

Khaja, K., Springer, J. T., Bigatti, S., Gibau, G. S., Whitehead, D., & Grove, K. (2010). Multicultural teaching: Barriers and recommendations. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 21 (4), 5-28.

## **Multicultural Teaching: Barriers and Recommendations**

Khadija Khaja  
Jennifer Thorington Springer  
*Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis*

Silvia Bigatti  
*Indiana University School of Medicine*

Gina Sanchez Gibau  
Dawn Whitehead  
Kathleen Grove  
*Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis*

*A pedagogy that serves students of all backgrounds and trains them to compete in a diverse world is becoming imperative. University educators have been slow to accept the challenge of multicultural teaching, yet it is not clearly understood why this is the case. The authors surveyed 464 faculty members from across disciplines at a large urban, Midwestern campus. This mixed-methods study assessed faculty conceptualizations of multicultural teaching, the degree to which they may be engaged in this practice, and what challenges they face. The findings revealed that faculty members perceived several barriers to multicultural teaching, including student resistance, language barriers, lack of teaching resources, time constraints, and lack of knowledge about multicultural teaching pedagogies. Although the faculty perceived that most barriers were related to student factors, they revealed some degree of insight into their own role in terms of relative effort and lack of knowledge. Furthermore, faculty identified various institutional barriers that could be addressed to facilitate multicultural teaching at institutions of*

*higher education. The importance of multicultural teaching in the current economic and political environment is discussed.*

As the forces of globalization continue to shape our everyday lives, institutions serving undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students are compelled to prepare their next generation of graduates to be culturally competent citizens. Multicultural teaching is often identified as the principal strategy through which the value of diversity is imparted and the skill of cultural competency is obtained (Banks, 1993). Multicultural teaching is a method of instruction that considers specific course content, pedagogies, student assessment, and classroom climate in its design (Kitano, 1997). The incorporation of relevant content acknowledging the diversity of cultural experiences is often employed as a strategy in multicultural teaching. Yet engaging in multicultural teaching in higher education requires going beyond merely incorporating content. It also requires a specific, intentional pedagogy, one that is inclusive and student-centered (Banks et al., 2001). Multicultural teaching as a method of instruction enables students critically to examine differences and to come to appreciate difference in an interactive, dynamic, and flexible learning environment (Banks et al., 2001; Sheets, 2005). Although some institutions provide single academic courses through which multicultural teaching is conducted, the desired goal of preparing students for an increasingly multicultural world is best achieved when multicultural teaching is infused across the curriculum (Gay, 2004).

Although much has been written about multicultural teaching in higher education, few researchers have gone directly to the source, the instructors themselves, to learn about their perceptions. This mixed-methods study sought to develop a better understanding of multicultural teaching awareness, practices, and perceived barriers among university faculty.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

Participants in the study included 465 faculty members at a large, urban Midwestern university who, after having been invited to participate, went to an online survey and either agreed ( $n = 464$ ) or disagreed ( $n = 1$ ) to participate in the study after reading the informed consent statement. Assuming that all 1064 faculty who met the eligibility criteria (teaching, non-medical school faculty) actually received and read the e-mail invitation to the study, this number represents a 43.6% response rate. Of the

464 who agreed, 342 (73.5%) completed the survey past the first page (the informed consent statement). Table 1 shows the demographic information of the university faculty, as well as the demographic information for each of the major schools or colleges represented in the survey respondents. No demographic information was collected from the actual participants in the study, however. This was intentional, because we wanted to (a) guarantee anonymity and (b) collect information regarding the schools and departments. Because there are departments and schools with only one or two individuals fitting certain demographics (for instance, gender, ethnicity, or age), we determined we would eschew demographic information in favor of increasing the likelihood of anonymity and, therefore, participation.

### *Procedures*

#### **Multicultural Teaching Community of Practice (MTCoP)**

This study was initiated by the Multicultural Teaching Community of Practice (MTCoP), a collective of scholars from various disciplines across the campus that was the site of the study. The MTCoP includes faculty who have broad and common interests in diversity education. During October 2007, two e-mails were sent to faculty groups throughout the university, with the exception of Medical School faculty. The e-mails were sent to a total of 1064 individuals. The purpose of the study, as stated broadly in the e-mail, was “to understand the teaching practices and attitudes of faculty.” The e-mail included a link to a SurveyMonkey.com site where participants were provided an informed consent statement that discussed voluntary nature of participation and anonymity of participants. It was estimated that participants would take approximately 10-20 minutes to complete the survey. One month after the initial e-mail was sent, the site was closed to further participation, and the data were downloaded from the site.

