

Exploring the Diverse Classroom



James McNinch
Faculty of Education,
University of Regina

My son, a chef in a restaurant in the town of Jasper in the Rocky Mountains of

Alberta, likes to tell the story of American tourists asking where the fire-works display will be held to celebrate Independence Day on July 4th and their subsequent puzzlement when told, “we don’t celebrate your holidays here in Canada.” Such tourists’ insensitivity to difference – in this case – national identity, helps to define who we are as Canadians, if only by not being American. So an insult, even based on friendly but simple ignorance of identity has the power to define difference. When identities are given by or taken from others, stereotyping, jingoism, and racism are usually close by. The case of Europeans naming Indigenous Peoples of North America “Indians” because they thought that they had arrived in India illustrates how labelling the other presumes knowledge rather than constructing it. In the university classroom insensitivity to differences among students and between teacher and students runs the risk of alienating students and diminishing pedagogical effectiveness. In working closely with gay and lesbian students, international students, and First Nations and Métis students, I have learned that, while ignoring differences may seem to be the ultimately democratic stance in

academia, difference needs to be acknowledged, explored, and affirmed in the classroom.

What concerns do educators have in light of this challenge? They well may ask: “Why should I presume to ‘judge a book by its cover’? What about invisible differences? Why should differences among students have any impact on the study of my discipline? Isn’t this just part of the fashion for a socially constructed and student centred curriculum?” Yet we know anecdotally, from the experience of university teachers, that students of difference, sometimes with English as a second language or a physical or mental disability, pose considerable challenges to our classroom practice. How do we begin to conceptualize these issues?

Often the word “diversity” is used when we are talking about difference, and often that difference is assumed to be “disadvantaged.” We need to be concerned when “diversity” becomes a politically correct euphemism to mask differences that are regarded as inferior. Students with different physical and mental abilities understand this kind of stigmatization only too well. Louis Althusser (1973) argued years ago

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that ideology and language subject us to “interpellations” because all space, including the classroom, is constructed by the inter-relations of various positions of power and a class system works only if a sense of difference and inferiority is reinforced. We might remember, for example, how women have until recently been under-studied and under-represented in most disciplines and curricula. Such exclusion still exists for other “minorities” too. Official “blindness” to this problem of under-

From the Director

The increasing diversity in Canadian university communities creates rich intellectual environments, but also challenges us to include new worlds of experience in how we teach and how we learn. The contributors to this issue of *Focus* highlight some of the facets of Dalhousie’s diverse community and raise our collective awareness of how we can embrace diversity more effectively in our teaching.

Lynn Taylor, Ph.D.
Director, Centre for
Learning and Teaching

EDITOR
Suzanne Le-May Sheffield

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Zita Hildebrandt

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Dalhousie University
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Phone: (902) 494-1622
Email: CLT@Dal.Ca

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misrepresentation does not deny its existence. Queer studies shows us that minorities in society are often shaped by insult and contempt for the “other” and “suffer the experience of a subordinate positionality” as Pierre Bordieu (2001) calls it (Eribon, 2004, 38). This subordinate positionality can “see through” the privilege of power and challenge the power of privilege.

Both students and instructors bring their culture, their diverse ways of knowing, seeing, and being to the classroom. Whether this results in fractured, disjunctured inter-play between them or a more harmonious integration of differences depends on how teachers and students negotiate space for diversity, as the following examples illustrate. A colleague of mine, Christine Ramsay, teaching Film Studies at the University of Regina, ponders a class she will teach on the works of David Cronenberg. She

contrasts the majority of her students – film production majors – (predominately male and geared to making and doing things) with the minority who are women’s studies majors (exclusively female and keen

on talking and theorizing). Who determines what “norms” will be privileged in such a context? The course is a film studies not a film production course, but will the resistance of the male students to a critical agenda diminish the experience of the female students? The role of the instructor here is crucial in deciding what kind of approach to the Cronenberg canon will be taken and what kind of student work will be rewarded. In such a way does “diversity” (in this case, of gender and intellectual orientation) become a pedagogical responsibility for every university teacher. Sound pedagogy tells us to take advantage of this binary, first by clearly identifying it rather than avoiding it, and second by using it effectively to challenge the learning, in this case, of both

the female theorists and the male practitioners.

What role should the professor’s beliefs and values hold in a class? In a course on Restorative Justice, a minority of the students are First Nations or Métis. The other students are “white”; many are young men taking a degree in Police Studies. Some majority students accuse the professor, Josephine Savarese, a white female lawyer in a term position, of favouring the minority students and “their views.” The professor has gone to great lengths not to express her own opinions about the problems inherent in such practices as sentencing circles. The minority students accuse the professor of being unsympathetic to alternative views of the justice system because they think she should be an advocate of social change. Given our colonial past, is such confrontation and antagonism in the classroom

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surprising? Do our institutions support us in our insistence that academic integrity means respecting the differing views of others even when they seem to personally abuse or insult us? How can the professor ensure that this volatile

emotional and political situation in the classroom contributes to the learning of all students, by perhaps discovering something about themselves most of all?

