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November 2005

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Winston, Carole A., "Teaching North, Teaching South: Differences that Make a Difference" (2005). *10th Annual National Conference (2005): Different Perspectives on Majority Rules*. 41.

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Teaching North, Teaching South: Differences that Make a Difference

Abstract

This presentation will address challenges faced by an African American women from the North (New York City) teaching in a predominantly white institution in the South (Charlotte, North Carolina). Issues confronted include student expectations/instructor expectations; instructor's presentation (e.g., style of dress, speech pattern and temp; interpersonal communication style); myths and half-truths about "Southern hospitality" and "Northern rudeness."

Carole A. Winston,

Assistant Professor, College of Health and Human Services, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

A brief review of the literature reveals that during the early 1960s African Americans represented less than one percent of faculty at predominantly White campuses. By the end of the 1970s Latinos represented only 1.5 percent of faculty at the nation's colleges. By 1993 faculty of color represented only 12.2 percent of all faculty (http://www.pbs.org/shattering/the_program.html). During the 1995-96 academic year, ten percent of U.S. academicians were persons of color. Of that ten percent, 33 percent were Black women at the assistant professor rank. (*African American Faculty Women on Predominately White Campuses: How Race and Gender Shape and Influence Academic Opportunities for Success*, Paper presentation, Hawaii International Conference on Education, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 6-12, 2003).

As a Black female assistant professor, I represent an underrepresented segment of the professoriate. Given my status, I feel an obligation to introduce unique perspectives on life in America to students, many of whom have never before had a Black instructor, let alone a Black female with a doctoral degree. While the experience of teaching in predominantly White institutions of higher education in the North had its challenges, teaching in the South in a predominantly White university presents a different set of obstacles that warrant discussion.

It must be noted that living in the South is an overwhelmingly positive experience (e.g. strangers smile and say 'Hey'; no one honks their horn unless there is a true emergency, and neighbors will welcome you with a covered dish or a fruit pie). However, there are some customs and behaviors that occur that highlight the differences between life above the Mason-Dixon Line and life in the Bible Belt. For example, in New York, people rarely ask strangers where they "fellowship." In the South, it is expected that you attend church, and regularly. If not, several people are sure to invite you to their house of worship. For another, fried foods, creamy sauces, and cheese are *de rigueur* in the South and it is often difficult to find a restaurant where vegetables are prepared *al dente*.

Some of the differences I experience with students' is their difficulty in addressing me as 'Dr.' instead of 'Miss'; the disinclination for White students and students of color alike to talk openly about race; the students' lack of exposure to groups other than their own; other faculty members warning me to 'be kind' to the students. I was made acutely aware

of: my rapid, staccato speech pattern vs. my colleagues' and students' slower, languid speaking style; students not making eye contact with me; senior faculty not making eye contact with me; students' writing styles, etc.

The differences make a difference because I often feel like 'a stranger in a strange land.' Not only am I not Southern, I am a Black *Northerner*, a true outsider. Managing the differences in worldviews between myself, my colleagues and my students is a continuous effort, but one that is worthwhile as I not only help them to expand their horizons but I expand my own while I embrace the charm, warmth, and spirit of the New South.

Presenter

Dr. Carole A. Winston is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work, College of Health and Human Services at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in foundation and advanced Social Work Practice, Human Behavior and the Social Environment, and Professional Development. She is a native New Yorker who received her MSS from Columbia University School of Social Work and her doctorate in clinical social work from New York University.

Dr. Winston's research interests include parenting grandparents, particularly in communities of color; health and mental health issues in the African Diaspora including, disparities in the provision of health care services, barriers to end-of-life and palliative care services to communities of color. She is currently conducting a pilot exploratory study of the concerns and plans of aging parenting grandparents as they consider permanency planning for their dependent grandchildren. Dr. Winston has presented her research findings on grandparents in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Quebec City, Canada