Positionality: How Does Who We Are Affect What We Do?

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Learning Objectives

1) Develop touchstones - or guidelines - for engaging conversations related to diversity and inclusion.

2) Examine our social identities.

3) Examine how those social identities influence our experiences and interactions on campus.

4) Discuss considerations we can make when engaging members of diverse communities and multicultural topics in light of our identities.
Caveats

1) This is only a first in a series
2) Time constraints
3) Engaging these issues at work
4) Even though various labels and identifying terms are used, enormous heterogeneity exists within and between groups
Touchstones
Identities

How individuals define or perceive themselves
A set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.
Fluid, flexible
Hold societal status - privilege & oppression
Intersectionality
Often significantly influenced by context
Claimed identities
Also, called self-identifications or avowed identities
Ascribed or Socially-Assigned Identities
How individuals are defined or perceived by others
Identity Dimensions

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Sexual orientation
- Place of origin
- Job
- Rank within the hierarchy

- Ethnicity
- Physical ability
- Socioeconomic Status
- Religion
- Education
- Other characteristics that go into forming a person’s perspective.
Positionality

These identities – or social locations
- influence how we perceive and respond to knowledge and every issue
- bias how we view the world
- particularly relevant with issues related to difference and power and privilege

Within academia, often encouraged to consider information and events as “objective” or unrelated to our experiences and identities
My Salient Identity Dimensions

- Race: Multiracial African American or Black
- Ally/Multicultural Work
- SES: First generation college student
- Spirituality
- Mentor
Implications

1. Acknowledge the influence of our identities on our perceptions and engagement of these issues
   - To ourselves and to our students
   - The difficulty that sometimes arises

2. Grant ourselves time and emotional space to prepare for and process discussions & events

3. Prepare proactively
   - Oppressed & privileged identities
   - Videos, writing prompts, case studies
   - Responses to offensive comments

4. Connect to or develop supportive networks
Thank You!

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