

**Review Article****Cultural Competency for Working in Agricultural and Extension Education****Abstract**

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) has adopted a core competencies model that will contribute to the professional performance of extension educators. Due to the flexibility of the model, core competencies could be developed by future extension educators and volunteers during their undergraduate and graduate studies or could be achieved during their time working for extension. This paper describes the process of development a graduate course in Intercultural Competence, background, theoretical framework, course design, assignments, and course evaluation, aiming to contribute to the development of more strategies to develop intercultural competence in extension personnel around the world.

**Keyword List**

On line, Core/Intercultural Competencies, Training, Master Classes

**Introduction**

Traditional long time goals of education are development knowledge, skills and attitudes in the students at all levels (Martin 1990; Seaman, 2011). These goals are normally linked to rigid educational programs to be completed in certain time. Nevertheless, Competency Based Education (CBE) could be a less rigid and more focus alternative, which has demonstrated success in different stages (Davis, 1979; Hinn and Houghton 2001; Houston, 1974; Mahood, 1973; Mulder, 2012). CBE measures students learning through the acquisition of certain knowledge, skill and attitude achieved, rather than time (Mendenhall, 2014). CBE could be achieved by students enrolled in formal class-degree seeking educational options, but also students enrolled in informal-non degree seeking education, provided by the professors in higher education institutions and the Cooperative Extension Service' educators around the United States. Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCES) has adopted core competencies model that will contribute to the professional performance of extension educators and wellbeing population who receive extension services. Due to the flexibility of the model, core competencies could be developed by future extension educators and volunteers during their undergraduate and graduate studies or could be achieved during their time working for extension. Some of the core competencies listed in the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service (OCE) 4-H and Family Consumer Sciences are communication and organizational skills, flexibility, service orientation, team work, family resiliency, and Leadership Development (Oklahoma 4-H. Volunteer core competencies, 2014; Oklahoma State University – Family Consumer Sciences, 2014). Intercultural competence was included as part of the Leadership Development group in 2013 and defined as the ability to effectively work with people from different cultures (Fabregas,

Kelsey & Robinson, 2011; Fabregas Janeiro, Lopez Fabre, Nuño de la Parra, 2013; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Martin & Vaughn, 2007)

Different authors suggested different strategies to develop intercultural or cultural competency, but very few provide recommendations of how to develop this competence in extension educators (Deen, Huskey, Parker, 2009; Deen, Huskey, Parker, Whitehall, Grinner Hill, 2014; Herndon, Behnke, Navarro, Daniel & Storm, 2013; Skyza, & Russo, 2013). OCES is suggesting a compressive strategy that includes, 1) formal undergraduate and graduate courses in Intercultural Competence, 2) development of factsheets related to the topic, 3) in service and other face to face short training opportunities, 4) 2, 4, and 8 hours training in Intercultural Competence, and 5) On line training (using the D2L Platform). To accomplish the first strategy, the Department of Agricultural Education and Leadership (AGED) in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) at Oklahoma State University (OSU) decided to offer a course to Master students specifically designed to develop this Intercultural Competence. The course was called Cultural Competency for Working in Agricultural and Extension Education. The purpose of this paper is to describe the process of developing and conducting a graduate course in Intercultural Competence. This article describes the background, theoretical framework, course design, assignments, and course evaluation, aiming to contribute to the development of more strategies to develop intercultural competence in extension personnel around the world.

### Development of the Course: Cultural Competency for Working in Agricultural and Extension Education

#### Background

In 2009, after competition a PhD dissertation entitled *Assessing changes in intercultural sensitivity among agricultural students exposed to international experiences*, the author of this paper decided to design a course as an alternative to Master students who would like to improve their intercultural competence. The course designed was a 5000- Master level course called: Working in a Diverse Society and was offered on line, for the first time in spring 2010. The first step to offer the class was to design the syllabus and get the course approved by the Department of Agricultural Education at Oklahoma State University and the Ag Idea Consortium, which will allow students to enroll in the class at any American university as a member of the consortium. After offering this course for six semesters and due the demand, the Department of Agricultural Education, Communication and Leadership in the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Oklahoma State University assigned a permanent number and change the name of the course focusing on future extension educators, the permanent name for the class is Cultural Competency for Working in Agricultural and Extension Education