Ignoring the diverse impact that new knowledge has on students can ruin the climate in the classroom. But we should understand that learning is an emotional, as well as an intellectual, experience. We should expect individual personalities and histories to collide, particularly if there is also a diversity of intellectual sophistication and academic experience. Managing competing agendas in the classroom requires considerable deftness. In this particular case, speaking candidly with individual students after class allowed the professor to explain her pedagogical position and to ask for

(actually, insist on) the cooperation of several vocally dominant students on both “sides” in maintaining the ground rules of civil discourse. When a teacher sees the subtlety and the complexity of the issues, while the students are looking for the “right” answer, she can rely on her own narrative of her own learning to illustrate that learning is more of a journey than it is a destination. Frank Tuitt (2003) usefully summarizes what appropriate pedagogy looks like for diverse college classrooms. His summary of the literature concludes that such classrooms are characterized by a high degree of faculty-student interaction and dialogue, and the sharing of power through the “activation” of student voice. Animated by an understanding of the importance of personal narrative and collaboration, and an awareness of different learning styles, teaching must be responsive, “fluid and reflective,” and governed by an understanding that education is a transformative process, meaning that the teaching “seeks to empower students to change the worlds in which they live.” Excellent teaching, according to Tuitt, is deliberately skilful, understands context, challenges student resistance, and draws, in Parker Palmer’s phrase, on “the courage to teach.”

The nature of course material can impact the dynamic of a diverse classroom, but even supposedly “value-neutral” subjects can be problematic, in part because student identity is not static but always contested, sometimes because of differences in experience and culture. In Geology, students learn from lab instructor Evanna Simpson to identify rock samples through certain experimental procedures. Such explorations are done in groups but the reports are to be the work of each individual. The petroleum engineering students from China, however, want to hand in only perfect work to please the instructor and show they know what is the best expected so they all hand in the same lab report done by the most adept of their peers. Similarly, a

computing science graduate student from Thailand is to research and write a paper on a particular topic. The professor, Philip Fong, finds the paper very familiar: it is his own, culled from a journal publication without attribution. The student has attempted to impress and flatter his supervisor by showing him that he has accepted the knowledge of his better and assumed it as his own. Again, sound pedagogy suggests the responsibility of the instructor is to induct such students into western notions of science, work, and individualism which is more complex than these apparently blatant examples of plagiarism would at first suggest. Explaining to students how we construct knowledge and understanding in our disciplines makes them more complex spaces and implies more sophistication for the university instructor, who will find it increasingly necessary to adapt and modify curricular material and teaching strategies to address the learning needs of all students.

These issues of cultural difference also raise the issue of diversity in learning styles, whether innate to the individual or culturally learned. In working with diverse students, we might learn from Mariolina Salvatori (2000), a professor of Italian literature at the University of Illinois and a 1999 Carnegie Scholar. Her Carnegie teaching project concerned the role of “difficulty” in the learning process. What counts as difficult? How do learners experience it? How can faculty most profitably engage students with materials that are importantly and necessarily difficult and beyond their immediate comprehension? From her experience as a foreign graduate student, Salvatori recalls moments in class of disorientation and difficulty because she was understanding things “differently.” In her teaching, Salvatori proposes that instead of seeing “problems” as mistakes or signs of ineptitude, that we view difficulties as points of departure and the beginnings of meaningful interpretation, points that need to be interrogated for understanding.

Learning occurs when someone is asked to articulate what exactly it is that they don’t understand.

From those who work closely with international students we learn to understand and respect differences among students, not through received stereotypes or by regarding them as picturesque or exotic, but by seeing each of them as unique individuals. In other words, we must explore, not ignore, differences



amongst our students because this is one of the ways they will learn. Then from Salvatori we see that when students have a problem with meaning we can use this “teachable moment” as an opportunity for intellectual growth and transformation. Such complementary stances provide useful approaches for working with diverse and minority students. Like all sound pedagogy, these general approaches tend to be appropriate for all students, if we see our classrooms as sites of exploration and not of transmission. Let us acknowledge difficulty in learning in the same way that we acknowledge differences among students and use these two pedagogical tools to enhance student learning.

As teachers and as scholars we create disciplinary norms that reflect our social and cultural bias. “Norms” once established suggest “differences” are somehow subordinate. I spend some time encouraging my students in the Faculty of Education, the vast majority white and heterosexual, to understand that they are actually in the minority in that they thrived in the intensely social environment of public schools, and that their integration was so complete that they can envision themselves returning to the system to teach in it. On the other hand, the majority of the public have

had very “problematic” experiences of schooling, and couldn’t wait to put it all behind them and escape to the “real” world. My education students don’t even understand the privilege they have; it is “just who we are” as one student explained.