#### **Measures**

The survey contained 20 items. The respondents’ rank, school, credits taught per year, and students taught per year were collected first. Then an 11-item scale that we created assessed respondents’ teaching practices. This scale measured teaching on a Likert-type scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*), with higher scores indicating more use of multicultural teaching practices (see Table 2). A principal axis factoring with varimax rotation revealed 3 factors that, together, accounted for 57.54% of the variance. The

Table 1  
**Faculty by School: Eligible to Participate, Actually Participated, and Demographics**

<i>School/Unit</i>	<i>Number Eligible</i>	<i>Number Participated</i>	<i>Percent Male</i>	<i>Percent White</i>	<i>Mean Age (SD)</i>
University wide	1063	342	54	81	49
School of Social Work	36	11	39	78	52
School of Arts	39	9	51	79	44
School of Education	37	26	24	76	49
School of Nursing	82	29	1	91	56
School of Liberal Arts	204	105	55	84	50
School of Public and Environmental Affairs	28	8	64	89	51
Schools of Dentistry and Allied Health	131	29	56	83	49

School of Business	48	11	73	90	52
School of Engineering and Technology	93	16	75	60	47
School of Sciences	164	66	73	76	46
Other Schools					
Informatics	28	5	57	64	45
University College	4	2	25	100	46
School of Law	48	4	54	90	51
School of Music	12	6	83	83	48

Table 2  
**Multicultural Teaching Practices Scale Items, Reliability, Means,  
 and Standard Deviations (*n* = 319)**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Item-Total Correlation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Provide opportunities for interactive learning experiences (factor 3).	.353	3.18	.847
Vary instructional techniques in order reach students with a variety of learning styles (factor 3).	.467	3.05	.830
Establish a framework within the classroom where students can safely share their experiences (factor 2).	.540	3.29	.910
Encourage students to ask critical questions about all information they receive from you and curricular materials, and model this type of critical thinking for them (factor 2).	.473	3.51	.709
Demonstrate high expectations for all students (factor 2).	.338	3.62	.546
Critically examine textbooks and other educational materials to ensure that language and images are inclusive of all students (factor 1).	.535	2.68	1.176
Have a continual process for examining and confronting your own prejudices and considering how they inform the way you teach and interact with your students and colleagues (factor 1).	.547	2.87	.986
Incorporate the voices, experiences, and contributions of a diversity of people in your curriculum; eliminate bias in the reporting of discoveries (factor 1).	.569	3.00	.973
Attempt to make the content of your course relevant to the lives, experiences, and perspectives of your students (factor 2).	.435	3.61	.644

Table 2  
**Multicultural Teaching Practices Scale Items, Reliability, Means,  
 and Standard Deviations ( $n = 319$ ) (continued)**

<i>Item</i>	<i>Item-Total Correlation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Weave material about historically under-represented groups (People of Color; Women; Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People; People with Disabilities, etc.) throughout the content of the course (factor 1).	.574	2.44	1.245
Connect the material to local community and larger global issues (factor 1).	.509	3.16	.900

*Note.* Instructions for the measure were as follows: "Please indicate the degree to which you do any of the following in your teaching," with the scale anchors of 1 (*never*), 2 (*rarely*), 3 (*sometimes*), 4 (*frequently*), and 5 (*always*).

first factor included items about general course preparation, the second factor included items about student learning, and the third factor included items about course instruction (see Table 2 for factor items). Chronbach's alpha reliability for this scale with the study sample was .82, suggesting good reliability. Finally, the survey contained five open-ended questions that assessed respondents' attitudes toward and knowledge about multicultural teaching, as follows: "Please tell us your current understanding of the concept of multicultural teaching"; "Please explain what *you* perceive as the benefits of multicultural teaching"; "Please explain what barriers *you* have encountered to multicultural teaching"; "If you do engage in multicultural teaching, how do you do it?"; and "What additional insights regarding these questions or multicultural teaching do you have?" For our analysis, the question about barriers to multicultural teaching that respondents encountered was analyzed in qualitative detail.

## Results

### *Descriptive Statistics*

#### **School**

Most respondents came from the School of Liberal Arts ( $n = 105$ ; 30.9% of sample), Sciences ( $n = 66$ ; 19.4%), Nursing ( $n = 29$ ; 8.5%), and Education ( $n = 26$ ; 7.6%). The rest either did not respond to this specific question ( $n = 13$ ; 3.8%) or were from the School of Dentistry, Law, University College, Business, Informatics, Music, Other Health (for instance, radiological sciences), Engineering and Technology, Public Affairs and Environmental Sciences, or Art. For all future analyses, Dentistry and Other Health were combined ( $n = 29$ ; 8.5%) and University College, Informatics, Law, and Music were combined ( $n = 17$ ; 5.3%). These combinations were based on size of the groups as well as whether or not they were in health fields (see Table 1).

