

# ENHANCING THE PRACTICE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

APRIL 2010

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**As long as the differences and diversities of mankind exist, democracy must allow for compromise, for accommodation, and for the recognition of differences.**

Eugene McCarthy

## DIVERSITY AND EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION BY PATTY TOMA

*“Over our time together, Elaine worked tirelessly toward her Engineering Diploma in Water Quality and Control. Where many of her classmates spent three hours on an assignment, Elaine would often put in triple and quadruple the time. Elaine’s instructors would connect with me asking for clarification on the Accommodations that Elaine was entitled to. This happened often. Elaine had a severe learning disability. She required a reader for her tests and exams. Words on the written page, for Elaine, were reversed and often moved around. With the support of her instructors, who did not know the details of Elaine’s disability, and other support staff at the College, Elaine graduated with her Diploma. What was important to Elaine was getting to the finish line. She would graduate with her peers. Elaine is employed at present in the field that she studied here at the College.”*

Her story is not unique.

Four employees at Okanagan College work specifically with individuals, like Elaine, who have medical verification outlining their disability, and their accommodated needs, in our educational setting. There is a Disability Service Coordinator at each of our four campuses.

We work, in part, within the parameters of The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the BC Human Rights Code. Our services are mandated by Canadian Legislation. Our work also reflects our department’s

Mission statement:

**“It is the mission of Disability Services to recruit, accommodate, retain and graduate students with disabilities and to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to compete alongside their peers.”**

This group of students represents a minority within the college population. Of the total college population; students with disabilities represent anywhere from 10 percent to 15 percent. Within this population is an extreme amount of diversity. No two students present with exactly the same challenges or accommodation needs. Inclusive among the barriers to education are physical, emotional, cognitive, neurological or a combination of one or more of the above mentioned.

Many of the disabilities that our students are challenged with are not obvious. For example, Elaine was a student with a severe learning disability. She presented as any other student until it came time for demonstrating learning input and output.

Students with visual or hearing challenges may have compounded cognitive and/or social challenges which can affect their learning, as well as other day to day activities

Elaine, and other students with educational barriers, come to the college ready to work toward their educational goals and eventual place in the workforce.

The Association of Canadian



Patricia Toma is the “Fellow” for service oriented staff

Community Colleges outlined in their brief titled Access to All, (submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, and Social development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities) March 2007, that,

“Canada’s supply of skilled labour is in serious decline. By the year 2020, labour shortages are expected to reach 950,000.” Post secondary institutions must facilitate “education and training opportunities for all Canadians so that they have the necessary skills to be productive and contribute to Canada’s social and economic prosperity.”

Okanagan College plays an important role in contributing to the accommodated needs of our students with educational barriers. These same students will enter the workforce along with all the other graduating students. Alongside their co-workers they will contribute to the overall state of Canada’s economic and social profile; a profile that Canadians proudly describe as diverse.

## ON CAMPUS DIVERSITY AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP BY Jane Muskens

Diversity walked into my office the other day. He was a young international student from China who excels in courses that lean towards numbers and formulas, but struggles with any subject that requires strong writing skills. My goal right now is to find him supports so he can improve his grades.

Later on I walked over to the cafeteria for lunch and overheard a number of students from the Caribbean talking about life in Canada, about going to school, having a part-time job – laughing the entire time as they shared their Canadian experience.

Last week I was talking to one of

our students who is a second generation Indo-Canadian about his exchange with a university in Germany, and how much he learned from that experience.

And I recently heard that a student who worked for me a few years ago married one of his classmates, an international student from Taiwan.

