Multiculturalism in the College Environment

In looking around your classroom, perhaps you not there are no other Latino men in the room. During class discussions, it becomes apparent you are the only Muslim present. Maybe you are the only Korean American woman in your major. While college is a time of transition and adjustment for most, for those who may feel different or isolated from their peers, the transition into the college environment may be particularly challenging. It may even be a bit frightening.

In addition to the challenges students face throughout college, many students are concurrently trying to integrate the backgrounds with the predominant culture. Given the diverse backgrounds from which many individuals at RU may come, some students may find integrating the “college culture” with their already existing culture(s) to be a challenge. Balancing the norms and expectations of multiple cultures is a formula for stress. The result can be felt sense of “culture clash.”

Figuring out what fits best with each individual’s sense of identity and ultimate life pursuits can present many unique challenges. Some may struggle with deciding where to live while attending college, whereas others may have difficulty pursuing careers atypical in their culture. Often times, family traditions play a significant role. For example, some of the cultures to which students at Roosevelt University belong encourage and expect children to live at home until marriage. Because of this expectation, many of those students live with members of their immediate and extended family as opposed to in the dorms or in off-campus housing with other peers. Additionally, caring for younger family members or working to contribute to the household may also be an expectation that takes time away from studies.

Living with family and meeting the expectations of the family can raise many issues for a student who is also trying to become acculturated in his or her college life. Sometimes students feel a lack of community in their college, as they perceive themselves as not being “on-campus” friends and support (Hertel, 2002). In addition to not feeling part of the “college community,” some students also experience feeling disconnected or different within their families. Many may come from cultures where individuals do not frequently attend college. Being the first person in the family or even community to attend college can be difficult and has the potential to leave students experiencing a lack of support from family members. Despite how isolated you may feel, there are many individuals with similar challenges.

While figuring out what works best for you may be an ongoing progress, a few strategies have been found to be helpful and may ease the feelings of isolation or felt lack of community while at Roosevelt University. First of all, it is helpful to acknowledge these feelings exist and that they are understandable. Sharing these feelings with someone you feel safe with will likely also provide some relief. In the processes of dialoguing, you may be surprised to find you have more in common with your classmates than you think. Exploring your diverse experiences can result in a better understanding of yourself and how your unique culture impacts your personal and academic goals and relationships with others. Others will benefit from the discussion as well, which can help to create a positive respectful community by encouraging and offering nonjudgmental processing of our multiple perspectives. Finally, remember that a bicultural or multicultural experience of life has many benefits including developing keen reflective and observational abilities, an enhanced ability to compare and contrast multiple perspectives and ultimately it will enhance the development of a rich sense of identity that is uniquely yours.
References:

