

## Chapter One

# Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs

*I teach in a master's level student personnel program at a Research I university. I teach about college students and social conditions affecting higher education and try to do so from a fair and objective perspective. My goal is to be "color-blind" and understand our society from all points of view. I don't ignore race, but it really isn't the focus of my class. That's why we have a Cultural Diversity in Higher Education class. I just can't figure out why some students of color express frustration with the readings I have assigned and the examples I use in class. I really just don't understand what they expect of me. (White male faculty member teaching at a predominantly White university)*

*I work in the Office of Student Activities (OSA) and I am really good at what I do. Recently I was accused of showing favoritism towards students of color by some White students because of the types of programs that OSA sponsors. The fact is, OSA supports all student groups—and we try to ensure that they all have the opportunity to succeed. But some of these groups—especially the students-of-color groups—really struggle to survive on this predominantly White campus. I know from my own undergraduate experience that if students-of-color groups are really visible and powerful on campus, they will, in turn, help individual students of color feel less marginal and stick around to graduate. OAS does target specific types of programs for these student groups. But when it is all added up, the students of color still get far less than the White students both from this office and this campus. Yet, I'm accused of favoritism! Have these White students looked around this campus at all? (Latina assistant director of student activities)*

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*I am completing one of my student affairs internships in the residence halls on my campus. My graduate program is located on an urban campus and since the resident population of the halls is almost 25 percent students of color, there is a lot of attention focused on multicultural issues in resident advisor and resident director training. My concern is that the only multicultural issue that ever gets attention is race. Don't get me wrong, I honestly believe that racism is a problem and that we should focus on it. But it bothers me that we don't even discuss other issues that affect the residents and the staff like sexual orientation or disability. I feel uncomfortable bringing up the issue because I haven't told anyone here that I am a lesbian. At the same time, I also don't like feeling invisible. (White lesbian graduate student in student personnel)*

These statements and numerous others like them are all too familiar on college campuses today. Many student affairs practitioners, faculty, and graduate students are striving to create a campus that is welcoming for all students, yet they are often perplexed and frustrated with the results. The increasingly complex cultural dynamics on college and university campuses across the country are making the work of student affairs professionals more challenging than ever. Some of the most controversial and demanding cultural issues and concerns have included the changing makeup of the student body in terms of race, age, income, and other significant social variables; the increase in the reporting of discrimination and bias crimes; affirmative action policies that are either legally challenged or dismantled; and redefining and exploring core curriculum requirements in a multicultural context. These complicated and difficult issues necessitate a new collection of knowledge and skills. In addition, innovative approaches are needed to address the individual needs of a diverse student body and the organizational demands of changing campuses. Cheatham (1991) suggested that colleges and universities have responded to cultural diversity issues in a variety of ways over the years and that the results have been, at best, inconsistent. There is little evidence to suggest that much has changed in the last ten years.

Student affairs professionals have always played an important role in addressing multicultural issues in higher education. According to Pope, "student affairs professionals have been in the

forefront of the quest to create more welcoming and affirming campus environments and have often been called upon to address the discontent and outrage of students who have experienced an alienating and hostile campus climate” (1993b, p. 3).

These efforts are consistent with the expectations of the role of student affairs on a college campus that has always been to address the needs of students outside the classroom (Hood & Arceneaux, 1990). Despite the significant role that the student affairs profession has played in responding to multicultural issues on campus, there is limited student affairs literature that specifically addresses multicultural concerns (Pope, 1993b). Rather, the literature is far more general in simply suggesting that multiculturalism is an appropriate approach. Multicultural dynamics appeared dramatically in higher education in the 1960s and 1970s as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War became contentious and controversial issues on campus. Despite the prevalence of escalating conflict on many campuses, student affairs professionals had insufficient literature to guide their responses. During the 1980s and 1990s, there were published articles and books addressing multicultural issues and focusing on the importance of making college campuses more welcoming and multiculturally sensitive (Astin, 1992; Barr & Strong, 1988; Cheatham, 1991; Katz, 1989; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Ponterotto, Lewis, & Bullington, 1990; Reynolds & Pope, 1994; Woolbright, 1989; Wright, 1987). Recently, scholars have focused on the need to incorporate multicultural issues into the curriculum and training of the student affairs profession (Ebbers & Henry, 1990; Fried, 1995; McEwen & Roper, 1994a, 1994b; Pope, 1995; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Pope, Reynolds, & Cheatham, 1997; Talbot, 1996a, 1996b; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997). Further, there have been efforts to infuse multiculturalism into the core theories and practices of student affairs (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Fried, 1995; Pope, 1995). Although there has been increased cognizance of the importance of multicultural issues in student affairs and higher education in general, it is unclear how much of this awareness has become integrated into the core values, beliefs, and practices of the profession. For example, two studies that explored the “great books” of student affairs observed that most books identified were written by White males and that few addressed multicultural concerns (Hamrick & Schuh, 1992, 1997).

