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Coordinating A Cultural Diversity Retreat for Your Campus

John Leonard Harris

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Abstract

The purpose of this workshop is to help those who want to develop a cultural diversity retreat for their campus. The workshop will cover the "what," "when," "where," "how," and "why" of diversity retreat planning. The ultimate goal of this workshop is to help participants develop one mechanism for building a campus community.

What if everyone had an opportunity to be themselves and say what they felt that they needed to say to get the kind of understanding that is so desperately needed in our world? It can happen and a cultural retreat is one way to do it.

Giving students, faculty and staff the opportunity to be a part of the solution and not a part of the problem is what a cultural diversity retreat offers. Participants are invited from various segments of the campus community with one purpose in mind, to become better trustees of the institution. Participants are not asked to change their background, views or any of the things that most diversity efforts suggest. Rather, for real understanding to happen, everyone is required to be who they are, as they invest in a process that very well might lead them to change. The event can indeed be life-changing.

The organizing of a cultural diversity retreat is not an arduous task. The event begins with a vision to make the campus community a better place. Everything else comes after. A coordinator or team of coordinators simply have to put the logistics together by finding the right place and the right time best suited for maximizing participation. This is a critical part of the planning and must not be taken lightly.

A key component of a successful cultural diversity retreat is the selection of the facilitator or facilitators. This person or persons must be keen aware of the issues most important to those on the campus. The facilitator(s) must be able to lead the participants toward the predetermined goal. This person keeps everyone focused, their "eyes on the prize."

A second key component of a successful cultural diversity retreat is the development of the exercises and activities. The energy needed to achieve the desired outcomes is tremendous, so it is important that the activities mix critical learning with leisure. Participants know that for all the serious issues that will be address, that there will be time to process, to share, and to connect in fun ways.

A third key component of a successful cultural diversity retreat is the selection of the participants. The synergy of the group is essential and must be conscientiously sought. Those who attend a cultural diversity retreat must be willing to be challenged, confronted, shocked and amused. Through it all, however, there is a genuine desire to see the campus community become

a better place to matriculate.

There are many mechanisms and tools for cultural understanding and learning. However, none of them can match the life-changing experience of a well organized and facilitated cultural diversity retreat.

Presenter

John Leonard Harris is a native of St. Louis, Missouri and a graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia. Mr. Harris is the Founder and Principal Consultant for Harris Consulting Services, through which he provides cultural education, leadership, organizational effectiveness and motivational programs. He is also the Founder and President of Encouragement Unlimited, Inc., a faith-based nonprofit organization that serves as an active agent of hope and renewal for the forgotten, undervalued, unappreciated and disadvantages in our society. Additionally, Mr. Harris partners with organizations and agencies whose mission is to serve low-income families and at-risk youth. Mr. Harris is an award-winning writer, newspaper columnist, singer, actor and poet. He is a popular keynote and conference speaker. His presentation topics range from religion to rap, media to motivation, family to freedom, and self-esteem to service.