With guidance these students can assist in constructing their discipline to reflect multiple meanings of the “ideal” student, focus

on material that has relevance to minority students, and select pedagogical techniques that will enhance the learning process for a diverse range of students (Henry and Tator, 2006).

Pedagogy built on acknowledging diversity implies opening our doors to different ways of knowing in our disciplines. A multiplicity of literacies not only enhances, but interrogates the academic knowledge and social mores we often take for granted. The literature on inclusive, anti-racist, and critical multicultural education (Kumashiro, 2000; McIntosh, 1998) tells us that the academic achievement of students from diverse and minority backgrounds is intricately linked with the learning environment and the social mirroring they receive from both professors and peers. An inclusive classroom encourages interaction and dialogue between different students. The university teacher can move students beyond “confirming interaction” with their peers, where difference is minimized, and provide opportunities to expand their vision of the world, through a respectful exchange of ideas with students who are different from them. Kumashiro encourages us to see social and educational privilege as “not naturally produced,” and to

go beyond teaching “about or for the Other.” As noted critical educator bell hooks (1994) reminded us more than a decade ago: “When we, as educators, allow our pedagogy to be radically changed by our recognition of a multicultural world, we can give students the education they desire and deserve.” (44)

For example, a student response to an assignment for Suzanne Le-May Sheffield, illustrates well hook’s intent. Students in a Darwin, Einstein, and the Humanities course at York University were asked to write a reaction piece to a chapter in the *Origin of Species* from the point of view of a contemporary of Darwin, such as a student at Cambridge or an Anglican clergyman. A female, Moslem student asked if she could write from the perspective of a 19th century Moslem. The class discussed various reactions to Darwin and this student offered the Moslem perspective.

Apparently, according to this student, the conflicts that existed for Christians just did not hold for Moslems. Le-May Sheffield reflects, “From her I saw how our cultural

assumptions had been embedded in the assignment and how these assumptions also coloured the historiography. I don’t think anyone has written about the nineteenth-century Moslem reaction to Darwin – perhaps there wasn’t one and that is interesting in itself. But this experience pointed to the normative assumptions that existed more broadly in our discipline and had impacted on our thinking. Ironically, in this assignment we had included options for students to see the *Origin* from different classed and gendered perspectives, but had omitted religious differences (outside of Christianity). Even when we think we are being aware of difference and

diversity, we are perhaps only half so.”

Environmentalists talk about restoring bio-diversity to the grasslands of the prairie, arguing that a complex interdependent eco-system of indigenous plants and animals is healthier and “truer” than the monoculture of the agri-business, with its dependence on chemicals and petroleum. The growing of wheat, for example, as a one-size fits all approach to agriculture in southern Saskatchewan led to disastrous consequences during the Dirty Thirties when the over-tilled soil blew away in a decade of drought. Today farming methods take into account many local and regional differences including topography, soil types, moisture levels, precipitation, and number of frost free days, and then choose the appropriate crop to match local conditions.



Perhaps university teachers aren’t that much different from farmers: both hope to succeed by making informed choices. The metaphor of nurturing

and growing a crop (in this case of students) may be apt if it takes into account the environment in which one teaches. Just as teaching is always value-laden, it also never takes place in a vacuum. What kind of students are these? Where do they come from? How have they been “raised” to this point in their lives? What is the context in which I am teaching? Asking, and attempting to answer, these questions will go a long way to determine appropriate content and instructional and assessment strategies.

University teachers need to be aware of the strong role they play in establishing norms that reveal the values and identities implicit

in our teaching. This “hidden curriculum” shapes our content and instructional and assessment choices and defines the nature of the academic community; all of this will remain a mystery if it isn’t articulated. Appreciating that we all do not necessarily share the same values, beliefs, and identities is a useful starting place for working with diversity in the classroom. Making the implicit explicit is the second step in such pedagogy. Responding to individual needs of students further augments this approach.

Hannah Arendt (1973) uses the metaphor of the table to help us understand the importance of difference. The table brings us together around it but it also separates us. The classroom is a table, a public and contested space, where we are capable with others of what Kant described as “enlarged thought” (Eribon, 343). Encouraged, the influence of minorities on campus leads to more divergent thinking and diverse perspectives, better critical thinking, and a willingness and ability to change. In other words, diversity helps students and faculty to think and learn. Isn’t that what a university education is all about?

Dr. McNinch,
past Director of
the University of
Regina Teaching
Development Centre,
is a contributor in
their 2005 publication
*International
Students: A Resource
Guide for University
Educators*, available
on loan from the CLT
Resource Library.

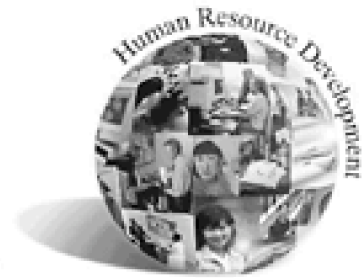
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Diversity at Dalhousie: What part will you play?