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Many scholars have argued that the student affairs profession needs to become more multiculturally sensitive and responsive (Barr & Strong, 1988; Cheatham, 1991; Howard-Hamilton, Richardson, & Shuford, 1998; Manning & Coleman-Boatwright, 1991; Pope, 1995). According to Talbot, “the student affairs profession will need to assume a leadership role in helping institutions bridge the gap between old skills and paradigms and the new tools necessary to effectively meet the needs of changing student populations” (1996b, p. 380). Despite these expectations, many student affairs practitioners have received minimal training in multicultural issues, and their work performance rarely has been evaluated using multicultural criteria (McEwen & Roper, 1994a, 1994b; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Talbot, 1996a; Talbot & Kocarek, 1997). In student affairs it has become commonplace to view the knowledge and ability to respond to multicultural issues as a special skill cultivated by a few individuals rather than as a compulsory competency area for all professionals. Given that multicultural concerns and dynamics are occurring in almost every aspect of campus life, it is no longer defensible for student affairs professionals to rely solely on “multicultural experts.” Instead, what is necessary is a reexamination of what constitutes basic competencies, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for effective professional practice in student affairs.

### **Student Affairs Core Competencies**

According to Pope and Reynolds, “the student affairs literature shows increasing attention to the core competencies, or general awareness, knowledge, and skills needed for efficacious and improved professional practice” (1997, p. 267). Scholars have suggested concrete competencies that are needed for student affairs practitioners (Barr, 1993b; Commission of Professional Development [COPA], 1988; Council for the Advancement of Standards [CAS], 1992, 1997, 1999; Creamer et al., 1992; Delworth & Hansen, 1989; Komives & Woodard, 1996; Miller & Winston, 1991). Moore (1985) focused her discussion of professional competencies on generic skills that could be found in any student affairs job description: interviewing, problem solving, management, instruction or training, conflict management, supervision,

verbal and written communication, self-knowledge, and others. Barr (1993b) focused her list of essential competencies for middle and upper management program planning, outcome assessment and evaluation, budgeting and fiscal management, theory translation, conflict and crisis management, ethical and legal knowledge, as well as campus and community relationships. Some of the core competencies identified by Delworth and Hansen (1989) are assessment and evaluation, instruction, consultation, counseling and advising, program development, budgeting, and managing and using data and information resources. According to the preparation guidelines by the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS): "Preparation for practice in student affairs requires knowledge of the foundations of higher education and student affairs; knowledge of professional practice including student development theories, college student characteristics and effects of college on students, individual and group interventions, organization and administration of student affairs, and assessment, evaluation, and research; and supervised practice that includes demonstration of proficiency in appropriate educational skills and competencies" (1997, p. 1).

Creamer, Winston, and Miller (2001) identified specific skills and knowledge that student affairs administrators need in their roles as educators, managers, and leaders. Within the manager role, they specified competencies such as planning, assessment, budgeting, program assessment, and managing facilities. Influencing, collaboration, and self-knowledge were some of the competencies identified as part of the leader role. Finally, within the role as teacher they suggested skills such as lecturing, advising, coaching, and facilitating.

Komives and Woodard's list of essential competencies for student affairs (1996) was one of the few compilations to include multicultural issues as central to the development of student affairs professionals. Their competency list, viewed as those core skills that cut across student affairs roles, also included leadership; teaching and training; advising and counseling; program development and advising; and assessment, evaluation, and research. In 2003, Komives and Woodard updated their competency list suggesting that consultation, conflict resolution, community building, and professionalism be added.

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Although various core competency lists exist, there appears to be a lack of consensus in the field regarding the core competencies for effective student affairs practice (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Creamer et al. (1992) suggested there is a strong and compelling need for the student affairs profession to become more competency based than it is. Until there is agreement within the profession about what core areas of awareness, knowledge, and skills are essential, it is difficult to assure the profession—as well as important stakeholder groups such as students, parents, higher education administrators, and faculty members—that there is an understanding of what quality student affairs work entails.

Student affairs practitioners and scholars have nevertheless increasingly petitioned that any expectations of what entails quality practice include multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills (Ebbers & Henry, 1990; King & Howard-Hamilton, 2001; McEwen & Roper, 1994a; Pope & Reynolds, 1997; Pope et al., 1997; Talbot, 1996b). In addition, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the two preeminent professional associations for student affairs professionals, have identified multicultural issues and skills as fundamental to the field (NASPA, 1987; Pope et al., 1997). Taking those suggestions one step further, Pope and Reynolds created a synthesized list of seven core student affairs competencies:

1. Administrative and management
2. Theory and translation
3. Helping and interpersonal
4. Ethical and legal
5. Teaching and training
6. Assessment and evaluation
7. Multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills

Although each of the seven competencies is the subject of a chapter in this book, they warrant an introduction here.

The first core competency, *administrative and management*, constitutes those capabilities necessary to complete the tasks common to most student affairs administrative positions, such as fiscal management and budgeting, resource use and allocation, strategic

planning, time management, delegation, and task supervision. *Theory and translation* entails thorough knowledge and understanding of the various theories necessary for effective student affairs practice, including student development, management, and organization development theories. In addition, this competency involves knowledge of and appropriate use of process models that prescribe the translation of theory to practice. *Helping and advising* involves the advising and counseling components of many student affairs positions, including communication skills, group dynamics, crisis intervention and conflict management, as well as campus and community relations. *Ethical and professional standards* includes knowledge of ethical standards and legal implications as well as the ability to make decisions and solve problems about complex ethical issues that are daily challenges for student affairs practitioners. *Training and teaching* consists of not only formal classroom style teaching but also the ability to design and present workshops, staff development and training, and offer consultation to individuals and groups on campus. *Research and assessment* requires that professionals have the ability to complete self-studies, program evaluations, and campus assessments (for example, quality-of-life assessments) and make meaning of the data collected. The final competency area, *multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills*, entails the awareness of one's own assumptions, biases, and values; an understanding of the worldview of others; information about various cultural groups; and developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques.

