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Can Diversity Programs Help Change Behaviors In the Campus Environment?

Sharon Ulmar

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Survey Question Results

Survey questions were distributed to 200 participants. Of the 150 returned, 95 percent suggested a positive attitude about the program. In my session, the survey questions and results will be discussed.

Action Plans

In addition to survey questions, action plans were filled out with one group of 30 participants. Out of the 13 participants who filled out an action plan, eight or 62 percent of the participants had taken some action to change their behavior. The action plan results were:

1. Using a diverse search committee.
2. Instead of ignoring a disabled person, asked the disabled person if they needed help.
3. Is learning to understand the minority staff member in her department. No longer believes the minority member is "odd" but had different values and cultural background.
4. Is working on not feeling intimidated by others in higher positions.
5. Communicating better in staff meetings and listening to everyone, not just a few. This participant learned that not everyone speaks out in public, but may have some good information to share privately.
6. Is looking at promotion criteria to have a more diverse department.
7. Teaching diversity in the classroom.
8. Makes sure that all students are treated equally in the classroom no matter what culture a student may be from.

The number of action plans completed was disturbing in this study as results are low and may prove to be responsible for the answer to this study. There were few individuals who actually transferred the results of the program into changing their own behavior. Without the participants using action plans of their own, changing behavior would be difficult. This could be disastrous for the program. The program is not designed to lecture participants but to learn by observation and participation. Participants must incorporate their own goals, behaviors and attitudes with the learning devices from the program. Without this combination, there will be a little change the environment. Diversity programs can change the behavior of an individual but they cannot do it alone. Close attention must be paid to the type of program. Diversity programs must be able to change or be revised based upon the culture of the organization. Programs should not be

designed to be placed on a shelf once participants leave the room.

Once diversity programs have been conducted, the participants must move forward. It is clear from the action plans that more attention must be paid to ensure that more participants take action.

Conclusions

Diversity is a new concept and it may be difficult to find research results about other diversity programs across the country. Also, validity and reliability is limited because there are no past diversity programs for comparison from the university. This study may be a good start for research and may prove to be more valid and reliable within the next five years.

Based on this small sample, the diversity program for the university is a positive start. It is clear from the results that participants are pleased with the program and that some of their goals are being met. However, the program has shown that it will take more than conducting the diversity programs to change the culture. Close attention must be paid to working with participants outside the diversity program. The facilitators must be able to bridge the gap between the diversity program and the participants' behaviors within their own departments.

PRESENTER:

Sharon Ulmar has over 20 years experience in civil rights and employment law with a focus of employment discrimination. She presently holds the position of assistant to the chancellor for Diversity and Equal Opportunity at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Prior to her employment at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, she was assistant director at the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission where she gained knowledge of civil rights laws. She holds a bachelor's degree from Bellevue University and will graduate in December of 1999 with a Master of Public Administration with an emphasis in Human Resources. Ulmar conducts numerous training programs across campus as well as throughout the community.