Dalhousie University is committed to equity and to taking steps to reverse the historic under-representation of specific groups that are present in society. Included in this commitment is the encouragement and celebration of diversity in the workplace. A diversity education program has been developed, with the School of Social Work, as a means to accomplish three specific goals with respect to diversity: awareness, analysis, and action.



Benefits of Attending:

- An increased awareness of diversity issues, initiatives and responsibilities;
- Analysis of individual and group experiences and attitudes; and
- An opportunity to develop strategies for implementing improvements with respect to diversity

The facilitators are University employees who have been trained to deliver this program.

All University faculty, staff, and administrators are welcome to attend.

Schedule:

The next 1 1/2 day training program will take place on February 8th (9:00 am - 4:00 pm) and February 9th (9:00 am - 12:00 pm), 2006

Registration is required. Please call Human Resources Development at 494-8886 or email HRD@Dal.Ca

Working with Disabilities



*Interview with
Michelle Mahoney
August 2005
Conducted by Suzanne
Le-May Sheffield*

Michelle Mahoney has been a clerical employee at Dalhousie

University for almost seven years and is currently an administrative assistant in the Faculty of Computer Science. She enjoys her work and believes she is good at her job, but Michelle, who was born with a physical disability that left her with “two crooked arms and one leg that doesn’t bend” has not only had to find ways to cope with her disability, but has also had to cope with how others perceive her ability to manage her work and daily living.

How does Michelle type on a computer all day without the use of her finger tips? She is open and frank in her willingness to discuss her disability. She smiles in response to my question and says, “I use my knuckles, like this.” And she demonstrates on the table in front of her. She prefers that people ask questions so she can clarify her abilities, rather than suffer from unspoken assumptions that she cannot engage in activities that able-bodied persons do. “I don’t want pity,” she emphasizes. Michelle is an outspoken advocate for persons with disabilities. She is a board member of Halifax’s Independent Living Resource Centre and was recently selected by the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres to represent Nova Scotia at the 2004 International Day of Disabled Persons in Ottawa.

Michelle met with me to discuss the ways in which Dalhousie faculty and staff can, and do, create supportive environments that facilitate persons with disabilities working and studying on campus. Michelle remarks that she “comes with her own computer tray and chair.” These are items that enable her to do her job well and have been introduced into her workspace over the

years she has worked at Dalhousie. Like many students with disabilities, Michelle, as a staff member, hesitates to ask for her special needs to be met in the work environment. On the one hand, she does not want to feel as if she is “a burden” to those around her, on the other other hand she wishes to perform her job to the best of her ability which necessitates some special accommodation.

She stresses that faculty and staff need to ask persons with disabilities how they can accommodate them in given situations without embarrassment, but they also need to listen to the responses and requests of disabled people who more often than not know best how their needs can be met. Michelle has requested such items as a lowered telephone table and low-access filing cabinets to facilitate her ability to do her job. Yet, she understands the reticence of disabled persons to be proactive and encourages them not to feel ashamed to ask that their needs be met so that they may succeed in participating equally in work and study activities alongside able-bodied persons.

She sighs when she remembers how she felt about using the ‘special’ seats for disabled people in a lecture hall, when taking a course on campus. She comments that she would often have to sit in the very front of the class and felt as if everyone was staring at her – both at her disability and her more mature age for a typical undergraduate classroom. Either that, she says, or I would be relegated to the very back of the hall on the outskirts of the class. Change can only happen and accommodation be made when persons with disabilities speak up about how they experience their everyday lives.

Responsibility for addressing these issues of diversity lie with both

individuals and institutions. While Dalhousie can institute policies and procedures that attempt to create an equitable work and study space for all, departments and individuals need to not only know and understand these policies and put them into action, but also need to be adaptable to specific situations that may not fit the mold of generic policies.

In the end, says Michelle, “I’m just like everyone else.” She has hopes and aspirations for her life and her career. “I’d be lying,” she said, “if I didn’t wonder whether I was turned down for a job or advancement because of my disability.” But she also reflects that in order to succeed she must take her own fair share of hard knocks. Sometimes she feels discouraged and frustrated, but Michelle also often feels as if she must carry not only the weight of her own personal disappointments

but also the weight of others’ curiosities about her disabilities and their concerns that she can not succeed at certain tasks. Yet she prefers direct questions and clarifications, whether from strangers on the street or fellow employees, to silent stares. In this way she believes she can not

only improve her own life and work circumstances but also educate able-bodied persons about the abilities of those who are disabled.

“Change can only happen and accommodation be made when persons with disabilities speak up about how they experience their everyday lives.”