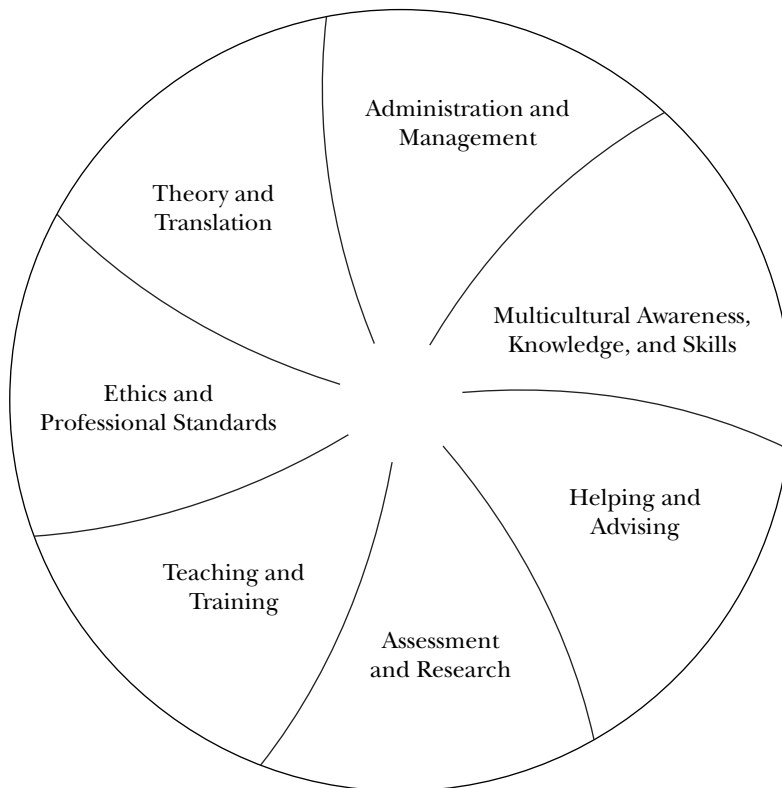
*Multicultural competence* is a distinctive category of awareness, knowledge, and skills essential for efficacious student affairs work; this category may assist student affairs practitioners in creating diverse and inclusive campuses. However, it is also vital that multicultural competencies be integrated into the other six core competencies. Although not *all* student affairs practitioners will become experts in multicultural issues (any more than they are expected to be assessment experts or authorities on budgeting), every student affairs professional must have a level of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills that allows them to competently work with diverse groups of students and colleagues.

The Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence (see Figure 1.1) is a visual representation of these crucial student affairs core

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competencies. The seven core competencies offer a parsimonious conceptualization of the requisite qualities and abilities for efficacious student affairs practice. Although all student affairs practitioners need some level of competence in these seven areas if they are to be effective in their work, some professionals naturally develop more proficiency in specific areas on the basis of work experiences and interests. Such differential strengths are acceptable so long as individuals can meet basic requirements for quality service. The level and depth of competence may vary with the individual and area of competence, but some standards need to be developed for minimal competence.

**Figure 1.1. The Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence**



*Source:* Adapted from Pope and Reynolds (1997), p. 269.

The Dynamic Model of Student Affairs Competence is not meant to be a measurement tool; however, the model can be used for professional self-assessment, goal setting, and possibly supervision and evaluation. Student affairs professionals or graduate students could use this model within a job or academic program as pretest and posttest, discussing their strengths and areas for growth when they began and how those areas change during the course of their employment or education. The open hub at the center of the model further illustrates the dynamic and fluid nature of the seven core competencies. Ideally, competence in one area may have an influence on other competencies as well. For example, understanding the literature on students of color further enhances knowledge of student development theory. Helping and advising skills are more fully enhanced if one has an understanding of how women and men communicate their emotions in different ways. Examining leadership from a multicultural perspective is a final example; leadership from this context requires a broader definition of what is meant by being a “successful” leader (Pope, 1995). Without careful consideration of an inclusive view of how to lead, it is easy to use the same techniques to motivate and involve everyone, which may have negative results. For example, individuals from some cultural groups are motivated by recognition and public support, while those from other cultural groups may be uncomfortable with individual attention and prefer that the team effort be acknowledged. Although each competency area is its own unique domain, the dynamic nature of student affairs work demands that individuals make connections across competency areas.

## **Multicultural Competence**

Multicultural competence is not a new concept. The counseling psychology literature has been examining, cultivating, and expanding the profession’s understanding of multicultural competence since the early 1980s. According to Pope and Reynolds, because of “intersecting histories and some overlapping professional goals,” (1997, p. 267), initially using the multicultural competence models from counseling psychology and applying them in student affairs is an appropriate and meaningful starting place to explore multicultural competence.