#### **Rank**

Most respondents were Associate ( $n = 84$ ; 24.7%) or Full ( $n = 79$ ; 23.3%) Professors. The lowest response rate came from Full Librarians, for which there was only one respondent, likely because of less frequent teaching responsibilities among this group. For all future analyses, tenured and tenure-track faculty were kept in separate groups (Full, Associate, or Assistant Professor), senior and junior lecturers were combined into a Lecturer group ( $n = 79$ ; 23.2%), and all others (clinical, research, visiting, part-time, adjunct, and librarians) were combined into an Other group ( $n = 40$ ; 11.4%). These combinations were made based on teaching loads; that is, lecturers are full-time teachers, while all the others do teaching as part of a more diverse set of responsibilities.

#### **Credit Hours**

Respondents taught from 1 to 41 credit hours per year, for an average of 14.82 ( $SD = 7.31$ ). There were no differences among schools in terms of credit hours taught (see Table 3). There were, however, differences by rank in terms of credit hours taught, with lecturers teaching more credit hours than all other groups ( $F[4,315] = 29.541$ ;  $p < .001$ ) (see Table 3).



Table 3  
Yearly Credit Hours and Students Taught by School and Rank

<i>Grouping Variable</i>	<i>Credit Hours Mean (SD)</i>	<i>Students Mean (SD)</i>
<b>School</b>		
School of Social Work	15.64 (7.65)	151.70 (89.00)
School of Arts	18.33 (6.78)	156.78 (93.50)
School of Education	15.52 (6.63)	134.65 (70.47)
School of Nursing	13.77 (6.65)	129.17 (110.61)
School of Liberal Arts	15.91 (7.35)	149.70 (99.82)
School of Public and Environmental Affairs	15.00 (6.00)	208.13 (130.05)
Schools of Dentistry and Allied Health	18.48 (20.49)	162.93 (114.20)
School of Business	17.10 (8.50)	240.00 (206.64)
School of Engineering and Technology	15.07 (5.68)	111.88 (61.48)
School of Sciences	13.15 (8.36)	240.19 (212.56)
Other Schools	12.63 (6.92)	138.29 (114.26)
<b>Rank</b>		
Full Professor	12.22 (6.69)	123.90 (81.34)
Associate Professor	14.70 (12.15)	157.31 (120.44)
Assistant Professor	12.28 (5.64)	120.77 (82.17)
Lecturer	21.54 (7.18)	268.24 (177.71)
Other Ranks	13.71 (7.95)	140.08 (144.46)

*Note.* There were no differences in credit hours by school. The School of Science taught significantly more students than the Schools of Education, Nursing, Liberal Arts, and Engineering and Technology ( $p > .05$ ). Lecturers taught more credit hours and more students than all other ranks ( $p > .05$ ).

Other Schools: University College, Informatics, Law and Music  
Other Ranks: Clinical, Research, Visiting, Adjunct, Part-Time, and Librarians

### **Number of Students**

Respondents taught from 6 to 800 students per year, for an average of 167.39 ( $SD = 138.57$ ). There were differences among schools in terms of students taught, with Sciences teaching significantly more students per year than Liberal Arts, Nursing, Education, and Engineering and Technology ( $F[10,312] = 3.203; p = .001$ ) (see Table 3). Not surprisingly, again, there were differences by instructor rank in terms of number of students taught, with lecturers teaching a higher number of students than all other groups ( $F[4,331] = 17.325; p < .001$ ) (see Table 3).

### *Multicultural Teaching Practices*

For multicultural teaching practices, assessed with an 11-item survey, respondents reported engaging in significant practices associated with multicultural teaching (mean = 3.13;  $SD = 0.54$ ; range = 1.09 to 4). Table 2 shows reliability and mean data for each item. There were no differences in scores by rank, but there were differences by school. Respondents in the School of Sciences scored lower on multicultural teaching practices than did those in Liberal Arts, Nursing, Social Work, Education, Arts, and the combined Others ( $F[10,297] = 9.119; p < .001$ ). See Table 4 for detailed information by rank and school.

### *Barriers to Multicultural Teaching*

An open-ended survey item—"Please explain what barriers you have encountered to multicultural teaching"—yielded a set of five themes that are discussed in more detail in the next section. For the quantitative analysis, these themes were further grouped into student variables, faculty/self variables, and system or institutional variables, depending on who or what the respondent believed was responsible for the barrier. Grouped this way, more respondents identified student variables ( $n = 92$ ; 27.1%) than institutional/system variables ( $n = 66$ ; 19.4%) or faculty/self variables ( $n = 42$ ; 12.4%). A smaller group of respondents ( $n = 18$ ; 5.3%) said that the question was not relevant to them, either because of the material they taught or their opinion of multicultural teaching in general. Finally, most respondents ( $n = 122$ ; 35.9%) chose not to respond to this open-ended item.