**Academic
Integrity Week**
February 6-10, 2006
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Social Inclusion: Diversity, Solidarity, and Universities Institutional Commitment to Recognition of Diversity



Barb Hamilton-Hinch
*Black Student Advisor,
Black Student Advising
Centre
Ph.D. Candidate,
Interdisciplinary Studies
Sessional Instructor,
Health & Human
Performance*

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, many Black students are becoming the first in their families to go to university. For different reasons, many of these students have deferred university education and are returning as mature students. Some are balancing raising a family and attending university, while working part-time to afford university. Unfortunately some are forced to leave the university before completion of their degree due to financial, personal and academic reasons.

Often, Black students and their parents have already faced many struggles in the public education system before arriving at university. The *BLAC Report on Education Redressing Inequity-Empowering Black Learners* (1994) highlights this issue, among others. An Employment Counselor who participated in the study stated:

I wanted to be a social worker but was told by my high school principal after the career testing that because I was Black, I would not be able to get a job as a social worker. Although my test results indicated that I would be an excellent social worker, he suggested that maybe I should be a nurse. However, because of my race, that field would also be hard to penetrate, so he suggested that I become a teacher. At that point I felt there was no need to continue school and I quit in grade eleven. I believed what my principal said and quit school as many other students did.

Black university students have often overcome many obstacles to arrive at university and continue to carry with them, in different ways, the

disadvantages they have experienced. In 1989-1990 twenty one students graduated with this degree.

In recognition of the challenges Black students face in getting to university and succeeding when they arrive, Dalhousie University has implemented a wide range of opportunities, demonstrating its commitment to increasing campus diversity. There are a number of initiatives which the university has taken dating back as far as 1969 with the Transition Year Program (TYP). TYP is a one-year program with a carefully constructed core curriculum that enables Blacks and Aboriginals to prepare themselves for their first degree. Other initiatives at Dalhousie are: the Indigenous Black and Mik'maq Law School Initiative (1989), The Black Student Advising Centre (1989), The James Robinson Johnson Chair in Black Canadian Studies (1990), Opportunities for African Nova Scotians in Engineering (2002), Imhoteps Legacy Project (2000), and "Diversity at Dalhousie: What part will you play?" a 1-day workshop implemented by the Human Resource Department (2004). There are also ten Entrance Scholarships for Indigenous African Nova Scotian and First Nation students (2005), and Mentoring and Academic Advising initiative for Indigenous and Aboriginal students (2006).

Individual departments have also made commitments to diversify their student population and staff. In 1984, Dalhousie's Maritime School of Social Work offered a Bachelor of Social Work Program for Mik'maq Social Services staff employed by agencies sponsoring the program (The Native Alcohol and Drug Association, the Welfare Programme, the Native Council of Nova Scotia and the Mik'maq Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia).

Today, the School of Social Work has designated seats for students of African descent, Aboriginal students, students with (dis)Abilities and Acadian students. As of 2002, the School of Nursing allocates five seats for Indigenous Black students. Each summer, since 2004, the School also hosts a day camp for junior high school students of African descent. Recently they have begun to coordinate a mentoring and recruiting program with nurses of African descent in Nova Scotia to help support present students and those who have graduated.

However, are all these initiatives enough to help Black students see Dalhousie University as an option, feel welcome and succeed in their studies? As an African Nova Scotian, instructor, graduate student, and

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administrator on campus, I would like to suggest that there are several things that individual faculty and teaching assistants can do within and beyond the framework of institutional policy to create a more inclusive atmosphere on campus. Dalhousie must continue to increase the diversity of employees across the university. This is particularly important, though, in strategic positions such as recruiting, and the Registrar's Office, areas of first contact for incoming students.

An inclusive curriculum that recognizes the Black contributions in most disciplines is of the utmost importance. When selecting reading materials, articles and books, search for ones that are written by racially visible individuals to bring a variety of perspectives to the classroom. Consider inviting guest speakers from the African Nova Scotian community or organize a tour for

your students through the Black Cultural Centre of Nova Scotia. The Black Student Advising Centre would be happy to assist faculty by providing suggestions and contact information for speakers and by helping to organize a tour. In addition, attending culturally diverse events in Halifax Regional Municipality such as African Heritage Month, Martin Luther King Jr. Celebrations, African Nova Scotian Music Awards, or the Black Cultural Centre Annual Dinner is another way to broaden and deepen one's own understanding and sensitivity to Black issues and culture while also reaching out to connect across communities.

I would also encourage all staff, faculty, and teaching assistants to become familiar with the number of university services, initiatives, and programs available to Black students. Make use of these resources to inform both yourself and your students on issues of diversity but to also raise awareness of these programs among students who may be able to benefit from these services. In addition, faculty, teaching assistants, and staff should consider signing up for the "Diversity at Dalhousie University: What part will you play?" workshop or attending one of the other opportunities to discuss diversity issues being offered this term by the Centre for Learning and Teaching and the Division of Medical Education through their 'Changing Worlds: Diversity and Health Care' series. Increased participation and success of Black students at Dalhousie is a positive development for both individual students and for our academic community. Please feel welcome to contact the Black Student Advising Centre if we can assist you in any way in your work with Black students.



