

Stream proposal for the Equal Opportunities International Conference, Athens 2013

Proposed title: Examining the Criteria for Effective Diversity Learning in the Professional Workplace

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In the United States there is little discourse on methodologies for teaching diversity and inclusion in the professional workplace. There is even less discussion of what diversity content should be taught, and how learning can be effectively and engagingly delivered. In the corporate, legal and education sectors, diversity training is the norm. This training is generally understood as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Yet "training" connotes top-down, superficial treatment and one-off or annual sessions. The methodology behind such training and the source of the learning content is often unexamined by the purchaser of the learning program---the corporate or institutional office. Moreover, the methodology void is often filled by shifting and more or less persuasive justifications for diversity learning, such as social justice, advocacy for and by discrete identity groups, corporate responsibility, and legal requirements. These justifications may be un-explicated or controversial, thereby leading to confusion, political opposition and resistance to learning among diversity trainees. Accordingly, the proposed stream will examine methodologies for teaching diversity and inclusion in the professional workplace. It will address the fundamental questions, what diversity knowledge, skills and competencies should be taught, and how?

Stream questions:

1. Is there a body of essential diversity and inclusion content?

Is there a core diversity and inclusion curriculum for the professional workplace? What, if any, are fundamental diversity competencies?

2. What are the desired outcomes for diversity learning in the professional workplace?

What knowledge and skills make workplace offices, departments and units more inclusive? At the institutional level, what are the desired outcomes of diversity learning programs? How can diversity learning connect institutional diversity goals to personal diversity competence?

3. Should diversity learning content be based on research?

What is the difference between diversity learning based on research that identifies ways to grow cultures of inclusion and increase diversity, and diversity learning based on concepts of social justice, corporate responsibility, legal exposure, and advocacy?

4. How can diversity learning be made engaging? How can learning methodology address diversity resistance, including claims that diversity learning is motivated by political correctness?

How can learners be made to feel that diversity learning is addressed to, and benefits them, and that it will help advance diversity and inclusive culture in their office, unit or department? How can learning be designed to give learners confidence that it is neither an infringement upon personal beliefs or political viewpoints nor a comment on any one person's status or identity group membership?

5. What is the best way to deliver diversity learning?

What delivery format/s are the most engaging, accessible, flexible and cost effective? What, if any, is the place of online diversity learning?

Stream keywords: diversity, learning, teaching, methodology, competencies