Chi-square analyses compared groups (rank and schools) by the five response variables of student, faculty/self, institution/system, not relevant, no response. There were no differences by rank in any of these

Table 4  
**Multicultural Teaching Practices Scale Means  
 and Standard Deviations by School and Rank**

<i>Grouping Variable</i>	<i>Multicultural Teaching Practices Total Scale Score Mean (SD)</i>
<b>School</b>	
School of Social Work	3.50 (0.41)
School of Arts	3.47 (0.39)
School of Education	3.43 (0.50)
School of Nursing	3.38 (0.29)
School of Liberal Arts	3.28 (0.49)
School of Public and Environmental Affairs	3.23 (0.38)
Schools of Dentistry and Allied Health	3.02 (0.47)
School of Business	2.92 (0.62)
School of Engineering and Technology	2.82 (0.53)
School of Sciences	2.69 (0.54)
Other Schools	3.24 (0.47)
<b>Rank</b>	
Full Professor	3.02 (0.60)
Associate Professor	3.17 (0.51)
Assistant Professor	3.10 (0.54)
Lecturers	3.19 (0.53)
Other Ranks	3.19 (0.51)
<p><i>Note.</i> School of Sciences scored statistically significantly lower than Liberal Arts, Nursing, Arts, Social Work, School of Public and Environmental Affairs, and Education. Engineering and Technology scored statistically significantly lower than Nursing, Social Work, and Education.</p>	

responses; there were, however, differences by school ( $\chi^2[40] = 69.749$ ;  $p = .002$ ) (see Table 5).

### *Qualitative Analysis*

Faculty respondents reported five themes that they considered barriers to multicultural teaching: student resistance, cross-cultural communication, teaching resources, time constraints, and lack of knowledge about multicultural teaching pedagogies.

#### **Student Resistance**

Faculty reported the concern that if they attempted to infuse multicultural content into their classrooms, students could be critical of such efforts in their evaluations. One respondent explained that students can penalize faculty on evaluations if they teach about diverse populations, especially when a population “behaves contrarily to the tenets of their religion.” Some faculty even went as far as saying that their teaching evaluations are lower if they incorporate issues of social justice and equality. Other faculty members reported that spending time on multicultural teaching was not a priority for them, because “most students were over saturated with it and now turned off” and because students “don’t like us putting it in their faces in class again.” One faculty member gave the following reason for student resistance:

White majority culture students often take a defensive stance when encountering difference. They assume that a study of minority perspectives is geared toward blaming them for something they didn’t do. I also get the response that the subject matter must not be important, because it is not related to their experience (their assumption).

Some faculty members reported that in white majority classrooms, multicultural teaching is challenging because it is seen, especially by first-year students, as being “confrontational” or “indoctrinating.” One faculty member reported that first-year students are “often disinclined to see other perspectives or already believe themselves to be fair-minded individuals.” Faculty appeared frustrated that it is often difficult to challenge students who are members of white mainstream culture to see that they are in a privileged position. As one faculty respondent explained,

Students can be reluctant to embrace a perspective that seems to accuse them of being privileged when they don’t feel privileged. Administrators embrace multiculturalism because it is

Table 5  
Count and Percentage of Response Type for Barriers by School and Rank

<i>Grouping Variable</i>	<i>Student Variables Count (%)</i>	<i>Institution Variables Count (%)</i>	<i>Instructor Variables Count (%)</i>	<i>No Answer Count (%)</i>	<i>Not Relevant Count (%)</i>	<i>Total Count (%)</i>
<b>School</b>						
School of Social Work	3 (27.3%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (100%)
School of Arts	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	1 (11.1%)	5 (55.6%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100%)
School of Education	10 (38.5%)	7 (26.9%)	5 (19.2%)	3 (11.5%)	1 (3.8%)	26 (100%)
School of Nursing	7 (24.1%)	9 (31.0%)	2 (6.9%)	11 (37.9%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (100%)
School of Liberal Arts	42 (40.0%)	11 (10.5%)	20 (19.0%)	29 (27.6%)	3 (2.9%)	105 (100%)
School of Public and Environmental Affairs	2 (25.0%)	2 (25.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (100%)
Schools of Dentistry and Allied Health	7 (24.1%)	7 (24.1%)	4 (13.8%)	11 (37.9%)	0 (0.0%)	29 (100%)
School of Business	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	2 (18.2%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	11 (100%)

Table 5  
**Count and Percentage of Response Type for Barriers by School and Rank (continued)**