Best Practices in Safe Space Initiatives

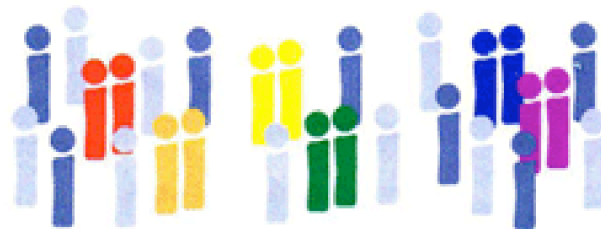
Bob Coffey
University of Michigan

Friday, January 27, 2006 • 2:30 to 4:00 pm
Student Union Building, Room 302

Mr. Coffey currently serves as the Education, Training, and Outreach Coordinator for the Office of Student Conflict Resolution at the University of Michigan. This is his tenth year working professionally in higher education. Robert has extensive experience in advising, conflict resolution, LGBT student services, leadership development, residential life, and student activities. He is also active in several professional organizations and often presents on issues related to leadership, supervision, diversity, and inclusion.

Robert holds a Bachelor's degree in Canadian Studies from the University of Vermont, a Master's in Canadian history from the University of Maine, and he is currently completing a Masters in Public Administration from the University of New Hampshire. He lives in Ann Arbor.

An invitation is extended to all members of the Dalhousie community to attend this session.



The International Graduate Student Experience



Muhannad Al-Darbi
NSERC Postdoctoral
Fellow and Killam
Post-Doctoral Fellow
University of British
Columbia

Muhannad Al-Darbi, Ph.D., was an international graduate

student in the department of Chemical Engineering at Dalhousie University between 2000 and 2004 and he was a part-time assistant professor in that department during 2004-2005. He was the recipient of the 2003-2004 Dalhousie President's Graduate Teaching Assistant Award.

As an international graduate student, I faced many challenges and difficulties throughout my program of study at Dalhousie University. Some of those challenges started on the first day I arrived in Halifax, others did not appear until later. Some difficulties were resolved quickly; others continued to be on-going challenges. During my time at Dalhousie, I found that many of the people at the university are willing to do their best to help international students. There are many ways in which international students, as well as Dalhousie University and the people working there, can ease the transition to living, working, and studying in Canada.

Some of the immediate challenges I faced when I arrived in Canada included:

- finding a good place to live in a new city
- getting a health insurance number and SIN number
- opening a bank account
- getting used to the weather
- choosing courses with new professors who are unknown to you
- obtaining access to facilities and resources expected to be available

These are challenges that many people new to Halifax might face. For international students, though, these challenges are compounded by the fact that they are unfamiliar with the different systems, language, and cultural attitudes. Sometimes it was very hard to understand or know how to deal with many people. I made the

mistake of arriving late, more than a week after the beginning of the fall term. So I always advise other international students to try their best to arrive early so they can make all the necessary arrangements before they have any other study and work commitments. General information that is helpful for understanding life in Canada can be found at the Dalhousie University International Students and Exchange Services website at: <http://internationalstudentservices.dal.ca/> where a more detailed *International Student Information Guide* can also be downloaded.

It is also particularly important for international students to make new friends when they first arrive in Canada. Many students feel lonely once they arrive at the university, having left their beloved ones behind. Talking to people helped me to feel that I was not alone and made being away from my family much easier. I think that the first few days, and maybe weeks, are vital in

creating a sense of belonging and community for international students on campus. It is very important for the university and individual departments to involve international students in many activities during this critical time to enable them to make an effective transition. Sometimes, I found it was hard to make friends with students and people from other nationalities. This could be an issue of language/communication barriers with Canadian students or others. Also, people from the same country, ethnic group, language, or religion, group together and separate themselves from other groups. It is therefore important for the university to encourage international students to mix together in events such as those listed at: <http://internationalstudentservices.dal.ca/international/events.html>

As international students settle in to their new life as students in Canada, new difficulties can arise. Students from other countries are often unaware of the university rules they should follow or the social and

legal systems that they should abide by. They are also often unaware of their rights and duties as people living in Canada or as students studying and working on campus. I would like to see Dalhousie University teach international students about the rules and their rights and duties especially with regard to academic policies and terms of employment. This is especially important so that they know they should not be afraid to speak up when problems and difficulties arise. I would also like to see Dalhousie institute a system that would address the issues raised by international students if they are uncomfortable or if they are facing any troubles, so these problems can be resolved before it is too late. At present, general information and advice on financial,

legal, and immigration matters is offered to international students on a referral basis via the International Students and Exchange Services.

