

Immersion Experience 2

For this immersion experience, I attended a diversity practices conference that was held at the AU Hotel for a class assignment, as well as this assignment. Though I would not have attended this conference on my own, I found the conference to be educating, interesting, and contributory to my life. There were two different sections of the conference: one for the students and one for professors to attend which I thought was a good method to allow students to be comfortable in the conference because you were surrounded by your peers. At the conference, since it was open to the public, some students came from all over Alabama instead of all being from Auburn University. There were even students from different high schools in Alabama. At this conference, besides differing from age the attendees of the session varied in ethnicities and gender. During the conference, I encountered several people from different walks of life, which I particularly enjoyed because it was nice to see some diversity that I had seldomly encountered before. When I walked into the conference room, I was pleasantly surprised to see faces that I had never seen before because I knew some students who did not attend Auburn that may have had different experiences in college that had brought them to this conference. There were some familiar faces as well that I never would have thought would have been attending the conference, nor did I think it was something they would be interested in learning about. I realize that these may have been some stereotypes of the person I thought they were that were coming into play, and I have learned that it is something I need to work on in the future.

The guest speaker of the session I attended was Dr. Bobby Kunstman, the Director of Student Life & Leadership at UNC-Chapel Hill. Dr. Kunstman identifies as a Queer Person of Color (QPOC) and biracial (half African American and half Cuban), which is substantially different than how I identify as a straight, Native American, female. He was particularly open

about sharing what he identified as because he wanted his students to "know who he truly was" and he encouraged others to do the same because before a person identifies themselves, they can never truly identify with others who identified with them or an aspect of themselves. I admired how he was able to be open about these things with strangers, especially identifying himself with a population that is frequently judged harshly by others. During this section, he encouraged attendees to learn to look through different lenses to view the world through an activity using multiple colored sheets of cellophane. The activity included four different sections that had four different effects on the way I had seen my life. While the colors everyone was using were the same, the lens they looked through was a different aspect of their life and no two were alike, therefore, you saw things differently based on which lens was held in front of you first and the lenses that were layered as you held them. Through this exercise, I learned that even though it seems as someone is looking through the same colored lens as me their view of the world through that lens is different. After looking through the lens individually, we were partnered then grouped to discuss the "colors" we saw. Some answers were the basics like blue, red, or yellow. Other answers were teal, the color of my favorite shirt, or the color of my state's flower. No matter if the cellophane sheets were the same color people saw them differently based on experiences, they had experienced or it was just how their brain chose to describe the color. It was interesting to see how different people were able to make the color significant to them.

The conference reminds me of most of the lectures and discussions about cultural competence. When we first started the activity, I felt it was a little silly that we were looking through these lenses and were expected to have different experiences by doing so. I was unaware that someone would feel significance towards the color they saw when they looked through them based on something culturally significant to who they were or what they practiced. I realized that

not only should one have cultural competence within a place of work, education, or some other service, you should be culturally competent every day in everything that you say, do, or think. Not only can cultural competence be defined in a dictionary, but it can also be defined by action. You can know what cultural competence is, but you will never know how to truly output cultural competence unless you have actually acted in a culturally competent way and seen the positive and/or negative effects of doing so. I have thought about a phrase that came up while he was speaking and walking us through the activity which is, do not step on someone's toes but rather step into their shoes. To tie back to the lecture in class, when we discussed that we should be aware of others' beliefs and practices and not assume that their behavior or values will match our own. When discussing in groups some placed more value on their work than their family because to them wealth and happiness came from how well off you were based on your occupation, not familial piety as I had been taught to value most. From this experience, I have learned the actual meaning of what it is to be culturally competent. To me, cultural competency is not only the ability to communicate with a diverse set of people, understanding their beliefs, and appreciating differences, but also being able to be comfortable in a diverse setting has to be a part of this as well. If you are not comfortable in a situation, the energy you put towards a situation will be felt by the other person or group of people involved in that situation. It is up to you to not only act but feel comfortable in a diverse setting.