<i>Grouping Variable</i>	<i>Student Variables Count (%)</i>	<i>Institution Variables Count (%)</i>	<i>Instructor Variables Count (%)</i>	<i>No Answer Count (%)</i>	<i>Not Relevant Count (%)</i>	<i>Total Count (%)</i>
<b>School</b>						
School of Social Work	3 (27.3%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (100%)
School of Engineering and Technology	0 (0.0%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	9 (56.3%)	3 (18.8%)	16 (100%)
School of Sciences	9 (13.6%)	13 (19.7%)	4 (6.1%)	31 (47.0%)	9 (13.6%)	66 (100%)
Other Schools	5 (29.4%)	4 (23.5%)	2 (11.8%)	5 (29.4%)	1 (5.9%)	17 (100%)
<b>Rank</b>						
Full Professor	20 (25.3%)	13 (16.5%)	9 (11.4%)	31 (39.2%)	6 (7.6%)	79 (100%)
Associate Professor	19 (22.6%)	19 (22.6%)	10 (11.9%)	32 (38.1%)	4 (4.8%)	84 (100%)
Assistant Professor	17 (29.3%)	11 (19.0%)	6 (10.3%)	21 (36.2%)	3 (5.2%)	58 (100%)
Lecturer	24 (30.4%)	12 (15.2%)	12 (15.2%)	26 (32.9%)	5 (6.3%)	79 (100%)
Other Ranks	12 (30.0%)	11 (27.5%)	5 (12.5%)	12 (30.0%)	0 (0.0%)	40 (100%)
<i>Note. Other Schools: University College, Informatics, Law and Music</i>						
<i>Other Ranks: Clinical, Research, Visiting, Adjunct, Part-Time, and Librarians</i>						

the right thing to do, but they have no complex understanding of such scholarship.

Other faculty members felt student resistance was because students were basically “shy.” Because they had probably never talked about the multicultural society they were living in, they were fearful of offending their classmates.

### *Cross-Cultural Communication*

Some faculty members believed that cultural difference is a substantial barrier to creating a more multicultural teaching and learning environment. One faculty respondent stated this as follows:

Language translation, customs, and social norms can all be barriers in my area of nursing. Students of other cultures have indicated that some terms and ideas do not translate from their native language to English or from English to their native language. For example, proverbs that we use to assess abstract vs. concrete thinking do not translate into some other languages, so students are not sure how to interpret them when they ask a client to state what a proverb means. I also find that some cultures find it hard to ask for help, and so students will struggle in a course and not ask for help or even accept the help I try to offer them because they feel they should not ask for help.

There were other faculty members who felt communication was not a barrier to incorporating multicultural content into their classrooms. While speaking about language barriers, one respondent said there had been “very few [barriers] in my 35+ years of teaching in 2 languages and 3 countries to students from Asia, Latin America, and North America. Only on rare occasions have I encountered misunderstandings of what I was trying to communicate; these were probably due to differences in interpreting language.”

### *Lack of Multicultural Teaching Resources*

The lack of textbooks that incorporate the multicultural reality of the U.S. was seen as a major barrier to multicultural teaching for many faculty respondents. As one respondent explained,

Textbooks for survey courses that truly incorporate multicultural content and methodologies are difficult to find. Multicultural content is usually added on in extra chapters or subsections in a token kind of way. Artists, for example, are added to art his-

tory survey texts if they reflect concerns of the West, not because they are significant within their own cultural contexts. Another major challenge involves my own ability to learn and absorb information, ideas, and methods from diverse cultures. I try to add more ideas each year, but it is a constant challenge.

Faculty suggested that offering academic institutional sensitivity training about how and what textbooks to incorporate into classrooms to build a multicultural teaching and learning environment could be useful. Multicultural resources could become the composition of the classroom itself. One respondent indicated that there is

Under-representation of cultures in the classroom—so, for example, if we are reading an essay about the African-American experience, and there are no or only a few African-American students in the classroom, we are losing the opportunity to “live” the multi-cultural experience we are reading about. Also, people in the U.S. are often reluctant to talk about race and sometimes culture, or they are inclined to think that we have an open and tolerant society, so we shouldn’t focus on injustices from the past. Finally, my own busyness or limited knowledge keeps me from doing the best job I can, but I’m working on that.

### *Time Constraints*

Citing the pressure that faculty members at many universities face to publish and get research funded, some reported that it was not to their benefit to learn multicultural teaching methods to implement in their classrooms. It was seen as too much additional work that would add to their already limited classroom preparation time. In addition, some faculty felt that they were not rewarded by their institution for blending multicultural content into their courses, and in some cases that it was not even valued by their departments. One faculty respondent explained it as follows:

Multicultural teaching involves more time and energy than other types of teaching. There needs to be some relief periodically to reenergize one-self and to stay current with trends and scholarship. Multicultural work is very difficult to do well, and I’m not too sure there are currently many rewards in the university system for doing this hard work! The course content is rigid, and I don’t often have enough time to devote to multicultural teaching given the other pressures I face on the tenure track.



Many faculty members who taught mathematical, science, or statistics courses felt that multicultural teaching was not applicable to their courses and, as such, did not feel that they really needed to devote time to it in their classrooms. They described basic science as “culture neutral,” and one faculty member went so far to say that “in mathematics there is no such thing as multicultural teaching.”