International graduate students also need to take responsibility for

their own learning and success as a student in Canada. In part, this means that they need to be aware of all the available resources by being in continuous contact with the Faculty of Graduate Studies as well as those departmental faculty members responsible for graduate education. It also means surfing the university websites, reading the board announcements, and attending the meetings, activities, and seminars that are related to students' studies and work on campus. In this way, I became aware of, applied for, and received scholarships, research assistantships, and teaching assistants that assisted me in achieving my scholarly goals. I would particularly draw international graduate students' attention to the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship, Graduate Studies Scholarship, Bruce and Dorothy Rosetti Engineering Research Scholarship and the Faculty of Engineering Scholarship. Dalhousie University provides an environment in which dedicated students are rewarded for their hard work.

"There are many ways in which international students, as well as Dalhousie University and the people working there, can ease the transition to living, working, and studying in Canada."

I was fortunate to have a position as a graduate teaching assistant at Dalhousie. This was very important to me for many reasons: it helped me to cover some of my living expenses; it introduced me to many of the students, faculty members, and staff at the university; and it gave me a very good experience. In turn it made me feel like I was returning a favour for all of the good things that this university and many people in it had offered me. I particularly enjoyed the chance I had to teach a few courses as a part-time assistant professor after I finished my PhD. I had a very smooth and easy transition to this position, as the experience I had from my TA job was indeed very helpful. I would encourage every international graduate student to be involved in teaching in one way or another because it is as important as their research and other studies. The Centre for Learning and Teaching at Dalhousie is doing an excellent job in encouraging, training, and guiding the graduate students to do their job as TA's in the best and most effective way they can. One of the other things that helped a lot in making teaching more fun and interesting for me was that I worked with people who really cared about teaching, and cared enough to teach and guide graduate students to become better everyday. Successful teaching practice not only benefits graduate students but also the whole university.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the difficulties and challenges I faced as an international student at Dalhousie University have made me stronger and more experienced. I realized that if I tried my hardest to get the best out of everything, and if I had the self-confidence and hope to achieve my goals, I would be successful sooner or later. What matters most to me now are the final results. When I look back at the last five years I spent at Dalhousie I feel I was really blessed to be in that beautiful place and to spend time with the many wonderful people I met there. As a result, Dalhousie is my other home, and the wonderful people there are my extended family.



What do you do when...

diversity and health care

Purpose: A series of 6 one-hour workshops to explore inclusive teaching principles and strategies.

Objectives: By participating in these workshops participants will

- become more confident in dealing with issues of diversity in their pedagogical practice
- expand their repertoire of teaching strategies that promote inclusive classrooms

Description: The growing diversity of our university community provides a wealth of learning opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. As we seek to make our classrooms more inclusive, we are presented with diverse issues and challenges. Through the use of brief video vignettes and facilitated discussion, these six sessions will promote a critical exploration of our pedagogical assumptions and offer specific teaching strategies to promote inclusive classrooms.

Content: What do you do when ...

1. **January 11** • A student seeks accommodation for religious holy days
2. **January 18** • Your curriculum and pedagogy is unknowingly homophobic
3. **January 25** • The language you use is unintentionally offensive
4. **February 1** • Racist ideas and assumptions are evident in the classroom
5. **February 8** • Gender dynamics are not recognized in the classroom
6. **February 15** • Student with disabilities seek accommodation

All sessions will be held in **15 C-1 of the Tupper Building** from **12:30 to 1:30 pm**. No registration required.

Women's Issues Office at Dalhousie

Susan Brousseau
*Sexual Harassment Officer and
Advisor on Women's Issues,
Sexual Harassment Office*

The Advisor on Women's Issues position at Dalhousie University began in 1987, with the appointment of two part-time Advisors to the President for the purpose of promoting equity for Women, Minorities and Disabled. In late 1989, the part-time position of Status of Women Coordinator was established and became permanent in January 1993, increasing to 80% FTE in 1998.

The primary responsibilities of the Status of Women Coordinator are identified as sexual harassment and more broadly defined gender bias issues. Some of the areas in which the Coordinator was particularly active in the first few years included pay equity, non-unit comparability (comparing salaries of non-DFA female faculty in Medicine and Dentistry with their male counterparts), faculty retention, personal safety, and maternity benefits for part-time faculty. Planning events to mark significant dates for women (including the December 6th National Day for Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, and International Women's Day) was, and continues to be, a facet of the role since its inception. In more recent years, the Advisor has worked closely with the Dalhousie Women's Centre in ensuring appropriate recognition for these events.

In the years since the establishment of the Coordinator position (which subsequently came to be called the Advisor on Women's Issues), the sexual harassment area has evolved into the major part of the Advisor's role. The approval of the University's Sexual Harassment Policy in 1984 led to an increasing need to develop an experienced resource to manage concerns and to develop effective and on-going awareness training for

the campus community. Currently, more than 80% of the advisor's work involves developing and delivering educational programming; overseeing and administering the University's sexual harassment policy and complaint procedures; responding to concerns about sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking and related concerns. In addition, the creation of an Employment Equity Officer position in 1990 provided an additional resource for addressing some of the issues related to women and employment. These two offices now work cooperatively on certain initiatives and provide valuable support for each other.



