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## Multicultural Needs Assessment of Extension Educators - Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service

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### **Abstract**

Oklahoma State University's College of Human Sciences and the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) have developed a multicultural and community engagement program to determine intercultural training needs. The program conducted a study to determine the needs for intercultural training by Extension personnel across the state of Oklahoma. The results of this study showed that OCES personnel are interested in attending intercultural training and developing their own intercultural competence to reach multicultural groups. This study helped OCES design its first intercultural competency training plan. This plan includes assessing intercultural competence and designing trainings materials using a variety of modalities such as face-to-face workshops, lectures, and online activities via Adobe Connect or Desire 2 Learn (D2L) platforms.

*Keywords:* extension, multicultural and community engagement, intercultural competence, intercultural training, survey

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## Introduction

Working and interacting effectively in a diverse environment with people from different cultures is the challenge for Extension educators in the United States in the twenty-first century (Johnson, 2009; Selby, Peters, Sammons, Branson, & Balschweid, 2005). United States demographics have been changing, and in less than 40 years minorities will become majorities (US Census, 2010; CNN, 2008). Extension programs, especially the ones related to the wellbeing of families, should effectively reach the new-to-be majority population. To do so, Extension educators should be trained to develop their intercultural competence (Hammer, 2009). This will provide educators with the ability to effectively interact with people from different cultures and develop and engage multicultural community leaders who will in turn help accomplish the Extension goal of reaching and serving the entire population (Corbaz, 2001; Deardorff, 2009; Hassell, 2007; OCES, 2014; Williams, 2001).

States such as Washington, Wisconsin, Kansas, and North Carolina are designing and delivering programs to improve the ability of professors, students, and Extension educators to reach and work with multicultural audiences (Kansas State University, 2013; North Carolina State University, 2013; Washington State University, 2013; University of Wisconsin, 2013). These programs teach the premise that different cultures should be approached in different ways (Ewert, Rice, & Lauderdale, 1995; Smith, Jayaratne, Moore, Kistler, & Smith, 2010; Williams, 2001). However, the majority of the state Extension services are not making significant investments to develop Extension educators' intercultural competence.

Oklahoma State University (OSU) has shown its commitment to diversity for years, mainly through the Office of Institutional Diversity (OSU, Office of Institutional Diversity, 2013). In addition to these institutional efforts, the College of Human Sciences and Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) joined efforts in 2013 to facilitate hiring a new faculty member to serve as a multicultural

and community engagement specialist. The main purpose of this position is to develop intercultural competencies and expand OSU's diversity efforts among Human Sciences students, staff, and faculty members, as well as Extension educators to better serve multicultural and diverse communities. The multicultural and community engagement specialist is charged with: (a) determining multicultural training needs; (b) assessing intercultural competence using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI); and (c) designing training to develop intercultural competence among students, professors, staff members, and Extension educators to at least the acceptance level of the Intercultural Competence Continuum (Bennett, 1986, 1993; Hammer, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to discuss Oklahoma Extension personnel's experience with and interest in further intercultural competence training and resources, and the plan designed to improve their competence and enhance programming efforts for diverse audiences.

## Method

### Participants

The participants in this study were from Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES). A request to participate in the study was sent by email to 685 Extension personnel, the Extension listserv for OCES. One hundred thirty-two (19.27%) Extension personnel answered: 36 from the Northeast, 15 from the Northwest, 28 from the Southeast, and 53 from the Southwest districts. Out of the same 132 participants, 61 were from Family & Consumer Sciences, 74 from 4-H, 40 from Agriculture & Natural Resources, and 20 from Community & Rural Development.

### Instrument

This study used an online multicultural needs assessment survey designed by the OSU multicultural and community engagement specialist and the OCES director of staff and program development. This survey consisted of 10 closed-ended and five open-

ended questions. This survey was designed using the Qualtrics web platform, which allows for anonymous response and offers the advantage of summarizing all results for ease in further analyses. The survey was distributed via email using the Extension listserv for Oklahoma. The information collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the need of multicultural training by Extension personnel across the state of Oklahoma.

