51	-2.67*	215
	(.71)	(.65)		
Recognize Own Privileges	4.21	4.37	-3.65**	211
	(.82)	(.71)		
Total Score	46.07	47.21	-5.61***	186
	(4.79)	(4.84)		

* $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

As previously noted, in contrast to the expected trend, participants' awareness of own culture and ethnicity was not significantly different on the pre- and post-tests. Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference on the item that assessed participants' willingness to welcome the opportunity to study abroad, if they were provided financial support.

Evaluation of Lecture

To evaluate participants' perception of the lecture, they responded to two items ("I gained new knowledge through this lecture" and "This lecture challenged my beliefs") during the post-test on a five-point Likert scale (wherein 1 = Very Low, 2 = Somewhat Low, 3 = Average, 4 = Somewhat High, 5 = Very High). The mean score for the item that assessed participants' perception that they gained new knowledge was 4.42 ($SD = .73$). The mean score for the item that assessed the degree to which the lecture challenged participants' beliefs was 3.29 ($SD = 1.18$). Overall, participants rated their knowledge and learning higher than before the lecture.

Lecture-Specific Knowledge and Awareness

Participants responded to lecture-specific items that assessed their level of knowledge and awareness about the content of the presentation at the pre and post-tests. As illustrated in Figure 1, participants reported greater awareness and knowledge of the content on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test.

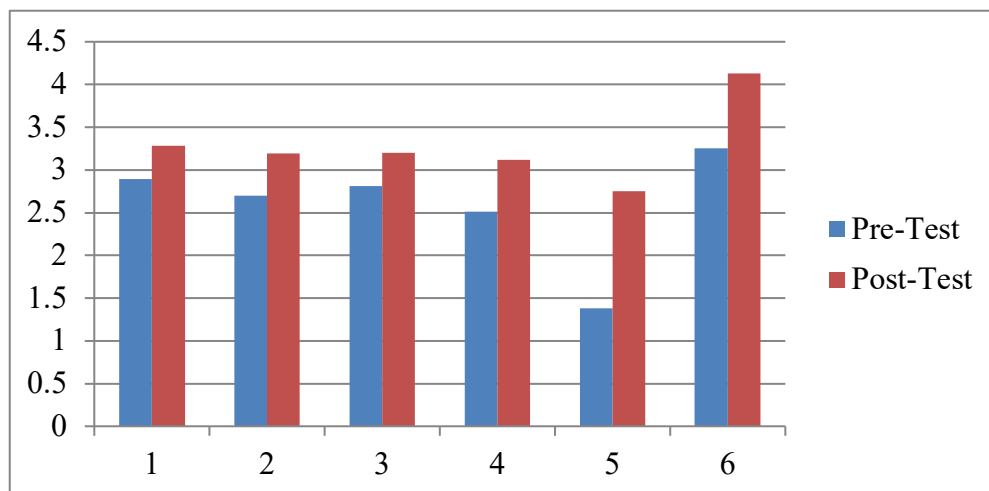


Figure 1: Comparison of Mean Scores on Lecture-Specific Items on the Pre- and Post-Tests
 Note: 1 = Very Low, 2 = Somewhat Low, 3 = Average, 4 = Somewhat High, 5 = Very High

Discussion

The purpose of the present research study was to examine changes in diversity awareness in response to WELS. It was hypothesized that participants would show greater diversity awareness on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test. As expected, participants had significantly different scores on the post-test in comparison to the pre-test on most of the items of the MUDAS. Overall, participants demonstrated increase in awareness of importance of intercultural interaction on the post-test, in comparison to the pre-test. Furthermore, in comparison to the pre-test, participants recognized that intercultural interaction had more significance on the post-test. Results from the immediate post-test indicated that the objectives of WELS were clearly met and the proposed strengths of using diverse speakers to improve diversity awareness were supported in this study. These findings are consistent with previous research which has demonstrated that utilizing role models and diverse examples can have substantial impact on knowledge and attitudes (Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011) and reduce negative impacts of stereotypes (McIntyre et al., 2005).

In contrast to the expected trend, participants' awareness of own culture and willingness to study abroad were not significantly different on the pre- and post-test. The absence of significant differences on these two items warrants discussion. With regards to awareness of own culture, participants in the present study held high levels of awareness of own culture at the pre-test. Given that the majority of the participants scored at the upper limit of the awareness of own culture item at the pre-test, it is possible that the MUDAS was not sensitive to detect changes at this level. The item examined awareness of own culture using a five-point Likert scale. Another possible explanation for the lack of significant difference could be conceptual. In the context of the Identity Development Models (Helms, 1995; Howard, 2004; Myers et al., 1991; Sue, 2003), increased knowledge and critical reflection of experiences resulting from the WELS might have questioned and challenged the beliefs held by participants regarding their own social group on the post-test. Gordon (1992) notes the psychological risks resulting from emotionally loaded topics addressed during diversity awareness trainings.