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Sue et al. (1982) first delineated the core multicultural competencies necessary for counseling, which included the tripartite model of multicultural competence (awareness, knowledge, and skills). Most multicultural training and competence models as well as instrument development in multicultural competence are based on this theoretical framework. According to Pope and Reynolds (1997), "counseling psychologists have continued to expand the depth of their understanding of the multicultural competencies necessary for effective psychological practice" (p. 267). Several revisions and expansions of the original Sue et al. (1982) model have occurred during the past twenty years, among them works by Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992); Sue et al. (1998); and Sue (2001).

In addition to theoretical developments in multicultural competence in counseling psychology, there have been extensive applications in clinical practice, training, and research. During the past decade, professional psychology has worked to translate the theoretical conceptualizations of multicultural competence to concrete guidelines for effective practice. Several committees within the American Psychological Association (APA) have developed working guidelines to assist practitioners in translating the beliefs and assumptions regarding multicultural competence into actual skills and behaviors for work with specific populations (see APA, 1993, 2000). Such guidelines make it possible for professionals to be focused, inclusive, and systematic in their efforts to become more multiculturally competent.

Training programs, curriculum, and supervision implications have also been increasingly explored in the multicultural counseling literature. Enhancing professional performance and training the next generation of psychologists to be multiculturally competent are important steps in the process of advancing the ability of a profession to address the needs of all individuals. Many training and supervision models and approaches have been proposed; see, for example, Brown and Landrum-Brown (1995); McRae and Johnson (1991); Pope-Davis, Breaux, and Liu (1997); Porter (1995); Reynolds (1995a, 1997); Ridley, Espelage, and Rubinstein (1997); Sue (1991); and Vazquez (1997).

There has been growing interest in multicultural competence research and instrument development in the multicultural counseling literature. To date, four multicultural counseling competence assessment instruments have been developed and

researched (D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991; Ponterotto et al., 1996; Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, & Sparks, 1994; Sadowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). Although in varying phases of validation and research, these instruments are being used to assess individual multicultural competence as well as evaluate the potency of some educational or training interventions. Despite the unique aspects of the various instruments, Pope-Davis and Dings (1995) identified four key multicultural competencies present in most if not all of the measurements: multicultural awareness and beliefs, multicultural knowledge, multicultural counseling skills, and multicultural counseling relationships. The availability of these instruments offers several benefits to the counseling profession, among them greater depth and complexity in the understanding of multicultural competence, further research and assessment of multicultural competence, and additional development of training and educational tools to enhance multicultural competence.

The research and exploration of multicultural competence is more limited in student affairs than in the counseling psychology literature. Most writing has concentrated generally on multicultural issues, with less attention on multicultural competence. Typically, multicultural research has focused more on students than on student affairs professionals (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). To effectively integrate the concept of multicultural competence in student affairs literature and practice, student affairs practitioners and faculty members must examine multicultural issues in complex and comprehensive ways that will influence future research, education and training, and work practices.

### **Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs**

According to Pope and Reynolds, "multicultural competence is a necessary prerequisite to effective, affirming, and ethical work in student affairs" (1997, p. 270). Using the tripartite model described in the counseling literature, multicultural competence may be defined as the awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to work with others who are culturally different from self in meaningful, relevant, and productive ways (see Pedersen, 1988; Sue et al., 1982; Sue et al., 1992; Sue, 2001). Although this definition accurately describes the current view of multicultural competence, the

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components described are necessary but not sufficient to be as inclusive as possible. Having the awareness, knowledge, and skills to address cultural issues with someone who is culturally different from one's self is critical. Having the awareness, knowledge, and skills to address cultural issues with someone who is culturally similar is just as crucial. When Whites work with other Whites around racial issues, or when women make consciousness-raising groups available to other women, there are multicultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills required in efficaciously addressing the issues and concerns of those individuals. The definition of multicultural competence must continue to change and embrace our growing understanding of the complexity of diversity. Moreover, the student affairs profession needs further clarification and discussion as to what constitutes the multicultural competencies necessary to effectively and ethically address multicultural issues (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Although student affairs preparation programs are increasingly addressing multicultural issues in the curriculum (Talbot, 1996a), more specific and concrete multicultural competency criteria need to be determined. Initial efforts to develop assessment tools for measuring multicultural competence in student affairs have begun (see Pope & Mueller, 2000; Mueller & Pope, 2001); however, more research and exploration is needed.

In this chapter, multicultural competence is explored from two primary vantage points. First, various global multicultural competencies are briefly explored and applied to the range of work responsibilities and tasks in which most student affairs practitioners engage. Second, good-practice exemplars are highlighted to further emphasize the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that student affairs professionals need to develop to work effectively and ethically across cultural differences and with cultural similarities. More thorough understanding of the various multicultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills allows student affairs professionals to assess their own level of multicultural competence and to understand and consider the multicultural capabilities of individuals whom they are teaching or supervising.

The global conceptualization of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills is a useful place to start. Multicultural awareness constitutes those values, attitudes, and assumptions essential to working with students who are culturally different from a particular student affairs professional (Pedersen, 1988; Pope &

Reynolds, 1997). Self-awareness, or the ability to be aware of those values, attitudes, and assumptions, is a significant aspect of multicultural awareness. Without such self-evaluation, individuals may not realize that they hold inaccurate or inappropriate views of a particular culture in the form of stereotypes, biases, or culturally based assumptions. For multicultural development to continue, individuals must be able to challenge their misinformation and correct their erroneous assumptions and beliefs.

