

The [*Administrators Cultural Training Institute \(A.C.T. Institute\)*](#), administered by New York University's Center for Multicultural Education and Programs (CMEP) sits squarely at the heart of the University's mission. In NYU President John Sexton's words, "Diversity is indispensable to NYU's pursuit of excellence." The President, Provost, school deans and essentially all the leaders at NYU have emphasized that understanding and promoting diversity is the responsibility of everyone in the institution. With this as guiding philosophy, CMEP chose to design and implement the A.C.T. Institute, a continuing professional development program series of seminars for Student Affairs administrators at NYU, employing a range of curriculum and pedagogy to intentionally explore the concepts of diversity.

The American Council on Education, the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, among others have all concluded in major reports on the positive impact higher education administrators committed to and knowledgeable about diversity have on student learning and success. Furthermore, a plethora of research, illustrated in reports such as "The Impact of Diversity on Students: A Preliminary Review of the Research Literature" (Appel and Morgan), provides much evidence of the overall impact institutionally-based diversity has on the learning and success of all students. Combining this positive influence of administrators to advance educational progress among students, and the important role institutional diversity plays in student achievement, it seemed natural to create a convergence of these forces through a professional development experience for administrators – one that enhanced their knowledge base around diversity issues and the application of this knowledge into their work with students and colleagues. The administrators who participate in the A.C.T. Institute influence both policy and provide direct service to students, making diversity awareness an intentional part of their daily practice in the educational process.

An essential need at NYU (and all campuses) is to constantly improve understanding of the diverse identities and worldviews of students and professionals with which students, faculty and administrators engage at the university. Thus, it is imperative and most critical that the NYU community understands the dramatic and the subtle aspects of difference and knows others in all their complexity. The A.C.T. Institute recognizes that to keep pace with the immensity of this enterprise, Student Affairs administrators must all be life-long learners in the field of diversity and have forums for facilitated discussion on these topics. It does this through a sustained series of seminars, with innovative pedagogies, that allow for dialogue that honors the experiences and worldviews that exist within the participants. This opportunity to dialogue around these complex subjects, between colleagues across a multitude of departments and schools, has been another critical need participants report being met.

Though the Director and Associate Director of CMEP take the lead on creating the curriculum and serve as primary instructors for the A.C.T. Institute, rich collaborations with academic affairs occurs as faculty from various schools present at seminars, provide consultation and contribute relevant research and publications to the reading list. The A.C.T. Institute also works closely with a wide range of colleagues from departments such as university chaplains, Institutional Research, Admissions, Office of LGBT Student Services, Office of International Students and Scholars and many others. These departments provide speakers, educational materials, expertise and additional resources. Academic deans, faculty and administrators from student affairs departments all collaborate with the A.C.T. Institute to promote the seminar series through various communications channels. This results in a high level of awareness among administrators regarding the institute, which translates to high enrollment of participants from diverse sections of the university. This cross-section of participants itself represents another form of ongoing collaborations between many departments as they collectively explore the many facets of diversity and discuss ways they can work together in promoting greater awareness of these critical issues.

The first indication that the A.C.T. Institute had strong elements of originality came when the designers approached the NYU Human Resources Department about certification of this program; the HR Director enthusiastically welcomed the prospect as the first professional development of its kind at NYU. The creativity comes in the curriculum, pedagogy and methodology that balance depth with a manageable schedule and the successful convergence of an impressive cast of professionals for intentional dialogues on diversity. The series begins with the Foundations seminar, a required prerequisite that offers a broad overview of the complexities of diversity issues in higher education and provides common language and shared theoretical frameworks for analyzing these issues. Subsequent seminars more closely examine selected areas of diversity and social justice in higher education and NYU specifically. Race, Ethnicity and Culture at NYU and Beyond; Socio-economic Diversity: Meeting the Opportunities and Challenges Through Student Affairs; and Religion, Faith and Spirituality in Higher Education were the first three selected area seminars offered in the 2008-09 series. Gender and Sexuality in Colleges and Universities and The Global/International Experience for Students and Professionals will be added for the

2009-10 academic year series. The series ends with The Wrap-Up - Best Practices and Practical Application so that participants can discuss successful ways of implementing the knowledge they have learned into the workplace.

Technology is effectively utilized to market the program and supplement curriculum and discussions through Blackboard. The A.C.T. Institute also makes effective use of resources such as film, original publications, and research, by partnering with faculty and other human resources. Films have included the premier screening of *Searching for Peace: A Youth Look at Religion* (2009), which features diverse young people speaking about their experiences and perspectives on spirituality.

The entire A.C.T. Institute is research-based. "Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice" (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 2007) serves as a primary resource for designing the curriculum; but other research on critical race theory, the impact of social class in higher education, religion and spirituality in universities and colleges and other scholarly literature related to the topics are heavily incorporated into the content of the seminars. To better place the information in the context of NYU and to make it more directly relevant to the participants work, the Institute relies on demographic data and survey results compiled by NYU's Office of Institutional Research and Program Evaluation. Primary research from CMEP student surveys and focus groups provides additional quantitative and qualitative data for seminars. Assessments of the program reflect high participant satisfaction, significant increases in knowledge around the complex issues of diversity, and applicability of the information to their daily work.

With successful collaborations across academic affairs and other Student Affairs departments, a multi-faceted, transferable curriculum around an ever-contemporary set of topics and a broad spectrum of professionals participating, the A.C.T. Institute was designed for sustainability. With a cadre of nearly 50 administrators spanning across the campus each year with a common language around diversity, equity and inclusion, access to extensive diversity resources and as indicated by assessments considerably greater knowledge on these issues, diversity education becomes increasingly imbedded in the fiber of the institution. Demand for the Institute has now become organic and great interest in enrollment precedes marketing for each series of seminars. As a core group of administrators continue to fully participate in all new seminars, become motivated to do more research on their own, take companion academic courses and engage with faculty, the new pool of instructors develops. Finally, because the A.C.T. Institute has an extensive network and runs primarily on a vast collective expertise, even in lean economic times, the program will continue to flourish.