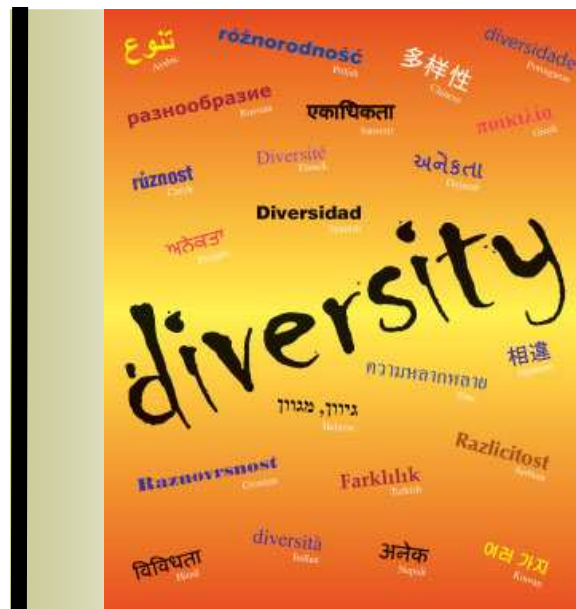
This is life on a post-secondary campus - the most multi-cultural environment in Canada.

To understand the importance of diversity, multiculturalism or globalization – whatever you want to call it - start with first-hand experiences.

We can't learn to accept, understand or even identify with those different from us if we can't see, hear or talk to those from different cultures.

Experiences found on college campuses help students, faculty and even administrators, like myself, understand different cultures and also realize some of our similarities.

As globalization and diversity take root, these catch-phrases are morphed into real life experiences for many young adults from all over the world who go to school, work and live in a foreign country.



And it is these experiences which create global citizens.

So what makes a global citizen? Global citizens are people who care about all human beings regardless of the passport they hold; they apply moral and ethical yardsticks with an international perspective.

Global citizenship includes respect for any and all fellow global citizens, regardless of race, religion or creed and gives rise to a universal sympathy beyond the barriers of nationality.

Global citizens don't just worry about the homeless in their own community, but consider this issue from a world-wide perspective.

These citizens look for change by lobbying the United Nations, G-8 summits and other international organizations to take a world-wide perspective on a number of important issues. They understand that a small contribution can make a world of difference when enough people start to think the same way.

They say no man is an island unto himself. To a global citizen no man or woman is a country unto themselves.

*They say no man is an island unto himself. To a global citizen no man or woman is a country unto themselves.*

### APRIL'S FEATURED LINKS

Dear Colleagues,

Please assist us in getting the word out about this year's annual Gathering on Aboriginal Education. "Challenging the Paradigm" at Northwest Community College is targeting faculty, administrators and board members. Leading scholars from western Canada and Australia will be there, along with presenters from as far away as Nunavut and Melbourne. It promises to be a great event. See also our links to our OC Disability and Aboriginal services.

#### Challenging the Paradigm

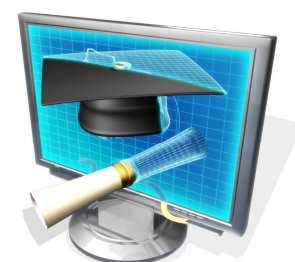
<http://ctp.nwcc.bc.ca/>

#### Disability Services:

[www.okanagan.bc.ca/administration/students/disability-services](http://www.okanagan.bc.ca/administration/students/disability-services)

#### Aboriginal Access and Services:

[www.okanagan.bc.ca/administration/students/aboriginal](http://www.okanagan.bc.ca/administration/students/aboriginal)



Check out these links!

# WHY DIVERSITY MATTERS

BY JAMES COBLE

Diversity in its most basic sense is defined as the quality of being different or varied. We've all been in social situations in which being different was a bit awkward. Think back to high school and how important it was for many of us to try and "fit in". Rarely did students, at least when I was in high school, want to be different. If only we knew then what we know now.

Now we know how important diversity really is. It's held in high regard in many domains with its importance rarely understated. For example, when applied to nature, the importance of diversity, or perhaps more aptly, biodiversity, is that all living creatures are supported by the interactions among organisms and ecosystems. Loss of biodiversity makes ecosystems less stable, more vulnerable to extreme events, and weakens its natural cycles. In the world of finance, a diverse portfolio, that is building a portfolio that includes securities from different asset classes, is important because a broader range of investments reduces the overall risk of investing. This harkens back to the old cliché, never put all your eggs in one basket.

What is important to remember from both of these examples is that diversity implies stability and balance. Without it, both nature and your wallet are more likely to suffer due to extreme events. It's no wonder then that we begin to see a trend emerging in post-secondary institutions across North America.