Multicultural knowledge consists of the content knowledge about various cultural groups that is typically not taught in many preparation programs. Historically, many theories and most research in student affairs were completed on White males, often from elite institutions. Despite long-standing beliefs of universality, it is difficult to confidently generalize the results from such studies to other individuals or cultural groups. To be multiculturally competent, student affairs professionals must gather information about the cultural groups with which they are working. In addition, they must learn about important cultural constructs such as racial identity and acculturation, and how these constructs influence the helping process. Individuals must gather more accurate and extensive information and be cautious with how they use such knowledge. If an individual's awareness and relationship to his cultural group is not explored, content knowledge by itself may perpetuate a cookbook or stereotypical approach to working with individuals who are culturally different from oneself.

Multicultural skills consist of those behaviors that allow us to effectively apply the multicultural awareness and knowledge we have internalized. Central to those skills is the ability to communicate across cultures and understand how culture influences the content as well as the verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication. Without a foundation of multicultural awareness and knowledge, it is difficult to make culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions.

Analyzing the student affairs profession and ourselves is fundamental to developing multicultural competence. However, it is vital that we accept this self-exploration and expansion of our hearts, minds, and skills as a long-term process without easy answers. The complexity of increasing multicultural sensitivity sometimes overwhelms individuals who are striving to do right. Lopez et al. (1989), in their developmental model of how individuals learn to become more culturally sensitive, suggested that for

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some individuals considering culture as a factor in the helping process may feel like a burden for which they are unprepared. Such an attitude is understandable when individuals begin the process of increasing their multicultural competence, but if we accept the developmental notion of challenge and support, then no challenge is too great so long as we have an appropriate amount of support. S. Sue and Zane (1987) insisted that obtaining cultural knowledge and learning culturally sensitive techniques is necessary and important but not enough. Their belief was that individuals should focus on the broader goals of credibility and gift giving. If in the process of helping students in a culturally consistent way we instill faith, trust, confidence, or hope, then we build credibility in the helping process. If we are able to build rapport or establish trusting relationships with students, then we are giving them the gifts of optimism and validation.

Over the decades, the construct of multicultural competence has continued to evolve at the same time as a richer and more complex understanding of what constitutes multicultural competence has developed. Recently, Sue (2001) offered a rich model—the Multiple Dimensions of Cultural Competence (MDCC)—which can be used to enhance our understanding and application of multicultural competence in a variety of settings, one of which is higher education. In his expansion of what is commonly known as multicultural competence, Sue emphasized the need to possess multicultural organization development skills so we can intervene and advocate within our institutions and the larger profession to develop new and more inclusive theories, practices, and organizational systems. According to Reynolds (2001b), “this is a profoundly important shift in the definition of multicultural competence which holds great promise in providing new ways of thinking about and achieving multicultural transformation” (p. 6). Traditionally, the focus of multicultural competence has been on the individual and her skill level rather than on the institution. Pope (1995) argued that individual or even group change is not enough to create multicultural campuses. Instead, she suggested that systemic change fundamentally altering the values and practices of an institution is vital to creating true or lasting multicultural change.

The growth and development of multicultural competence as a significant approach to addressing multicultural issues has been

a positive and progressive advancement. Diverse conceptualizations, frameworks, and training models have yielded important knowledge and tools for professionals in counseling and student affairs. However, such rich information is not enough. Student affairs professionals need concrete and applied examples that illustrate how to implement the various multicultural competency models and translate ideas into action. Without such information, student affairs practitioners and faculty may be unsure which specific practices to incorporate into their multicultural change efforts. To that end, we offer some positive practice examples that we hope cultivate a more concrete and meaningful understanding of what it takes to address cultural issues effectively with students, staff, and faculty.

### **Exemplary Multicultural Practices in Student Affairs**

Pope and Reynolds (1997) identified thirty-three characteristics of a multiculturally competent student affairs practitioner (see Table 1.1). This list is not exhaustive, yet it offers an important starting place for professionals to examine their level of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills. In the interest of increasing awareness of essential and concrete multicultural competencies for student affairs, eleven multicultural characteristics either gleaned or expanded from that initial list are highlighted here. These specific exemplary practices were taken from the consulting and teaching work of the authors. These examples are not meant to be viewed as the right way to do things; however, they are being shared as illustrations of attitudes, knowledge, and skills that may be successful in meeting the needs of diverse students, implementing multicultural interventions, or creating more multiculturally sensitive organizations and campuses. It is important to underscore the uniqueness of each campus environment as well as the complex overlay of individual and cultural similarities and differences that influence each individual's response to multicultural change efforts. There is no such thing as one size fits all; these exemplary practices are not meant to be cookbook offerings. Instead, they are meant to help student affairs professionals conceptualize and apply these notions of multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills tangibly and realistically.

