

RU Engaged 2009-2010
Broadening Our Horizons: Campus Diversity: What, Why & How?
Comments and Feedback from Attendees
October 1, 2009

On October 1, 2009 approximately 80 participants attended the initial conversation of the 2009-2010 RU Engaged series in Eynon Ballroom. The session was entitled “Campus Diversity: What? Why? How?” and was facilitated by Dr. Mary Beth Walpole, Educational Leadership and Dr. Tyrone McCombs, Rowan at Camden.

The facilitators opened the session by providing a summary of the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 series, and gave an overview of the sessions that will be held during the 2009-2010 academic year. They reminded those in attendance that RU Engaged is intended to provide a venue for every member of the Rowan family to have input and share in conversations that affect the future of Rowan.

President Farish offered greetings and reiterated the outcomes of previous RU Engaged Series that led to input into the University strategic plan and to a definition of shared governance. He discussed the difference between ‘diversity’ – which is viewed as an outcome, and ‘inclusivity’ which is a value. He reminded us that ‘inclusivity’ is a core value of our strategic plan highlighting the need for us to embrace, not merely tolerate diversity on our campus. He further stated that as a public institution it is our obligation to be a welcoming community. We have a responsibility to the students to ensure that they live in a diverse community and that they have opportunities to a quality education. He thanked participants for their attendance and stated that he is looking forward to the outcomes of this series.

Groups seated at small tables were then given 25 minutes to respond to four questions: 1) What does diversity mean? 2) Why is it important? 3) What are the aspects of diversity? 4) What is the difference between diversity and inclusivity? After each table had an opportunity to discuss the questions, the small groups reported out. Summaries of their responses appear below.

1. What does diversity mean?
 - Race, age, disability, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation
 - Social norms different from what we are exposed to
 - Differences and unique qualities of a group
 - Respect for individuals despite differences
 - Ways to categorize people
 - We included vegetarians, religious diversity, including the freedom not to practice a religion
 - We talked about diversity of thought, opinion, and perspectives
 - Everything and everybody
2. Why is it important?
 - We all need each other. We need to support each other. We need to eliminate the fear of the unknown.

- There is a difference between a melting pot and a salad bowl. Diversity matters for us to communicate with each other, learn from one another, to positively interact, for acceptance, to promote peace. It is important to be in contact with people from other countries.
 - Different points of view make the community stronger.
 - There is a broader spread of ideas. This provides more options for solving problems.
 - Diversity is needed for decision-making.
 - We learn how to collaborate and cooperate.
 - Interacting with diverse peoples adds to your life. You can pass it on to others.
 - It opens the lines of communication; heightens our comfort level for working together.
 - It brings a global view. Each person can bring something to the table. It is a reality of the world.
 - You can't know what you stand for until your views are challenged.
 - For human dignity – I'm different, not less.
 - The world would be boring.
3. What are the aspects of diversity?
- Everything. Everyone has a life story and everyone's story is different.
 - Race, age, disability, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation
 - Anything different is an aspect of diversity.
 - People's ideas, beliefs, values, experiences, how they identify themselves.
 - Working with other people – being open and optimistic.
 - Respect and embracing values. The media plays a role as a filter. Don't be a bystander when you witness discrimination.
 - Job titles – administration, faculty, staff. Age – young to old. It is important for the institution. Always pleasantly surprised by the level of commitment from all to this institution.
4. What is the difference between diversity and inclusivity?
- Diversity is accepted. There is a choice to make to be inclusive. How do we move forward to reach a goal of inclusivity?
 - Diversity means tolerating. Inclusivity means welcoming and celebrating.
 - Diversity is descriptive and inclusivity is active.
 - You can have diversity without having inclusivity, and that is not enough.
 - Inclusivity is an action that we have to take to make sure diverse peoples are welcomed, embraced and celebrated.
 - Diversity focuses on differences. Inclusivity focuses on welcoming.

The conversation then opened up to large group discussion around the issue of tolerance. What does it mean to move beyond mere tolerance? Individual comments included:

- You tolerate acne; you tolerate athlete's foot, not people.
- Think about your in-laws. Do you tolerate? Embrace?
- Some people are just at the tolerance level. How do we move them along?

- How do we move beyond talk to action and implementation?
- Tolerance is expanding our mind...our view
- This is a discussion of language. What do words mean? Let's talk about meaning as well. I'm even concerned about the term 'appreciate.' Does that relate to an international festival?

The conversation then moved to social justice....

- Where is the place for social justice?
- Are we willing to walk in each other's shoes? Then we're moving closer.
- Is the conversation going to get any deeper? Will it lead to acquisition of knowledge? We need to go back and read the definition for words like diversity and tolerance.
- Why can't we create our own definition of diversity? Why can't Rowan create its own definitions?
- Sometimes words and conversations are not enough. Simulations might help.
- At Rowan, what is the focus of diversity? Differences or having everyone feel welcome?
- Are we going after a 1st, 2nd, or 3rd order change? We usually stop after 1st order – new program, bumper sticker, etc. If we're visionary then we focus on 2nd and 3rd order change. We don't go back to old ways.
- How do we get to where we're going? Respect is very important.

The facilitators indicated that we had reached the end of our allotted time and invited individuals to provide feedback on the index cards at each of the tables. They also invited everyone to the remaining conversations in the series:

November 9, 2009, "Perceptions of Campus Climate", 5:30-7:00 pm in the Eynon Ballroom.

February 9, 2010, "Awareness: How Inclusive are we?" 3:15 -4:45pm in the Eynon Ballroom

April 19, 2010, "Creating an Inclusive Environment", 3:15-4:45 pm in the Eynon Ballroom