

Diversity Certificate Program Sparks Conversations at UCSC

Working in a diverse environment does not guarantee that a person will become culturally competent. But thanks to an ever-evolving diversity and inclusion certificate program at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), faculty, staff, and, for the first time, graduate students are gaining a better understanding of how to work with and learn from people whose backgrounds are different from their own.

The UCSC Diversity and Inclusion Certificate program began in 2010 as a way to train UCSC supervisors and managers in diversity sensitivity, but it was expanded after Sheree Marlowe was appointed campus diversity officer for staff and students in 2012. She says that as of this past May, 219 participants had earned a certificate of completion, having fulfilled the required seven core classes, plus two electives, within two years. However, more than 400 participants have chosen to take the courses without pursuing the certificate.

Each course consists of a three-hour session taught by internal and external instructors. Core classes — such as the historical overview on power, privilege, and oppression — are offered twice an academic year, and electives are offered once a year.

For graduate students this year, the structure is slightly different. They take the same seven core classes, plus two required electives that cover building inclusive learning environments and how to come to terms with people who are different from them in lab or work settings.

“In two hours, all the grad courses were filled,” Marlowe says. “We’re definitely showing that a need exists.”

The program is continually met with enthusiasm; classes for the 2015-2016 academic year filled up within two days, and each of the seven core courses has a waiting list of at least 30 people.

Marlowe even receives outside interest.

“I usually get five or six calls a year from people outside the university who want to be part of the program,”



Program supervisor Cathy Crowe stands with UCSC Diversity and Inclusion Certificate program graduates (from left to right) Teresa Burka, Joanna Palmer, Inger Blanck, and Molly Thompson at the university's May 19, 2015, graduation ceremony. (Photo by Michael Pratt)

she says. “Several universities have contacted our office with an interest in developing a certificate program using ours as a model.”

Participation is free — costs are covered by UCSC’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion — and is voluntary. Marlowe says the only incentives are personal, and many employees participate for their own professional development.

Chancellor George Blumenthal and Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Alison Galloway both support the initiative, and Marlowe says their engagement has been encouraging.

Using end-of-semester evaluations and feedback from participants, Marlowe determines which classes to phase out and what topics could be added in the future. Additionally, external issues — both on a national and campus level — help shape the course offerings each year.

“For example, three years ago there was a major push at UCSC to increase

the number of international students on campus, but there wasn’t much talk about how to meet the unique needs of this influx of students,”

she says. “So we added an elective on international students. And last year, we added an elective on undocumented students because we had quite an increase in the number of [them] on campus.”

Popular elective classes have included “Troops to College” and, new this year, “Exploring Impacts of Implicit Bias and Microaggressions

in Higher Education,” but the core class on power and privilege has been the most well-received. This class also lays the basis for all other coursework.

“You can’t talk about diversity if you don’t first talk about power and privilege,” Marlowe says.

She recognizes the impact the certificate program is having in how students and faculty who complete the program are continuing the diversity dialogue on campus. One such way is through an affinity group called the Staff Diversity Group, which has grown from 30 to 150 participants and meets once a month.

“We hope that we don’t just speak to the people who are already having these conversations [on diversity],” she says. “We hope we are able to reach those who need to be having these conversations the most.”

UCSC is a 2015 HEED Award recipient. Read more on page 67.

— Rebecca Prinster