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An Overview of Diversity[1]

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This paper is the first in a series of articles on planning programs to effectively outreach to diverse audiences. This series will include specialized papers on enhancing cultural competence, recruiting diverse volunteers, planning culturally appropriate marketing strategies, and other topics that are integral to the design and implementation of culturally relevant Extension education programs.

Defining Diversity

There are probably as many definitions of diversity as there are diverse characteristics of people. One definition states that: "Diversity is a mosaic of people who bring a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, styles, perspectives, values and beliefs as assets to the groups and organizations with which they interact" (Guion, 1999, p.1).

There are two essential words in the aforementioned definition of diversity: assets and interact. There will always be commonalities and differences among people, but the key is to interact well with the groups you serve. By interacting with individuals you gain a better sense of what their specific felt needs are, which needs can be addressed through Extension, and how to best deliver the education in a way that will be received by the

individuals. Also, you gain insight into their strengths, assets, and skills, enabling you to use those as part of the solution.

To truly accept diversity, you must learn to respect and value it. If you are willing to respect it, you must have the commitment to gain the knowledge, skills, and personal awareness necessary to work in the most effective way with a variety of clients. An Extension professional that can learn to integrate diversity factors into program design, greatly increases the chances of establishing a program that effectively serves the participants.

Several EDIS fact sheets in this series focus on key programming issues including "Planning Programs to Break Down Cultural Barriers," "Culturally Diverse Advisory Boards and Volunteers", "Ethnic Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audiences," "Personal Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audiences," and "Relationship Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audiences." These and other publications in this series will provide more information on strengthening programs to reach diverse audiences.

Different Types of Diversity

In defining diversity, we must also examine the different dimensions of diversity. There are two broad dimensions of diversity: primary and secondary. Primary dimensions of diversity reflect characteristics that are salient and can not be changed, they include: age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities or qualities, race, place of birth, etc. Whereas secondary dimensions are those that can change, such as educational background, geographic location, income, martial status, parental status, religious beliefs, work experiences, etc.

Changing Demographics

The 2000 U.S. Census confirmed that minority groups are increasing at a rapid rate. Our country is more ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse than ever before in its history. The major factors for this rapid rate of growth are as follows:

- Large scale immigration;

- Globalization of goods, services and finances;

- Current immigration policy focusing on family unification; and

- Census 2000 allowed people to claim more than one race for the first time in history.

Some national statistics provide further evidence of the changing demographics:

- In the past ten years, the Latino population increased more than 60%. The Latino population is slightly larger than the African American population. This was predicted to happen in 2010.

- Currently, 13% (34.7 million) of Americans identify themselves as African American.

- Asian Indians (2 million) are the fastest growing subgroup among all Asian groups in the United States.

- In 2000, Native Americans comprised 0.9% of the U.S. population.

- According to Census 2000, one in five Americans (17.9% of the population) over five spoke a foreign language in addition to English.

Foreign-born immigration is approaching levels not realized since 1900-1910. Based on reports from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 11% of the total population in the U.S. is foreign born. In 2000, nearly 7 million people (2.4% of the entire population) identified themselves with more than one race. This means that people are beginning to recognize their multi-ethnicity.

Florida statistics for the year 2000, taken from *Florida Quick Facts* by the U.S. Census Bureau, also demonstrate the rapid demographic shifts occurring in this state:

- Persons of Latino origin comprised 16.8% of Florida's population.

- 14.6% of Florida's population identified themselves as African American.

- Asian persons in general account for 1.7% of the population of Florida.

- American Indian and Alaska native persons comprise 0.3% of the people in Florida.

- 23.1% of persons over five in Florida speak a foreign language in addition to English.

- Foreign-born immigration in Florida consists of 16.7% of the population.

Diversity Within Diversity

When thinking about diversity, you must also consider diversity among and within ethnic groups. There is significant diversity within various ethnic groups in our society today. The main ethnic groups in the U.S. include African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Native Americans. While there are common cultural threads within a certain ethnic group, there are also very distinct values, norms, and practices within the group. Consider these facts:

- African American/Black is a term that encompasses recent African immigrants as well

as the descendants of contiguous Africa, both in mainland U.S. and from the U.S. Caribbean territories.

- The term Asian American refers to Americans who trace their origins to any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asian, or Indian subcontinents. It includes people with ancestral ties to India, China, the Philippines, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Pakistan, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia, etc.

- There are at least 14 distinct groups that make up the Hispanic/Latino American population, whose members trace their lineage to one of three continents: North America (Mexico and the Caribbean), Europe (Spain), and South America, as well as from the isthmus of Central America.

- There are close to five hundred federally recognized Native American tribes.

Other factors that can also contribute to diversity within an ethnic group are education, socioeconomic, level of ethnic identification, family background, and upbringing, etc. The EDIS fact sheet in this series that focuses on ethnic marketing is FY758, "Ethnic Marketing: A Strategy for Marketing Programs to Diverse Audiences" provides more information on diversity within diversity.

Conclusion

Based on the changing demographics, you can see there is clearly a need for Extension programs to become even more diverse in terms of participants, volunteers, and staff. Given the fact that the population from which to draw program target audiences is changing in a major way, programming must also change in order to be more responsive to the needs of all potential extension clientele.

Reflection

What changes have you noticed in the demographics of your county or community where you live/work? The chances are great that your county is experiencing similar changes to those reported in Census 2000. If so, how is your organization/agency responding to this change in

demographics, and is the response adequate? If not, then think about what else can be done. The EDIS fact sheets in the series will help you to gain more insight into this complex issue.

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