Higher education is experiencing a time of critical change. Meaningful collaborations between Student Life and Academic Affairs help navigate the change and enhance campus’ abilities to promote student retention. Collaborations must engage diverse students as not simply recipients of campus strategies but co-designers of the collegiate experience. The Office of Multicultural Affairs and Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning collaborated on a project focused on the retention of ethnically diverse students, Diversity Dialogues which fully embraced the student voice and promote campus efforts for change.

**ABSTRACT**

A series, "Creating Successful Relationships with Our Students" was collaboratively developed by staff at the Office of Multicultural Affairs, CETL team members, and students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The purpose of the series was to capture the unique relationships students have with faculty and staff.

The project began by collecting student stories about faculty and staff with whom meaningful relationships had been developed. Students and the related faculty and staff then participated in a videotaped dialogue discussing their relationship. In the analysis of the stories, three themes emerged. To promote successful relationships with students, faculty and staff must 1) build trust and rapport, 2) promote communication, and 3) create community.

**Project development**

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**Campus session teams**

Multidisciplinary teams including staff from Student Affairs, faculty from Academic Affairs, and students were invited to facilitate campus-level sessions for each theme:

**Build Trust and Rapport**
- Ernesto Soto, Chemistry Major and Lead Student in Gender Equity
- Randy Barker, Counselor, Student Health and Counseling Services
- Dr. Marsha Lue, Director, McNair Program

**Promote Communication**
- Marquise Slay, Business Communication Major and Peer Mentor in the Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Dr. Ephraim Nikoi, Associate Professor, Communication
- Jen Bird, Director, New Student Services

**Create Community**
- David Daley, History Major and Lead Student in Vet and Non-traditional Student Center
- Gabriela Theis, Student Services Specialist, Office of Multicultural Affairs
- Dr. Dean Yohnk, Dean of Academic Affairs

**Campus impact**

Campus sessions were held, with 76 participants attending from all campus units including Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, and administration. The primary role of the participants included instructors (41.1%); advisors (35.39%); and administrators (29.41%).

An explicit goal of the sessions was to connect the campus community. In a follow-up evaluation, 82.35% of participants stated that they were better able to connect with colleagues during the semester and work collaboratively.

The evaluation captured how concepts from sessions were applied to participants’ work with students:

- "I had a "check in" assignment where they told me about their lives (if they wanted, and they all chose to tell me something). I also make very blunt statements to the class that I am ok with them and their various identities, I welcome them and their diversity. I plan to add a statement to my syllabus next semester about parenting and allowing children in the classroom if their parents deem it appropriate."

- "I found this session helpful, informative, and a great chance to brainstorm with colleagues and hear from a student presenter, as well as knowledgeable staff and faculty presenters. They emphasized the idea of respect and looking clearly at the attitudes we convey to students."

- "Something that came out of one conversation was the idea of student driven art and displays. As a result of the conversation, I started soliciting classes I knew were doing projects with a visual element to display their work among our book displays."