

UWEC [AND] the Something New Domestic Intercultural Immersion ASB: An Exploration of the Impact of High-Impact Practices on Blugold Attitudes Surrounding EDI Initiatives 2.0



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INTRODUCTION

Immigration and the vast array of refugee experiences have been in the forefront of media recently. The current political climate surrounding immigration may potentially create confusion for individuals who do not have a high ego-involvement in the subject of immigration. This research explores student experiences on the Something New Alternative Spring Break (ASB), a university-supported Domestic Intercultural Immersion (DII) high-impact practice. The primary purpose of the current research is to expose Blugolds to the reality of the refugee under the current political climate, activism, and community partnerships. Conclusions and implications exemplify the significance of DII trips in supporting the development and implementation of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) initiatives on campus, assessed and contextualized utilizing tenets of Social Judgment Theory (Griffin, 2006)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

RQ1: What, if any, changes in cultural competence (as defined by AAC&U 2009 Rubric) exist in correlation with pre- and post-assessment of the Something New Alternative Spring Break integrative learning experience?

RQ2: What themes emerge in student narratives that contribute to changes in attitudes toward immigration?

METHODS:

Data Collection

Qualitative data for the research question was collected via convenience sampling of focus group interviews with students who participated in the Something New Alternative Spring Break over the 2017 spring break. Eight females and one male were interviewed on their overall experience on the trip, how their perception of the social climate regarding race relations in the United States has changed, and which instance on the Something New Alternative Spring Break challenged their worldview.

Quantitative data was collected via an online Qualtrics survey. All thirty-five students completed the survey both before and after going to Clarkston, Georgia.

Participant Demographics:

- 4 students identified as male, 31 identified as female
- 6 students identified as Asian American, 2 as Hispanic/Latino/a, 1 as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and 26 as White
- 9 first-year, 8 second-year, 10 third-year, 7 fourth-year, and 1 fifth-year Blugold

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the online Qualtrics survey drawing upon elements from the Immigration Attitudes Measure (Danso, H.A., Sedlovskaya, A., & Suanda, S. H., 2007) Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale (Henry, P. J. & Sears, D. O., 2002), White Privilege Attitudes Scale (Pinterits, E. J., Poteat, V. P., & Spanierman, L. B., 2009), and the AAC&U rubrics to assess cultural competence (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2009).

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative focus group interview data.

SOCIAL JUDGMENT THEORY

Sheriff's Social Judgment Theory assumes upon first hearing a new piece of information, we judge where it would land on an attitude scale that we have in our minds based upon our current knowledge of the topic.

There are three zones in which the new information could fall in: (a) the latitude of acceptance; (b) latitude of non-commitment; or (c) latitude of rejection. One's ego-involvement greatly influences into which zone we place a message. Ego-involvement refers to how important a topic is to oneself.

When a message contrasts with someone with high ego-involvement, they will perceive that message as being further from their anchor than it really is. Conversely, when a message falls within the latitude of acceptance of a person with high ego-involvement, they will perceive themselves and the speaker as having the same opinion.

In order to shift our attitudes, we must first judge how close or far a message is from our anchored position. Once judgment is complete, we are able to adjust our attitude to accommodate the new information accordingly.

The message that is most successful in persuading us to adjust our attitudes is the one that is most discrepant from our anchored position yet falls within our latitude of acceptance. However, if we judge a message to be within our latitude of rejection, we will dismiss the message by adjusting our attitude away from what we think the speaker is advocating.

LIBERAL EDUCATION: INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

The overarching goal of incorporating the Something New ASB trip in CJ/WMNS 111: Gender, Race, Class, & Communication: The Social Construction of Identity is to integrate learning across courses and disciplines, and between campus and community life.

Element 1: Connections to Experience

Students enrolled in CJ/WMNS 111 effectively develop examples of life experiences that connect to the class and Something New ASB trip

Element 2: Connections Across Disciplines

Students enrolled in CJ/WMNS 111 demonstrate an ability to effectively connect content from the disciplines of Communication Studies and Women's Studies to the Something New ASB trip to address social issues locally.

Element 3: Transfer Between Contexts

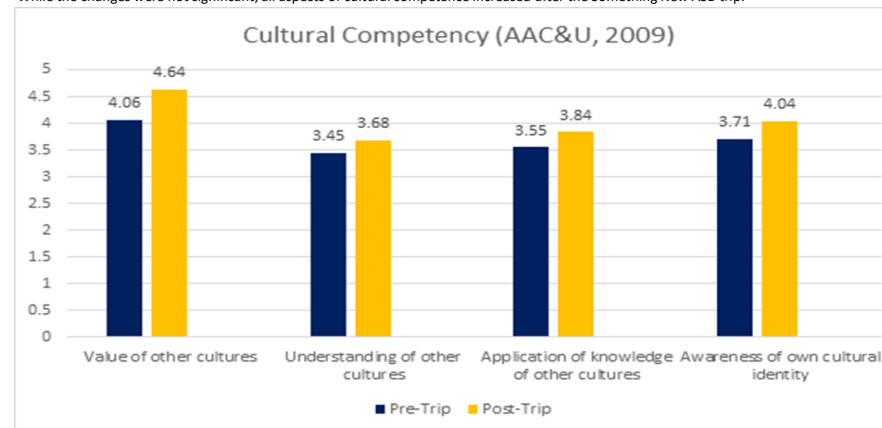
Students enrolled in course curriculum apply skills and knowledge gained from the class and the Something New ASB trip from one academic or experiential setting to another to solve problems or address issues with confidence.

(Integrative Learning Rubric Worksheet, 2012)

RESULTS

RQ1: What, if any, changes in cultural competence (as defined by the AAC&U Rubric) exist in correlation with pre- and post-assessment of the Something New Alternative Spring Break integrative learning experience?

While the changes were not significant, all aspects of cultural competence increased after the Something New ASB trip.



RQ2: What themes emerge in student narratives that contribute to changes in attitudes toward racism?

Interview Prompt 1: "Please describe your perception of the social climate surrounding race relations in the United States after having gone on this trip."

Implications of a Trump Presidency for Refugees

- "It depends on where the refugee comes from. Some refugees who are able to pass as White don't have as hard of a time. When their skin color or culture or religious beliefs distinguishes them from mainstream America, then they aren't as welcome. The current administration has reinforced that and made it acceptable to discriminate against refugees whose appearance makes it evident where they are from or what they believe."
- "The refugee experience is difficult as it is, but right now with the current administration it has become more dangerous due to the violent rhetoric in the media telling people what to believe about refugees."

Interview Prompt 2: "Describe ways in which we as students can support and contribute to EDI initiatives on campus."

Making EDI Initiatives Known

- "I never knew much about the [UWEC] EDI initiatives in place, but I realize how important they are after taking Gender, Race, Class, and Communication [CJ/WMNS 111] and from going on the Something New Alternative Spring Break Trip."
- "We need to make public how people truly feel about campus life...Students don't feel safe here, students feel left out of activities. The leaders of UWEC need to reach out to the students of UWEC, not just Student Senate or student organizations. They need to find a way for students to share their opinions because they think it will matter."

IMPLICATIONS

- DII immersion experiences are a significantly impactful opportunity in higher education in that they have the potential to position faculty and instructional academic staff to implement and contextualize the experiences within the university classroom and relevant disciplinary material.
- Students are able to understand the importance of cultural competence and how discrimination and systems of power and oppression affect the institutional experiences of refugees.

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University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Students Posing in Piedmont Park in Atlanta after Completing Training on the Six Principles of Kingian Nonviolence