Embracing Diversity

Celebrating diversity is a way of uniting humanity. At Roosevelt University, diversity is a core value celebrated through programs in curriculum and special events on campus. The word “university” itself is related to this idea of universalization. Clearly, our lives are enhanced when we understand and appreciate many world views and/or cultures.

Cultural diversity may be regional in nature (urban, rural, suburban), based on age, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic levels, professional affiliation, ethnicity, physical and mental abilities, gender, and much, much more. Embracing diversity allows people to live more fully in the communities throughout their lives.

Here are some ways that you can contribute to enhancing multiculturalism and diversity:

Respect one another. Recognize that to be equal does not mean to be “the same”. Respect the complexity and diversity of humanity, and recognize that differences enrich us both personally and communally.

Be open and learn from others. Ask people to share their experiences with you, and listen, free of judgment. Lack of respect is often based on ignorance or misinformation; bridge the gap by understanding others’ cultures and customs. Recognize our similarities, as well as our uniqueness.

Avoid making generalizations or stereotyping others. Attitudes and beliefs are a central part of stereotypes and can be either positive or negative. Be aware of your stereotypes and recognize that any preconceived ideas about someone based on your attitudes about their culture, religion, academic proficiency, etc. can be damaging to another.

Explore and challenge your beliefs or attitudes about others. Ask yourself what aspects of your past have contributed to the images you have about someone based on culture, ethnicity, etc. Be aware of the influence that the media has on perpetuating stereotypes. Be willing to expand your horizons and challenge your current ways of thinking.

Reach out and be a friend. Reach out to others. Pay special attention to someone who may be struggling with acculturating to this state, region, or country.

Be engaged. Some people may believe that, in order to make a difference, they must have more time, energy, courage, vision, eloquence and knowledge – in other words, be larger than life. Recognize that your everyday actions can and do make a difference. The more you involve yourself, the more you will inspire others as well.

Teach children to embrace diversity. Help children develop their own attitudes toward diversity by giving them accurate information about their own heritage and about other cultures, as well as by helping them to understand that bigotry and intolerance are hurtful. Help them to resist bias and to value the differences between people as much as the similarities. If children develop healthy self-esteem and respect for those who are different from themselves, they can better grow into adults who will celebrate diversity.
Help shape a better world. People may fear diversity because they are accustomed to the way things used to be and change makes them uncomfortable. Others may feel threatened because they perceive increased participation by underrepresented groups as a challenge to their own power. If not addressed, these fears can lead to resentment and bigotry. Counter these fears through education. Don’t allow bigoted comments by others to go unchallenged. By recognizing our similarities and appreciating our differences, we can overcome prejudice and intolerance and work toward a more peaceful and productive world.

Celebrate our rich variety that allows us to enhance our knowledge and expand our horizons. Truly live in a multicultural setting. Make friends who are from different backgrounds and learn about the cultural practices and customs of others. Multiculturalism goes farther than awareness or acceptance. It is more than coexistence. Multiculturalism is living together in every sense of the word.

During last spring’s International Day, staff members of the Counseling Center asked students and staff to share with us how they celebrate diversity. Here were your contributions:

“Never use racial slurs.”

“Treat everyone equally.”

“I make it a point to greet everyone.”

“Look for similarities in others and embrace differences.”

“I introduce myself to everyone.”

“A friend can easily exist without friendship, but friendship cannot exist without a friend.”

“Be nice, start with smiling.”

“Life is not long enough, so enjoy it as much as you can.”

“I imitate my Irish grandfather. I try to work hard and not complain. I listen to fiddle music, dance, and make a ruckus. I try to be generous and gracious. I tell amusing stories. I try to make my parents PROUD!”

“Say hello (in any language).”

“Ask myself: ‘What can I learn from this person?’”

“Be yourself; people like you.”

“SMILE!!”