#### Theoretical Framework

The course was originally designed considering the Evolutionary Perspective of Cultural Competence discussed by Burchum (2002), the Intercultural Competence continuum, described by Hammer, 2012, as well as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity by Bennett (1986 & 1993). These perspectives were combined and the result was a 15 unit course that includes: Cultural Awareness, Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Understanding and Cultural Competence (Bennett, 1986, 1993; Burchum, 2002; Hammer, 2009 & 2012), and developmental strategies as studying and discussing cultural differences, stereotypes and cultural values,

denigration, cultural superiority, inferiority and commonalities, and finally **focus** on the best way to approach and accept cultural differences.

Cultural awareness was supported by students' self-introduction and cultural description. The students were encouraged to use the John Hopkins Diversity Wheel and the Lewis Model-Cultural Dimensions to complete their assignments (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2003; John Hopkins, 2014; Professionals Skills Blog Magnusson Training & Consulting LLC., 2014). Cultural Knowledge was discussed with different readings about global and cultural perspectives for agricultural education services, as well as readings about working with people from different genders, ages, races, ethnicities, religions, economic status, sexual orientation, country of origin, language, nationality and physical and/mental ability, for example. Managing diversity was the goal of the discussion and the readings (Moran, Abramson & Moran, 2014; Peterson, 2004). For the strategy of cultural understanding the course discussed cultural intelligence and how to apply cultural intelligence in daily work and life. The framework of this discussion was that knowing your cultural style will allow you to identify and accept cultural differences. Managing transitions and relocations were also discussed. In the final part of the course the development of cultural competence the concepts learned during the course were applied when students were able to discuss how to work with people from different cultures, specifically with people from Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986, 1993) and the Continuum of Intercultural Competence (Hammer, 2012) were discussed at the beginning of the course and the stages described in the model were reinforced with activities as cultural nights, interviews, observation activities, etc. during the course.

## Course design

### **Catalog description, objective of the course, students' expectations and role of the instructor.**

The course: Cultural Competency for working in Agricultural and Extension education is described in the catalog as: Cultural Competency for Working in Agricultural and Extension Education discusses different strategies to increase intercultural intelligence, and intercultural competence. Discuss the importance of being culturally aware for international and multicultural experiences, in and outside the United States. Interpret concepts of cultural values and stereotypes, intercultural sensitivity, cultural differences, cultural transitions, and intercultural theories.

The course learning goal is to reflect about the importance of achieving intercultural competence, understanding the importance of developing intercultural skills to succeed in international and multicultural environments, and to better serves people from other cultures in agriculture educational and extension programs. As a result of participating in this course the student will be able to, 1) describe the importance of Cultural Competency for Working in Agricultural and Extension Education, 2) describe the importance of the cultural values and stereotype, 3) differentiate among multicultural, diverse and global societies, 4) interpret and analyze the importance of inclusive global societies, managing diversity, and cultural intelligence, 5) describe and analyze the importance and theories of cultural competence, 6) develop effective strategies to successfully approach people from other cultures in international experiences/opportunities in government agencies or transnational multicultural companies (in or

outside the United States), and 7) develop successful intercultural training strategies to better serve people from different cultures in agriculture educational and extension programs.

