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## THE CHAIR'S IMPACT ON DIVERSITY COMPETENCY

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In small groups, please discuss these narratives of recent college graduates and the ways in which department chairs can impact departmental climate, curriculum, and classroom approaches that support diversity competence and student identity development.

### **Scenario 1**

That Cross-cultural Psych class ...it really kind of changed my perspective on things. Before I had that class, I had always been used to being the only black person in class, and that continued in college. ...after I took this class, it helped me understand that my experience is personal to me and I have my own personal identification and if I don't act like another black student it's o.k. ...it really helped me become more confident in my own identification. I still struggle with it, because that's how I grew up. But whenever I think, 'Oh I'm not acting a certain way, or like I am acting too white,' I kind of remind myself that there is not one certain way a black person should act. And so I think that's something I became more comfortable with after taking that class. It helped me become more aware of racial identification.

Tanya, an African-American psychology graduate of a predominantly white Midwestern public research university

### **Questions for Consideration:**

What are the ways in which the chair can lead faculty in terms of curricular content, classroom interactions, and departmental climate that help overcome the prevalent conception of a common collective identity associated with a given social group?

How can the chair deflate presuppositions that cultural identity is synonymous with a given set of characteristics, such as Asian Americans are good in math and STEM fields?

## **Scenario 2**

It challenged my sense of identity because once again I was reminded of what the world thought of me, you know those historical perceptions of race. In high school and middle school it's like a constant trying to prove oneself that you had value and you were as smart as the mainstream. And I thought college would be the one place it would stop. Because you got here so you expected everyone here to have the "it" factor to make it. I found himself fighting for four more years to prove [myself]; it sort of made me bitter. I would say it strengthened me in terms of my resolve; but I wouldn't say it was like a positive strategy. But I have seen some of my peers, where they rebelled, they either dropped out or some of them dropped out. But the others who made it, it was like building up of a callous on the hand, that's what it did for me.

Martin, an African American sociology graduate of a predominantly white Midwestern public research university

## **Questions for Consideration**

What concrete actions could a sociology department chair in the context of a large, predominantly white public research university have taken that might have made a difference in terms of Martin's experiences as a minority undergraduate?

How might these strategies differ in a private liberal arts college?

What strategies have you used as a chair to facilitate communicate with undergraduate majors from nondominant groups?

### **Scenario 3**

Powerful experiences can be good, and powerful experiences can be bad. I interpret powerful as something long lasting. It was an experience I had with some college Republicans.... When I was talking with some of them, they simply couldn't relate to the idea of not having enough food or not having clothes. They were automatically assuming that disability meant disease. It seemed to be rooted in some sort of 1950s understanding.

My bachelor's program really sucked, it was quite isolating. ... By and large, I had a rather cruddy experience there. It is very difficult to think of something truly positive. It certainly contributed to my idea of expanding diversity in the workplace.

Diversity in my mind it is a matter of experiencing cognitive dissonance in such a way that it does challenge horizons of understanding. In this case my very presence and their reaction to me was one that challenged my concept of education.

Anthony, a white male sociology graduate of a predominantly white private liberal arts college with a mild form of autism spectrum disorder

### **Questions for Consideration**

What strategies can chairs deploy to help students with disabilities—both cognitive and physical—acclimate to the curriculum? To the classroom?

In what ways can chairs address issues of cognitive dissonance with diversity through course-based service learning or classroom strategies?