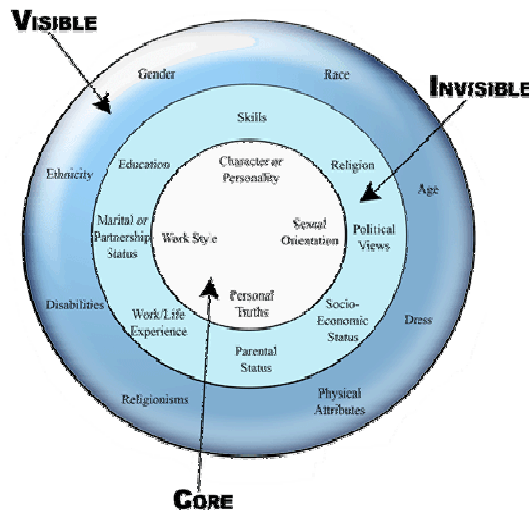
A trend that without a doubt reflects the importance institutions are putting on diversity. They're beginning to realize that diverse institutions produce highly informed and well-rounded graduates. Sure, there have always been efforts to increase enrolments from a diverse array of students, but to make diversity an integral part of an institution's strategic plan has not

- Reduction of prejudiced attitudes
- Increased exposure to diverse ideas
- Positive effects on intellectual development
- Positive effects on social development
- Positive effects on civic development
- Promotes growth in cross-cultural work competencies

It should be noted that simply increasing diverse enrolments does not in and of itself normally produce such effects. These effects tend to arise as a result of concerted and meaningful efforts on the part of institutions to address diversity. In reality, implementing a framework for diversity is no easy task and must not be taken lightly if these effects are to be observed.

So why does diversity matter? Because if we, as an institution, are committed to being a learner centred organization we owe it to all our students to give them the best possible tools to succeed in an increasingly diverse society. Teaching to, and embracing, diversity will produce the best possible graduate. So, I encourage you to reflect on your interactions with students to determine if how and what you are teaching, or if the service you are providing, is truly inclusive.

Diversity matters in ecosystems, diversity matters in finance; I hope we can all make an effort to make diversity matter in learning and teaching at Okanagan College.



always been a given. To have diversity embedded in the systemic workings of an institution is gaining momentum. But why?

Until recently, diversity in education was thought to make intuitive sense with relatively little research to support these claims. However, in the last 20 years researchers have made real strides in quantifying the effects of diverse institutions. Here is some of what they've found:



We are on the Web!

[www.okanagan.bc.ca/about/ILLT.html](http://www.okanagan.bc.ca/about/ILLT.html)



Institute  
for Leadership in  
Learning and Teaching



## ENHANCING THE PRACTICE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

### YOU AND DIVERSITY BY PATTY TOMA

*Diversity is not about how we differ.  
Diversity is about embracing one  
another's uniqueness. ~ Ola Joseph*

This quote welcomes the individuality of each and every one of us. It suggests that we focus on uniqueness rather than differences.

For some, this is as natural as breathing, but for others, the differences glare out at them. It will take a personal journey inward to gauge your reactions, or non reactions, (emotional or behavioral), to what you may perceive as different.

Personally, I have made this journey for many reasons. I wanted to be honest (not necessarily open) about what barriers might there be for me, if any,

when working with someone that I perceived as different from myself.

The journey begins with examining the family and social environment in which you spent most of your formative years. This would include religion, ethnicity, geographical implications, family values and beliefs, and anything else that you may identify as having an influence on your present attitudes, values and beliefs. Leave no stone unturned.

Questions you may want to pose are:

Did the religion I was raised in effect my tolerance toward sexual orientation or ethnic diversities?

Did some of my family's attitudes toward minorities, affect my perception

of minorities that I encounter now in my present personal and professional life?

Did the social status of my family leave a sense of superiority, or inferiority, with me among my peers, or people that I work with.

What was the acceptable work ethic that my family defined and how is that the same, or different, than people who I socialize with, or work with.

Ultimately, we want to be able to map out and list these effects with how we present ourselves toward others. More specifically, we want to connect them to the people we interact with in our place of employment. We want to determine if these effects are positive or act as a barrier to embracing the full spectrum of social diversity. ~



I am large. I contain multitudes.

Walt Whitman