#### *Lack of Knowledge About Multicultural Teaching Pedagogies*

Perhaps the most dominant theme in this study was that, generally, faculty members had low self-confidence regarding their ability to create a multicultural teaching and learning environment. They spoke about being hired due to their particular area of expertise, but that in their graduate training, multicultural teaching pedagogy was not even covered. Many faculty appeared very interested in teaching from a multicultural perspective, but the reality was they had no idea how to begin. One faculty respondent described this dilemma as follows:

The biggest barrier is the fact that many Ph.D. grads are not trained to teach, let alone to teach in a multicultural fashion. It would be helpful if [the institution] developed concrete strategies and techniques to help teachers—lesson plans, ideas, specific ways of integrating multicultural content. I attended a multicultural teaching workshop, but I didn’t feel that I came away with anything concrete that I could apply in my courses—except a giant book that I don’t have time to read.

Some faculty members reported that academic institutions appeared to subscribe to the belief that multicultural teaching is about students and faculty of color, or that it represents departments with a liberal agenda.

## **Discussion**

Although respondents reported a significant number of multicultural teaching practices, as evidenced by their scores on the quantitative questionnaire, they seemed to be readily able to identify problems in fully implementing multicultural teaching strategies within their classrooms, as evidenced by their responses to an open-ended survey question.

#### *Student Variables*

In the open-ended survey question, faculty members identified student-related variables as playing the primary role in their own lack

of multicultural teaching prowess. Most noteworthy of these variables was the student resistance to this type of teaching they had encountered, including students' belief that a focus on "others" implies some sort of accusation or reproach toward them. This perception, perhaps deriving from their experience that multicultural teaching is more likely to be embraced by faculty of color (Burk, 2007), can create an uncomfortable learning environment for all students. It is also true that many students view multiculturalism as "one-dimensional," only benefiting non-dominant groups (Johnson & Inoue, 2003). They may, therefore, resist what they perceive as an attempt by instructors to separate the dominant group from the non-dominant group. Further, it is not uncommon for white students to have a difficult time defining their own culture, although they may easily define aspects of other cultures (Phinney, 1990; White & Burke, 1987).

One way to counteract the defensive stance of students toward multiculturalism is for instructors to de-emphasize the "us" versus "them" mentality and instead to focus on the value of learning and applying diverse viewpoints to problems. This may be easier said than done but could be highly useful, especially in courses in sciences and other areas where culture may mediate the belief systems that interact with scientific findings to impact behaviors. For example, in a health psychology course taught by one of the authors, students frequently discuss cultural beliefs associated with health behaviors. Although at first glance these beliefs may seem difficult to understand from a majority culture point of view, a historical examination of where these beliefs come from, and a socio-economic evaluation of the illness experiences of these different cultures, clearly shows the logical reasoning behind these seemingly illogical belief systems. In the end, all students benefit from learning to examine carefully the antecedents and correlates of behaviors and beliefs in order to make sense of them. In this way, both majority and minority cultures learn to respect each others' backgrounds and better to understand that many forces come into play to explain both our differences and similarities.

Faculty members also indicated described barriers based on how their students would perceive their efforts at multicultural teaching, specifically, the concern that their teaching evaluations would suffer as a result of infusing multiculturalism into the classroom. On the one hand, this illustrates faculty members' responsiveness to student expectations and desires; but on the other hand, it prevents them from engaging in a process that would challenge student perspectives in order to promote their growth as global citizens.

*Institutional Variables*

Second to student factors, faculty members identified institutional factors as barriers to their own multicultural teaching. On the one hand, they stated that there were not enough resources available for them to develop expertise in multicultural teaching. On the other, they reported that they could not develop this expertise because of time constraints and the inability to focus on teaching when the university is perceived as rewarding only research and its outcomes. These concerns point to the contradictory nature of reward systems in state universities such as the study site that, more and more, depend on grant funding for their subsistence. Faculty members understand that one of their main roles is teaching, and yet to thrive at their positions they must focus instead on research grants and publications. When campus-wide priorities clash with the stated teaching mission of the university, faculty members are put in a difficult position (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005). In these cases, research efforts are more likely to take priority over teaching efforts.

Institutions must commit to developing multicultural teaching resources and institute multicultural training. As shown through these responses, however, faculty will buy into such programs only if and when the institution recognizes and values multicultural teaching beyond words alone. Universities that truly value multicultural teaching can incorporate appropriate recognition into the rewards systems for faculty. Including efforts toward and success at multicultural training and teaching within promotion and tenure criteria, for example, can send a loud and clear message to faculty that their efforts are worthwhile. Funding training and research on multicultural teaching will also show the institution's commitment to this important role for faculty.