Although the bulk of time is devoted to sexual harassment issues, the Advisor on Women's Issues continues to be available to women students, staff, and faculty to provide support, information, and assistance around issues of gender within the institution. In recent years, the Advisor (often working cooperatively with the Employment Equity Officer) has provided on-going support and advice for individual women faculty and staff encountering climate issues and other barriers within their respective units, and has worked to improve various university policies and practices in light of the experiences of particular individuals. Examples include the incorporation of provisions for dependent care expenses as eligible expenses within the University Travel Policy and changes to the University Parking Regulations to recognize absences for maternity and parental leave. These initiatives normally require the Advisor to research an issue, evaluate possible options, and prepare an appropriate proposal for consideration by the University.

The Advisor is also available to women students and can act to ensure that their concerns are addressed as well. For example, a very recent initiative involves examining how Dalhousie can ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment for women engineering students who continue very much to be a minority within their particular faculty. The Advisor has also worked with the Employment Equity Office to create a workshop for students on creating a more inclusive working and learning environment.

Since the early 1990s, when the Women's Issues and Employment Equity offices were established, the

situation for women at Dalhousie has continued to improve in terms of the numbers of female faculty, staff, and students who work and study at the institution. For instance, many of our faculties can point to full-time student enrollments that are near or greater than 50% women (combined undergraduate and graduate enrollments as of December 1, 2004). Similarly, women faculty now account for just over 50% of the total number of faculty members on campus, although continued efforts are needed to achieve a more equitable distribution across the institution and in tenure-stream positions.

While the overall numbers of women on campus have increased, there is still work to be done to ensure that opportunities for participation, advancement, and recognition in all areas, and at all levels of the University, are available for qualified women. The Advisor on Women's Issues is available to any member of the University community who would like to discuss concerns, suggestions, and ideas for collaboration.

New web-site for women at Dalhousie. The Advisor on Women's Issues is interested in establishing a web-site for women at Dalhousie (especially women who are new to the campus community). The aim is to connect women to a variety of resources, programs, policies, and research that may be particularly helpful to them in pursuing study or employment at the University. If you have suggestions for useful material or links for inclusion, please contact Susan Brousseau at susan.brousseau@dal.ca or 494-1137

The Politics of Inclusion in University Teaching: What's in it for me?

David Devine, *James R. Johnston Chair in Black Canadian Studies*

March 8, 2006 • 3:00 to 4:30 pm
University Hall, Macdonald Building

There is a presumption that "inclusion" is a wholesome activity, and that somehow both those being invited to be included and those issuing the invitation, are mutually benefiting from this transaction. This is highly questionable, in the context of individuals and communities who identify themselves as being marginalised and disenfranchised. The seminar will explore the costs and alleged benefits of "inclusion" and whether there is a right to remain excluded. Our personal responses to this dilemma shape our learning and teaching experiences.

To register contact CLT at 494-1622 or email CLT@Dal.Ca

Affirming Diversity Through Our Pedagogical Practice

Carolyn Campbell and Gail Baikie
Maritime School of Social Work

January 26, 2006 • 9:00 am to 12:30 pm
Killam Library, Room 2616

How do we "negotiate space for diversity" and promote the meaningful involvement of all students within our classrooms? What are the dynamics of diverse classrooms? Are we using exclusionary practices? How should we respond to racist or homophobic classroom events?

In this workshop the facilitators will explore the above questions through an examination of pedagogical principles and practices that are relevant to teaching within the context of diversity. This examination will be participatory in that participants will have ample opportunity to discuss the relevance of these principles to their educational context. In addition, participants will be invited to raise "critical teaching incidents" for reflection and discussion. This workshop will be relevant to participants who wish to engage in an in-depth critical exploration of their pedagogical practice.

To register contact CLT at 494-1622 or email CLT@Dal.Ca

Unpacking the Privileged Knapsack of University Classrooms

Carolyn Campbell
Maritime School of Social Work

February 14, 2006 • 1:30 to 3:30 pm
Killam Library, Room 2616

In a now classic essay, Peggy McIntosh (1988) provides a metaphorical definition of white privilege as "an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (p. 31).

Privilege, whether it is granted on the basis of race or other socially ascribed identities, ensures that the cultural practices of one group are represented as normal and universal while the cultural practices of other groups are represented as 'different' or 'diverse' (Bell, 1997).

This workshop will illuminate 'the tools, maps, and code books' that support various expressions of privilege within our classrooms. Through experiential exercises and dialogue participants will have an opportunity to critically consider the impact of privilege within their educational practice and the lives of their students.

To register contact CLT at 494-1622 or email CLT@Dal.Ca



Centre for Learning and Teaching

Dalhousie University

Halifax, N.S. B3H 4H8

Phone: (902) 494-1622