**Table 1.1. Characteristics of a Multiculturally Competent Student Affairs Practitioner**

<i>Multicultural Awareness</i>	<i>Multicultural Knowledge</i>	<i>Multicultural Skills</i>
A belief that differences are valuable and that learning about others who are culturally different is necessary and rewarding	Knowledge of diverse cultures and oppressed groups (i.e., history, traditions, values, customs, resources, issues)	Ability to identify and openly discuss cultural differences and issues
A willingness to take risks and see them as necessary and important for personal and professional growth	Information about how change occurs for individual values and behaviors	Ability to assess the impact of cultural differences on communication and effectively communicate across those differences
A personal commitment to justice, social change, and combating depression	Knowledge about the ways that cultural differences affect verbal and nonverbal communication	Capability to empathize and genuinely connect with individuals who are culturally different from themselves
A belief in the value and significance of their own cultural heritage and worldview as a starting place for understanding others who are culturally different	Knowledge about how gender, class, race, ethnicity, language, nationality, sexual orientation, age, religion or spirituality, and disability and ability affect individuals and their experiences	Ability to incorporate new learning and prior learning in new situations
A willingness to self-examine and, when necessary, challenge and change their own values, worldview, assumptions, and biases	Information about culturally appropriate resources and how to make referrals	Ability to gain the trust and respect of individuals who are culturally different from themselves

<i>Multicultural Awareness</i>	<i>Multicultural Knowledge</i>	<i>Multicultural Skills</i>
An openness to change, and belief that change is necessary and positive	Information about the nature of institutional oppression and power	Capability to accurately assess their own multicultural skills, comfort level, growth, and development
An acceptance of other worldviews and perspectives and a willingness to acknowledge that, as individuals, they do not have all the answers	Knowledge about identity development models and the acculturation process for members of oppressed groups and their impact on individuals, groups, intergroup relations, and society	Ability to differentiate among individual differences, cultural differences, and universal similarities
A belief that cultural differences do not have to interfere with effective communication or meaningful relationships	Knowledge about within-group differences and understanding of multiple identities and multiple oppressions	Ability to challenge and support individuals and systems around oppression issues in a manner that optimizes multicultural interventions
Awareness of their own cultural heritage and how it affects their worldview, values, and assumptions	Information and understanding of internalized oppression and its impact on identity and self-esteem	Ability to make individual, group, and institutional multicultural interventions
Awareness of their own behavior and its impact on others	Knowledge about institutional barriers that limit access to and success in higher education for members of oppressed groups	Ability to use cultural knowledge and sensitivity to make more culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions
Awareness of the interpersonal process that occurs within a multicultural dyad	Knowledge about systems theories and how systems change	

*Source:* Pope and Reynolds (1997). Used by permission.

### Exemplary Multicultural AWARENESS

*A student affairs professional becomes aware that she has limited knowledge and experience with a specific group that is culturally different from her. A multiculturally sensitive professional seeks out additional training, pursues peer supervision with colleagues from his own cultural group, and begins supplemental reading.*

Being willing to evaluate our own strengths and weaknesses with multicultural issues as well as with different populations is very important. All of us have been exposed to misinformation and have developed stereotypes on the basis of our life experiences, teachings from our families and communities, and media influences. This is true whether we belong to a dominant group such as Whites or are from a target group, perhaps Latino or Latina. None of us is immune, and guilt and defensiveness often prevent us from learning, growing, and developing more meaningful relationships with individuals who are culturally different from us. Within a professional context, few if any of us have received adequate training to be prepared to address the myriad multicultural concerns in higher education today. Therefore, those most willing or able to take risks to admit what they don't know are most likely to increase their multicultural sensitivity.

*A student affairs professional needs some awareness of his own cultural heritage and how it affects his worldview, values, and assumptions. A multiculturally sensitive professional has spent time examining how his life experiences, family background, and cultural influences affect how he relates to individuals who are culturally different from him.*

Many of us have never taken the time to thoroughly explore our value system; we may assume that what is normal for us is also commonplace for others. This is especially true for individuals who are members of a dominant group, such as men or heterosexuals. Our family and cultural background profoundly affect our values and worldview, and often we are not aware of the extent of this influence until we take a step back to examine ourselves. Sometimes this awareness can be uncomfortable or painful, should we observe that our values have become different from our families,

our friends, or the larger society. Whether we are a White person who begins to confront the racism in our family or an African American heterosexual person who challenges the homophobia within her community, such awareness can lead to difficult choices about how we want to live our lives.

*A student affairs professional realizes that despite her longstanding personal commitment to multicultural issues and combating oppression, her life continues to center around relationships and activities with people who are mostly like her.* Regardless of who she is, whether she is a Jewish woman, a White lesbian, or a woman of color, she recognizes that her friends are of a similar background and her social activities are often not inclusive of other cultural groups. As a multiculturally sensitive professional, she realizes that regardless of what she believes, she has never really changed her life.

It often takes a long time for this realization to occur because attitudinal changes are sometimes easier than behavioral changes. We work hard to challenge ourselves and our values, and we may even become a multicultural leader at work; yet when we look at our choices of who we socialize with, where we spend our money, what music we listen to, and where we live, we realize we lead fairly monocultural lives. It is sometimes difficult and challenging to live a fully multicultural life because it means putting ourselves into situations where we must constantly be aware of our values and worldview and how they affect others' perception of us, as well as how we form relationships with those who are culturally different from us or who have very different values. No one should feel the need to constantly be in the minority or among those who are different. Bernice Johnson Reagon (1983) suggested we all need time to be at home with others who are like us so it takes less energy to communicate and make sense of the world. This is why Tatum (1997) believes that we should not see student self-segregation as having a negative influence on community. Although we need to find more effective ways to encourage students to socialize in heterogeneous groups and build multicultural friendships, we do not need to take away important time with their own cultural group that allows them to build self-confidence and get support from others with common experiences and background.