Another institutional factor is the diversity of students within the classroom. Faculty members commented that it is sometimes difficult to bring in diverse viewpoints when the class consists mostly or entirely of majority students. This problem is compounded in institutions where diversity and multiculturalism are not embraced and made a priority. Students of color are attracted to institutions where they can find other students as well as instructors of color. This may be the result of feeling more comfortable in an environment with others of their own ethnic group (Bourassa, 1991). Yet a campus that recruits diverse students will be able to retain them in sufficient proportions only if it creates a welcoming climate (Burk, 2007). Multicultural teaching contributes to a climate that is welcoming of other cultures (Jackson, Morrison, & Dangerfield, 2002). Therefore, although difficult at first, multicultural teaching, even

within classrooms with only white students, may be a necessity, not only to benefit the white students, but also to create a framework that will attract a more diverse student body.

### *Faculty Variables*

Finally, faculty members identified individual factors as barriers to multicultural teaching. Even though student and institutional variables outnumbered the individual variables, faculty were able to discuss various barriers to multicultural teaching that were dependent on their own efforts. Most of these were based on their own understanding of multicultural education. It seemed, from their responses on the quantitative questionnaire, that faculty did, in fact, engage in more multicultural teaching practices than they were aware. Faculty scored high on practices such as setting high expectations for all students and weaving experiences from students' lives into their teaching. These strategies are not only good multicultural teaching practices, but also good overall teaching practices—ones that do not necessarily require in-depth knowledge of other cultures that faculty may lack. Those practices where faculty scored lower, such as weaving experiences of other groups specifically into their teaching or examining books specifically for their multicultural content, require a greater level of skill with multicultural teaching and may require faculty to seek out more knowledge and training.

In summary, in terms of barriers to multicultural teaching, faculty members seemed to identify many factors that could be remediated, especially through an institutional commitment resulting in significant changes to faculty reward systems and investment of funds for training faculty. An extensive body of literature suggests that this commitment and investment is well worth the effort. It will lead toward a campus community that attracts a diverse student body, which, in turn, will result in better trained students of all backgrounds (Higbee et al., 2004).

### *Limitations*

A limitation of this study is the rate of response to the survey. Only 44% of those who received the e-mail inviting them to participate did so. The response rate is typical for this type of study, however (Maruyama & Moreno, 2000). Although the response rate was a limitation, we received responses from all academic units and rank levels, and as was demonstrated in the Results section, from faculty with varying degrees of interest and knowledge of multicultural teaching. Further limitations include

the use of a non-standardized instrument, one with high face validity, to measure multicultural teaching practices. The instrument demonstrated good reliability, however, so we are confident that we were able to assess the construct fairly well. Future research examining the validity of the instrument will provide more information on its value.

Another limitation of the study is that a large proportion of faculty ( $n = 122$ ) did not respond to the open-ended question assessing barriers to multicultural teaching. Furthermore, this non-response was not completely random. Although there was no difference in non-response by faculty rank, there was by area. Although only a very small percentage of faculty from the School of Education did not respond (11.6%), over half of the faculty from Engineering and Technology did not respond (56.3). This disparity is compounded by the fact that 18.8% of faculty from Engineering and Technology who did respond said that multicultural education was not relevant to their classrooms; that is, there was no room or need for multiculturalism in their subject areas. Therefore, these response rates may not capture the full range of negative opinions toward multicultural teaching that may be present among faculty. Although it cannot be verified with the design used in the study, it is highly likely that faculty who did not respond to the question either did not feel strongly about or had opinions against multicultural teaching. Future research with non-volunteer samples should focus on interview techniques that obtain detailed information regarding faculty opinions, knowledge, and perceived value of multicultural teaching. Finally, the study was conducted in an urban, predominantly white Midwestern university. It is not clear how well our findings may generalize to other types of universities, especially those with a more diverse teaching body and student body. We suspect our findings will generalize to other geographically similar campuses.

It seems fitting to end with the following statement from a faculty respondent: "Multicultural work is very difficult to do well, and I'm not too sure there are currently many rewards in the university system for doing this hard work." No doubt, multicultural teaching can be supported in academic institutions by the development of multicultural excellence in teaching awards, research grant incentives, faculty course reduction, buy-out time to attend training on multicultural teaching and for development of multicultural teaching, interdisciplinary communities of practice and the creation of multicultural teaching and learning institutes on campus that provide resources and training sessions for faculty and aspiring students who dream of teaching one day. Clearly, academic institutions must show leadership in valuing and supporting faculty members committed to multicultural teaching, as that will create a broader academic climate that

truly reflects the diversity of life experiences and perspectives, enriching the student learning experience for all.