With regards to lack of significant difference on the item pertaining to participants' willingness to study abroad, it could be argued that the attributes of the participants (e.g., professional status) accounted for this unexpected finding. It is perhaps significant that almost 48% of participants in the study were graduate students, faculty, staff, or "other." It is likely that

participants at these advanced professional stages are less likely to consider relocating for a study abroad program. Furthermore, this item assesses willingness to engage in specific behaviors rather than diversity awareness; and the relationship between attitude and behavior is complicated. Specifically, the relationship between attitude and behavior is impacted by many factors such as the specificity of the attitude, perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985), attitude formation (Regan & Fazio, 1977), cognitive factors (Snyder & Kendzierski, 1982), and situational factors (Abelson, 1982).

This study has implications for higher education in the areas of diversity awareness, pedagogy, and student learning. The findings are germane to faculty and programs that aim to infuse diversity awareness in the curriculum. Employing a format similar to WELS may be advantageous for programs and faculty when conducting diversity awareness trainings.

Certain limitations of the study should be considered in the interpretation and generalization of the findings. One significant limitation of the study is the absence of experimental and control groups. This study utilized a pretest-posttest design. This design might have sensitized participants to what was being investigated and thereby affected posttest results. The data collected is limited to students from one institution. Therefore, these findings may not generalize to others populations or regions in the United States. Of particular note was the small number of participants from minority groups.

Future Research Directions

Future research needs to explore the relative effectiveness of different training strategies on diversity awareness. Participants' pre-test scores on the MUDAS could be used to structure and improve these diversity training lectures. Future research should identify the specific lecture characteristics that improve diversity awareness. More studies are required to demonstrate a relationship between pedagogical practices and student diversity awareness. Most importantly, future research should employ experimental assessments of diversity awareness training by utilizing experimental and control groups. This study evaluated diversity awareness immediately after the lecture. It is critical to discern the maintenance of this awareness over time. Measuring diversity awareness at two-month, six-month, and one-year intervals could accomplish this goal. Longitudinal studies that follow students from entry into training through graduation would be beneficial to more fully understand trends in diversity awareness. This could help in curriculum planning.

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Appendix A

Title and Brief Description of Lectures

1. Title: Education Across the Pacific Ocean Reach Out Taiwan
Description: A native of Taiwan shared educational policy and practice in Taiwan, including compulsory education, special education, teacher training, and issues of equity and diversity.
2. Title: The Power of Experience in Learning About Cultural Diversity and Education: Examples from Turkey and the U.S.

Description: The speaker who grew up in a small town in Turkey and worked as a teacher in different communities discussed his teaching experiences and cultural observations in Turkish, Cherkes, Kurdish, and American cultures.

3. Title: Immigration, Education and America

Description: A daughter of immigrants, the speaker, discussed about how society structures opportunities for some while blocking them for others, particularly in terms of culture and class. The speaker's research on the daily lives of immigrant youth, including analysis of migration status and its effects work, school, family responsibilities, and aspirations for social mobility was presented.

4. Title: Race, Class and Indifference: Predictors of Educational Access and Outcomes

Description: The speaker discussed their work to promote diversity and democratic values by providing youth with leadership, academic, research and advocacy skills to eliminate existing local and national civil rights and social justice disparities.

5. Title: Decolonizing the Imagination: Creative Expressions of Haitian Youth

The speaker shared own experiences developing an academic enrichment and cultural center in Haiti.

6. Title: The Israel Educational System: Frameworks, Challenges, and Opportunities

The speaker, a faculty member at an institute of higher education in Israel, described the Israeli educational system. The education system's ways of dealing with a multiplicity of ethnic and cultural groups, while struggling with internal contradiction were reviewed.

7. Title: Performing Story: An Act of Sovereignty in the Expression of Identity

The speaker, a tribal member of the Ramapough Lunaapee Indian Nation who actively promotes the education of the public about Indigenous culture and Mother Earth, performed narratives to situate audiences within an artistic construction of a local identity embedded within the dynamics of personal and community sovereignties.

8. Title: Health Promotion and Counseling the Culturally Diverse.

Description: The speaker discussed promotion of behavior change among diverse groups. Multicultural aspects of counseling interventions and healthcare delivery were examined.

9. Title: *Youth Power & Youth Voice*

Description: Issues that impact Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQQ) individuals were discussed. Best practices for working with LGBTQQ individuals were shared to help the audience members gain the tools for change that lead to safe, inclusive communities for LGBTQQ individuals, and experience how empowerment can bring about social change.

10. Title: You Are Dumb Until I Give You This: Youth Rethinking Education

Description: Members of a youth group led an engaging conversation focusing on ways to empower youth as learners, breaking down barriers that exist in schools, and engaging youth as leaders in the classroom.

11. Title: Latino Student Achievement and the ELL Crisis

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Description: The speaker who has extensive experience in social services work and policy focused on Latino student achievement and the ELL crisis along with ways to strengthen partnerships that lead to academic success.