### Exemplary Multicultural KNOWLEDGE

*A student affairs professional who is working in student activities with diverse student groups becomes aware of the lack of information she has about many cultural groups. She begins to feel it is affecting her advisement and her ability to form close and meaningful relationships with these students. A culturally knowledgeable professional seeks out information about diverse cultures through books, professional development, and, most important, personal relationships with individuals from different cultures.*

The importance of cultural knowledge and information cannot be overemphasized. Because we have been underexposed to accurate and meaningful information about others (and even ourselves), we are really unable to fully understand others without acquiring additional knowledge. This educational process occurs most effectively when we gather our information from a variety of sources. Although crucially important, there is also some danger inherent in gathering information about groups, especially from books and other impersonal sources. Too often we use that information in a way that stereotypes individuals and ignores individuality. If we develop our understanding of diverse groups—bisexuals, Korean Americans, people with disabilities, Dominicans—through relationships with such individuals, we have more grounded and often more multidimensional understanding of the true diversity that occurs within any given cultural group. Simply put, we all must increase our contact with people who are culturally different from ourselves. Although many members of marginalized groups on campus, such as people of color or lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, believe they already know “what White people are like” or how heterosexuals feel about them, it is just as likely that their perceptions are formed by stereotypes and assumptions and not necessarily applicable to any individual who is a member of that group. We need to understand and truly value the individuality of people.

At the same time, content information—knowledge about the history, traditions, values, customs, and issues of diverse groups—is important for individuals if they are to make meaning of who they are and how they view the world. It is important, for example, to understand that family ties and family proximity may be more

important for a Latino student than a single, “once in a lifetime opportunity” to travel. It may be significant to know that many LGB individuals form an alternative—surrogate—family because their family of origin is not accepting of who they are. Such appreciation of the unique issues and realities of groups affects how we interpret their behavior and effectively meet their needs.

*A student affairs professional begins to recognize that there are as many differences in values, life experiences, and identity among individuals of the same cultural group as between different cultural groups. He realizes that it is not membership in a cultural group that makes the difference but rather the meaning that cultural group has in a person’s life.* A culturally knowledgeable professional gathers information about identity development models; the process of acculturation; and how such processes affect an individual’s identity, values, and relationships with others who are both similar and different. He also develops an appreciation of the multidimensionality of identity and how all individuals are influenced by membership and experiences in a variety of cultural groups.

Knowledge about the process of identity development allows us to understand the individual experiences and needs of a given student. If we know that a student of color grew up in a predominantly White area and her family viewed race as only one aspect of her identity, we can appreciate some of the challenges she might face in forming relationships with other students of color. This content knowledge about various acculturation models and identity development frameworks allows one to interpret students’ behaviors meaningfully and accurately. It minimizes the stereotyping that often occurs when we focus only on differences between groups and not as well on the differences within groups. Viewing individuals multidimensionally is crucial to this process. Every person has many social identities that are influenced by race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, to name a few identities. If we see individuals in terms of only one identity, we minimize the complexity of who they are. We may forget that people of color can be lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or that White women with disabilities have unique issues, concerns, and ways of viewing self that may be both similar and different from other White women. Comprehending such complexity is at the heart of what it means to be a culturally sensitive person and professional.

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*A student affairs professional, through her experience at an antiracism retreat on campus, begins to realize how little she knows about prejudice and oppression. She has limited understanding of how oppression manifests within institutions and how individuals from target groups internalize the negative messages about their group that affect their self-esteem and identity. A culturally knowledgeable professional educates herself about institutional and internalized oppression and tries to understand how oppression creates barriers on her own campus.*

To fully understand multiculturalism, we need to understand prejudice, power, and oppression and how these systems work together to create barriers to access and success in higher education. Without such knowledge, we may become unwitting accomplices to frustration, discrimination, and even failure. For example, once we understand that limited access to money is only part of what affects the ability of a poor, first-generation college student to be successful in college, we have a better understanding of oppression. Sometimes even more powerful than money is access to understanding how college works and how one gains access to the unwritten rules for success in higher education. If we realize that many students of color internalize the negative and racist messages within society so much that they doubt their own ability to succeed, then we have a better understanding of oppression. Until we fully appreciate the true systemic nature of oppression, we are unable to combat its effects on us and the students we serve.

### Exemplary Multicultural Skills

*A student affairs professional realizes that he communicates differently with women than with men. He knows that he doesn't understand how members of other racial groups deal with their emotions. More important, he knows his lack of understanding of cross-cultural communication is affecting his relationships with individuals who are culturally different from him, yet he is unsure how else to act. A culturally skilled professional has the capability to assess how cultural differences influence communication and is able to genuinely connect and communicate with people who are culturally different.*

Many of us do not realize the extent to which our family and cultural background, generation, socialization, and life experiences affect how we communicate with others. Our cultural values are imbedded in what we say and how we say it—in words and with our body. If we are not aware of those influences, we don't realize that not everyone views personal space in the same way, that eye contact means different things to different people, and that many individuals are not comfortable talking directly about certain topics. We need to learn how to read verbal and nonverbal cues and be able to differentiate when personality or cultural differences are affecting communication. We need to be able to talk openly and take the initiative in addressing cross-cultural communication issues. As the professional, whether we are advising undergraduate students or supervising graduate students or seasoned professionals, it is our responsibility, regardless of our own sense of vulnerability, to take the initiative rather than expect the individual who may feel vulnerable to take that risk.

