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# Diversity Denial: An Exercise of Mind and Will

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**“When we all conform to the ‘majority rules,’ we are leaving behind the richness of the diversity we have to offer the people in the organization.”**

Do we need to learn to play the game "the majority rules" play? If we choose not to play the game are we going to be left out of the decision-making process?

Some people look different, and some do not look different but in essence are different. These people are found in all organizations, and find it difficult to survive in the predominantly White institutions where the majority rules. In this presentation, we will explore some of these issues through a series of examples that will demonstrate how cultural differences of color and gender play out in an institution. Issues to be covered:

- What does an organization that is supportive of diversity look like?
- What to do when your institution is in diversity denial.
- Walking the talk: how fast and how far?

As the outreach component of the land-grant university system, Cooperative Extension is an area where the "majority rule" takes place. Extension is often the only contact many people have with the university and, too often, judgments are made about the institution based on this contact. When the contact is positive, the university is viewed as being inclusive, and questions of diversity denial are few. However, many times because of the "majority rules," women and people of color do not feel included in the university. With the majority of Cooperative Extension employees in Colorado and the United States being of the "majority rules," the perception in the community is not inclusive to women and people of color. Therefore, the culture of Cooperative Extension is reflected in the attitudes, behaviors, and unspoken norms of this majority. With this in mind, we will examine Cooperative Extension as a component of the university system that is overlooked as a barrier to recruit and retain people from diverse backgrounds.

When the people that work together in an institution are men and women that grow up in different cultures, there are attitudes, behaviors, and skills that we need to learn in order to respect these differences. Whatever cultural or gender background we come from, we all bring important aspects to our organizations. When we all conform to the majority rule, we are leaving behind the richness of the diversity we can offer to the people in the organization. We don't want people to leave the richness of their diversity hidden in order to feel a part of the institution, its programs, and its classes. Nor do we want to be part of an organization that is in diversity denial: systematically denying the commitment to diversity by saying all the right things but acting on none.

Cooperative Extension lacks cultural diversity from people of color and is also

challenged for gender equality. With the majority of top administrative positions being held by White males, people of color and women need to learn new strategies to deal with diversity denial in these organizations. As people of color and women work together in teams with the "majority rules" to deal with complex societal issues, different life experience and cultural backgrounds can become a distracting source of misunderstanding and mistrust. People of color and women need to understand how issues are discussed and decisions are made (how to play the game), without having to compromise their cultural selves.

## **PRESENTERS**

**Paul H. Gutierrez** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Colorado State University. Gutierrez is a native of Grants, N.M., and is one of 12 children (eight boys and four girls). Gutierrez graduated from the University of Wyoming with a B.S., from New Mexico State University with an M.S., and from Oklahoma State University with a Ph.D. All three degrees were in agriculture economics with emphasis on range livestock production systems, cattle, and sheep. His appointment at CSU is split three ways among teaching, research, and extension. Gutierrez' teaching emphasis is in the area of agricultural business records and financial management. His extension and research components complement each other with particular focus on the economics of range livestock production as it relates to sustainable agricultural production systems. In recent years, Gutierrez has pursued another passion, the work of diversity. He served as Diversity Resource Leader for CSU-Cooperative Extension in 1994-1996 and Chair of the CSU Equal Opportunity Council. He has committed himself to gaining better understanding, knowledge, and skills of the issues of diversity in order to be a better role model for diversity.

**Cathy Martinez** is Diversity Resource Leader for Colorado State University Cooperative Extension. Her appointment includes being a Nutrition Education Program Extension Agent. Martinez is a native of Pueblo, Colo., and is one of six children. She graduated from The Colorado College with a B.A. in sociology. Interdisciplinary work included education, psychology, and cultural studies. Martinez' passions lie primarily in the commitment to diversity and being a role model for diversity. As Diversity Resource Leader, she has committed herself to (1) diversity advocacy and awareness, (2) cross-cultural and ethnic influences in the workforce and in education, and (3) recruitment and retention of minority students and staff in higher education.