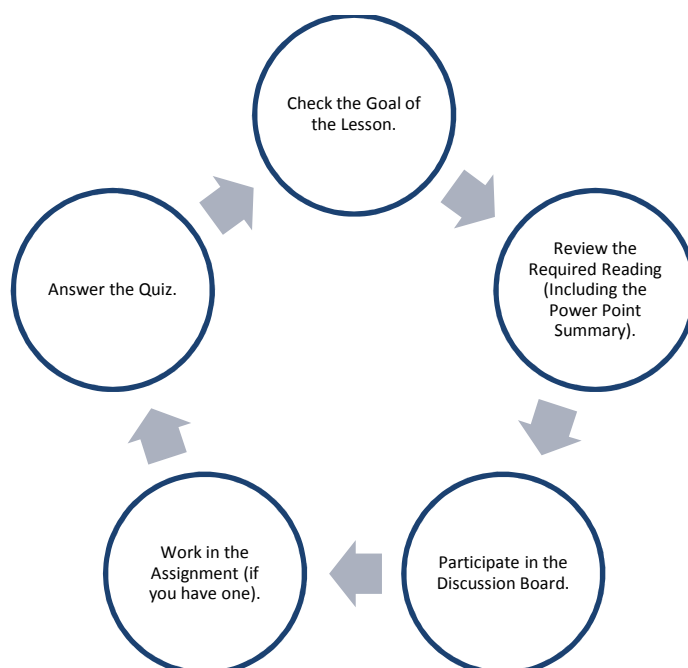
Students in this course are expected to be active learners and engage with the course and fellow students' participants. Meaning and thoughtful engagement is essential to the students' success in this class. Students are expected to read the material, interpret the readings, connect the readings with their personal experiences, complete the assignments, and discuss their thoughts with the rest of their classmates, as well as answering individually the weekly quiz.

For many students, discussing intercultural competence may be new and challenging, and many of the topics discussing may have a personal meaning, respect and discretion will be essential to encourage deep learning. One of the instructor's goals is to not only motivate a developmental change in each student regarding their perception of diversity and intercultural competence but to motivate students to develop personal skills to live, work and enjoy intercultural competence. Finally, the instructor is responsible to post a discussion topic every week and will serve as a persistent presence on the discussion board throughout the week. The instructor will redirect the discussion (if needed), and push students to think deeper, and help guide the discussion in such a way that meaningful learning is taking place. However, the instructor will show deference and respect to the discussion leader, by letting him or her be the main voice in his or her discussion topic.

### Course general organization.

The course is organized into 15 modules, one module per week plus a finals week. All the modules can be accessed in the *Content* area of the OSU Desire to Learn Platform (D2L) course. There are main and weekly assignments. Four modules are called, *main assignments*, introduction, interview, book review and final reflection or factsheet design. The rest of the eleven modules are *weekly assignments* (Fig. 1)

Figure1. *Weekly Assignments*



### **Assignments general definition.**

#### ***Self-Introduction.***

This assignment was designed to get to know the classmates. In this assignment, the students create a Power Point file. The power point must meet the following requirements, 1) students' full name, 2) six pictures that represent who the students are (e.g. personal life, family, career, background, etc.) each with a brief caption or other accompanying information, 3) a short statement explaining why you are enrolled in the AGED 5703 class.

#### ***Required readings.***

Required readings are the minimum readings the students will have to review every week. The name of the book, articles, chapters, newspapers and/or pages are clearly indicated in the weekly assignments.

#### ***Online discussion.***

The discussion board is one of the most important parts of the class. The discussion board should serve as an open forum to express your thoughts and feelings about intercultural competence. Each week, the professor posts a sentence, statement, or phrase to be discussed. The

students are expected to follow the discussion and get engaged. Depending on the number of students enrolled in the class, the discussion board may be in groups or as one group; each student has the opportunity to lead the discussion as part as their extra credit assignment. The responsibilities of the discussion leader are, 1) start the discussion using the posting that is already in the discussion board, 2) read all the posts your classmates are posting (in your own group), 3) encourage students' participation in the discussion (making comments about their posts & questioning their participation) and 4) keep the discussion going. Students' posts should be supported by the weekly readings. However, it is always valuable to relate the weekly readings to students' personal experiences. This will make the course more interesting. Meaning and thoughtful engagement is essential to the students' success in this class. Students are expected to read the material, interpret the readings, connect the readings with their personal experiences and discuss their thoughts with the rest of their classmates, as well as answering individually the weekly quiz. For many students enrolled discussing intercultural competence may be new and challenging, and many of the topics discussed may have a personal meaning, respect and discretion will be essential to encourage deep discussions. One of the instructors goals should not only motivates a developmental change in each student regarding their perception of diversity and intercultural competence but to motivate student to develop personal skills to live, work and enjoy intercultural competence

### ***Quizzes.***

During the semester the students' are required to take 12 quizzes. The quizzes are self-graded in the D2L platform.