*A student affairs professional is uncomfortable when students and other professionals make stereotypical remarks or inappropriate jokes, yet she is not comfortable confronting their behavior. She wants to challenge the remarks but is worried about offending the other individuals or making the situation worse.* A culturally skilled professional practices these skills in a supportive setting and then begins to take risks so as to optimize the success of the intervention.

It is rarely easy or comfortable to confront individuals about their culturally insensitive behavior, so it is important to learn how to make such an intervention. Unfortunately, there are not many laboratories outside of our personal and work relationships where we can practice doing so. Sometimes it is a matter of trial and error and not giving up even if it does not go well. It is important not to be judgmental or harsh in our feedback, and it is often effective to highlight how the behavior of others makes us feel. People may disagree with our perceptions of their behavior, but it is difficult for them to tell us that our feelings are inaccurate. These skills, no matter that they become more comfortable over time, are never easy. Dealing with multicultural issues is often messy and complicated, and once we accept this reality then we are less discouraged with the conflict and tension that can occur.

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*A student affairs professional must be able to accurately assess his own multicultural skills and comfort level in order to develop multicultural competence. If he has the awareness and the knowledge but doesn't know how to make culturally sensitive and appropriate interventions with individuals and in organizations, his ability to be a social change agent is compromised.* A culturally skilled professional is comfortable talking about what he does and doesn't know and is willing to ask for feedback and assistance when dealing with a challenging issue. If he is unsure of what to do, he knows to consult or make an appropriate referral to another colleague, or possibly to a member of the individual's own cultural group when deemed appropriate.

If we expect to have all of the answers, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment and failure. There is no way that any of us can be prepared to effectively address all the multicultural issues and dynamics that occur on a college campus. The more we work together and support each other in this process on the personal and professional levels, the more powerful our interventions become. We need to be humble and accepting of our shortcomings, recognizing that we will inevitably make cultural errors in our interactions with those who are different from us. Making cultural assumptions, lacking important cultural knowledge, and making errors in our cross-cultural communication are unavoidable. The challenge then is not to become immobilized with these missteps but rather to rebound and learn for the future. It is just as important that we remain nonjudgmental about cultural errors and weaknesses of others. The more we do multicultural work, the more aware we become of how much we do not know and how this process is a lifelong endeavor. Ideally, this knowledge is not discouraging, and we are able to accept that multicultural competence is not a finite category of awareness, knowledge, and skill that we can obtain if we only work hard enough.

Multicultural competence is not about getting to a destination. We cannot develop ten multicultural programs (much less one) on our campus and expect that we have addressed most of the significant multicultural issues. Students and cultural issues are constantly changing, and professionals are continuously developing new awareness, knowledge, and skills about multicultural issues. If we make a long-term commitment to the process of multicultural

change, within ourselves, our institutions, and our profession, then we are ensured of ongoing—although still not continuous—success.

Finally, if we want a campus to become multiculturally sensitive, a place where all individuals have the opportunity for success, it is important that we move our conceptualization of multicultural competence beyond an individual, or even a group, focus. Sue (2001) suggests we must be willing to make interventions that challenge our institutions and our profession. We must carry out social change that radically alters our assumptions and expectations about our students and our institutions. We must change how we evaluate the performance of practitioners and how we train future generations of student affairs professionals. We must rethink our knowledge base and develop new theories, models, and approaches that incorporate what we know about cultural diversity. Developing multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills is not the only approach to creating a multiculturally sensitive and affirming campus. Multicultural competence offers important understanding and tools that undoubtedly contribute to efficacious practice in student affairs.

### **Summary**

Multicultural competence is a compelling area of study that enables student affairs to enhance the theories, services, and programs offered to college students. The goal of multicultural competence is to create a more welcoming and affirming campus for all students by developing more relevant, meaningful, and culturally appropriate services. Student affairs professionals are well suited to this task because of their historical role of attending to the whole student and creating campus environments that enrich the personal and academic experiences of college students. Despite the philosophical connection between multiculturalism and the values of the student affairs profession, many student affairs practitioners and scholars are not effectively trained to address the complex and constantly evolving cultural dynamics on today's campuses.

By reexamining the core competencies of student affairs professionals and infusing the multicultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are needed to create a more multiculturally sensitive

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campus, both practitioners and scholars provide more ethical and effective programs and services. Multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills are core competencies that all student affairs professionals need regardless of their job responsibilities and level of training.

This chapter suggests that multicultural competence is one of seven core competencies needed in student affairs; it seeks a thorough understanding of what particular awareness, knowledge, and skills are needed to work with others who are culturally different from oneself. Good-practice examples have been included so that student affairs professionals have a more concrete and practice-based understanding of what is meant by multicultural competence.