## **Results**

### **Closed-Ended Questions**

Forty-two percent of the OCES personnel who answered the survey work with people from different cultures on a weekly basis, even though their multicultural population audience represents less than 20% of the total population they serve. Half of the OCES personnel who completed the survey had received some type of training related to how to better work with multicultural audiences and how to develop their personal intercultural competence. Within that group, 78% of those with multicultural training were trained during their college years or brief in-service activities. Overall, 78% of the respondents reported feeling comfortable reaching out to multicultural audiences and were confident that their multicultural audiences feel comfortable working with them. Sixty-six percent of the people who answered the survey were willing to attend a multicultural training.

### **Open-Ended Questions**

In the open-ended questions section, OCES personnel expressed that they are having problems reaching multicultural audiences and expressed their concern about offending people from other cultures mainly due to the language barriers and their unfamiliarity with cultural behaviors. The majority of the Extension educators indicated the need to be trained to interact effectively with Latinos, as well as other cultures, and expressed their concern about the need for designing programs to reach multicultural audiences. They expressed their concern about the limited

number of people from multicultural populations who contacted their office. OCES personnel believe that this is due to multicultural audiences not knowing about all the services provided by OCES. A limited number of OCES personnel did not perceive the need to participate in culturally responsive programs. They mentioned that all clients are people, regardless of culture.

OCES personnel expressed their need for multi-language fact sheets and training materials, as well as translators to better reach multicultural populations. In addition, they mentioned the current OCES strategies to reach multicultural groups including attending specific holiday celebrations and programs (such as English as a Second Language classes) in public schools, local churches, tribe facilities, and community centers. The participants also mentioned that established programs such as Master Gardeners, Bug Fest, 4-H, Co-parenting, Food Safety, Nutrition Education, Budgeting, Head Start, and Farmers Markets help them to reach multicultural populations.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study show that the majority of OCES personnel are interested in attending intercultural training and in developing their own intercultural competence to better reach multicultural groups in the state of Oklahoma. Well-trained and interculturally competent Extension educators are needed and have been in demand for a long time (Graf, 2004; Miller, 1992). Intercultural competence was defined in this study as the ability to work effectively in a multicultural environment. This definition was adopted considering other intercultural competence definitions: “live and work productively and harmoniously with people having different values, backgrounds, and habits” (Deardorff, 2009, p. ix) and “ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways” (Corbaz, 2005, p. 17). Building intercultural competence includes being aware of your own culture and understanding cultural differences, being capable of meeting the needs of multicultural audiences, and enriching other programs (Grogan &

Eshelman, 1998; Walker & Grant, 2011; Williams, 2001). To achieve these competency goals, intercultural training should be comprehensive and include the development of intercultural competence at least to the acceptance level of the Intercultural Development Continuum (Fabregas, Kelsey & Robinson, 2011). The Intercultural Development Continuum developed by Hammer (2009), based in the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986) includes five orientations from denial to adaptation. The acceptance orientation is described as “individuals begin to more deeply explore cultural differences; they recognize that these cultural patterns need to be understood from the perspective of the other culture” (Hammer, 2009, p. 250).

The training could be delivered in a variety of modalities from a sequence of a certain number of separate workshops, a lecture conducted by professors, Adobe Connect or D2L platforms, online-guided yearlong training, or in-service activities (Bosse, 2009). In addition to these training offerings, OCES should facilitate the translation and adaptation of factsheets and the hiring of translating services when needed.

### Conclusion & Recommendation

The study helped OCES design an Intercultural Competency Training Plan. The Plan includes: (a) assessing intercultural competence using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to determine the group level of intercultural competence; (b) designing multicultural and/or multilingual training materials to provide OCES Extension educators with better tools (training and teaching materials) to work in multicultural environment; (c) designing and delivering trainings on the OCES Desire to Learn (D2L) platform, and using Adobe Connect, or on-site training; and (d) participating in district meetings supporting diversity initiatives.

In addition to the four steps proposed, a team of OCES Extension personnel with multicultural backgrounds and experiences will be invited to participate as “multicultural team leaders (or mentors).” This group will be responsible for advising the multicul-

tural and community engagement specialist. OCES has the opportunity to become a pioneer in developing Extension educators’ intercultural competence.

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