### ***Interview paper.***

The interview assignment includes 3 parts, 1) preparing your interview, decide which question will the students be asking, 2) find and interview one person that was born or/and raised in a different culture, and write a reflective paper about your experience. The interview should be focused on cultural differences, acceptance and challenges of cultural differences, and adaptation processes. This assignment should not serve as document to describe the interviewee culture; but as a personal challenge. The challenge is to learn about cultural differences. The interviewee should be picked wisely.

### ***Book report.***

At the beginning of the semester the students will have the opportunity to pick a book from a list provided by the professor. The book report assignment includes reading a book and writing a brief report. The book report includes, 1) a summary of the book, and 2) the student's critique about the book.

### ***Final assignment.***

The students have the opportunity to decide their final assignment. They can choose between writing a reflective paper or designing an extension factsheet. The purpose of the reflective paper is a deep reflection of the development of the students' personal intercultural competence and how this competency is and will be impacting the students' decision-making and problem-solving processes. The second option is designing an extension factsheet that may be publishable

by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. “Fact Sheets are critical Extension resources for consumer education in Oklahoma. These teaching tools are meant to translate the latest subject-matter research into practical knowledge and best behavioral practices for improving someone’s wellbeing or improving on an existing consumer practice” (College of Human Sciences. (2014). Family & Consumer Sciences Sheets.Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service.Guidance for Academic Units.Guidelines.p. 1). The student has the opportunity to select the topic for the factsheet and follow the guidelines of OCES- Family Consumer Sciences.

### ***Extra credit.***

During the semester the students will have two opportunities to earn extra credit. The extra credit assignments include lead a discussion, book reading and/or movie critique.

### **Course Evaluation.**

The students are asked to answer three class evaluations during the semester. The first evaluation is a qualitative evaluation called, stop-start-continue, what should the professor stop doing? What should the professor start doing? And what should the professor continue doing? This evaluation, at the middle of the semester helps the professor to improve the learning process making the required changes to facilitate process. A second qualitative evaluation is conducted at the end of the semester encouraging the students to openly discuss the quality of the class. A third and final evaluation on line is supplied by the university at the end of the course.

In general, the students have been having positive comments about the class, **someof** their comments are: The class was an eye opening experience, I have an obtained a lot of insight and feel way more prepared to experience cultural differences when they travel abroad. The class is very eye opening and awaking. I would recommend this to anyone seeking an international career, The format for the session goals, objectives, required readings and assignments were easy to access and straightforward. I have taken many diversity courses and trainings before, and they were all pretty much the same and boring. This course though was much different. It challenged me to think outside of my comfort zone, explore my core beliefs and values and adapt the way that I work with individuals in the diverse society that we live.

The third evaluation applied by the University show that 50% of the students strongly agree that the course objectives were clear, 41.67% think that the activities, assignments, and reading materials were effective in contributing to learning, and 58% comment that the course was good.

### **Conclusion and Final Reflection**

In general, the course has accomplished the objectives proposed during the time it has been taught. Adaptation and modifications to the structure, content and assignments have been made every semester to improve students’ success. As a result of their participation in the class, the students have demonstrated their cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and cultural understanding. A recommendation will be to assess changes in cultural competence as their

result of their participation in the course, using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, et. al, 2003). The discussion board has demonstrated in this class to be an effective way to engage online students and build a community of learners. The students openly discuss their own culture, cultural differences and commonalities, in a framework of professionalism and respect. The conversations were deep and encouraged students to identify and accept cultural differences. The other assignment that makes an impact on students is the interview assignment, mainly because the students have to find a person from another culture and talk with them about cultural differences. The more difficult assignment for the students was the design of the factsheet due to the difficulty of discussing cultural topics at a 9<sup>th</sup> grade language level.

A limitation of this class it is that is only offered on line once a year and cannot accept more than twenty students. A second recommendation will be to offer the class face to face as well as on line and more instructors.

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