### References

- Banks, J. A. (1993). Multicultural education: Historical development, dimensions, and practice. *Review of Research in Education, 19*, 3-49.
- Banks, J. A. (2008). *An introduction to multicultural education*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Banks, J. A., Cookson, P., Gay, G., Hawley, W. D., Irvine, J. J., Nieto, S., Schofield, S. N., & Stephan, W. G. (2001). Diversity within unity: Essential principles for teaching and learning in a multicultural society. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83* (3), 196-203.
- Bourassa, D. M. (1991). How white students and students of color organize and interact on campus. *New Directions for Student Services, 56*, 13-23.
- Burk, N. M. (2007). Conceptualizing American Indian/Alaska Native college students' classroom experiences: Negotiating cultural identity between faculty and students. *Journal of American Indian Education, 46* (2), 1-18.
- Chesler, M., Lewis, A., & Crowfoot, J. (2005). *Challenging racism in higher education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gay, G. (2004). The importance of multicultural education. *Educational Leadership, 61* (4), 30-35.
- Higbee, J. L., Miksch, K. L., Jehangir, R. R., Lundell, D. B., Bruch, P. L., & Jiang, F. (2004). Assessing our commitment to providing a multicultural learning experience. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 34* (2), 61-74.
- Jackson, R. L., Morrison, C. D., & Dangerfield, C. L. (2002). Exploring cultural contracts in the classroom and curriculum. In J. Trent (Ed.), *Included in communication: Learning climates that cultivate racial and ethnic diversity* (pp. 123-136). Washington, DC: AAHE/NCA.
- Johnson, K., & Inoue, Y. (2003). Diversity and multicultural pedagogy: An analysis of attitudes and practices within an American Pacific Island university. *Journal of Research in International Education, 2* (3), 251-276.
- Kitano, M. K. (1997). What a course will look like after multicultural change. In A. Morey & M. Kitano (Eds.), *Multicultural course transformation in higher education: A broader truth* (pp. 18-34). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Maruyama, G., & Moreno, J. F. (2000). University faculty views about the value of diversity on campus and in the classroom. *Does diversity make a difference?* In American Council on Education and American

Association of University Professors (Eds.), *Does diversity matter? Three research studies on diversity in college classrooms* (pp. 9-36). Washington, DC: American Council on Education and American Association of University Professors.

Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108 (3), 499-514.

Sheets, R. H. (2005). *Diversity pedagogy: Examining the role of culture in the teaching-learning process*. Boston: Pearson Education.

White, C. L., & Burke, P. J. (1987). Ethnic role identity among black and white college students: An interactionist approach. *Sociological Perspectives*, 30 (3), 310-331.

---

*Dr. Khadija Khaja, associate professor at the Indiana University School of Social Work, grew up in Africa and has studied and worked in Canada and the United States. Her interests include international social work practice, Islamic social service delivery, the impact of terrorism on Muslim communities, refugees, the pre-post lives of Muslims around the world in the 9/11 era, peace building, ethnographic qualitative research, female circumcision, ritual practices, cultural competency, child welfare, children of war, human rights, international curriculum development, women's health and rights, cultural competency, multicultural teaching pedagogy, and teaching clinical practice using technology. She serves on the Council of External Relations-Global Commission of Social Work for the North American Council of Social Work Educators. Dr. Silvia Bigatti is an associate professor in the department of public health, Indiana University School of Medicine. She teaches courses on research methods and health psychology. Her major research interests are in coping with chronic health conditions. Dr. Bigatti has received numerous teaching awards, including induction into the Indiana University system-wide Faculty Colloquium on Excellence in Teaching (FACET). Jennifer Thorington Springer is an associate professor of English at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI). Born and raised in Barbados, her own "border-crossings" and personal background as a transnational subject directly influence her areas of study: Caribbean literature and studies, particularly Caribbean women's writing, contemporary African-American literature, and immigrant literature. Springer's research primarily examines literary constructions of black diasporic identities, and how race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality influence those identities. Gina Sánchez Gibau is associate professor in the department of anthropology at IUPUI. She earned an M.A. in Latin American studies from the University of California at Los Angeles and a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Texas at Austin, specializing in the African Diaspora. Her research interests include race and ethnicity, identity, migration, and gender studies. She conducted fieldwork on identity formation among Cape Verdeans in Boston, Massachusetts. She has presented at numerous conferences in the U.S. and abroad and has published chapters in edited volumes and articles in *Cimboa: Journal of Cape Verdean Letters, Arts, and Studies*, *Transforming Anthropology, Identities*, and *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. Dawn Michele Whitehead is the director of Curriculum Internationalization at IUPUI. Her interests center on the impact of internationalization of education on students and teachers at all levels globally and teacher education, retention, and recruitment in Ghana. Kathleen Grove has been the director of the IUPUI Office for Women since 2004. She also serves as associate faculty for the women's studies program in the Indiana University School of Liberal Arts, Indianapolis. Ms. Grove holds two professional licenses as an attorney and as a marriage and family therapist. She has been co-chair of the Multicultural Teaching Community of Practice at IUPUI, which won the Joseph T. Taylor Award for Excellence in Diversity in 2010. She is a member of the IUPUI Chancellor's Diversity Council. Her research interests include multicultural teaching practices and women's leadership development.*