

Setting the Stage for Highlighting Work in Cultural Competency Pedagogy
(Introductory essay: *eJournal of Public Affairs* special issue on cultural
competency pedagogy in public affairs education)

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Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

—James Baldwin, “As Much Truth As One Can Bear,” January 1962

As guest editors, we welcome readers to this themed issue of the *eJournal of Public Affairs* highlighting perspectives and experiences in developing, implementing, and supporting cultural competency pedagogy in graduate public affairs programs to prepare emerging and current professionals in public-sector careers. As faculty members engaged in public affairs disciplines, we are committed to strategies designed to integrate cultural competency at various levels—in the communities we work with, in the institutions we teach in, and in our classrooms through pedagogy. We value the need for cultural competence, especially as major demographic, socioeconomic, and political shifts have brought into relief significant shortcomings in how various communities have been served and in the conception, design, implementation, and evaluation of public goods and services. However, with challenges come opportunities to critically evaluate and more comprehensively honor public values such as democracy, equality, and justice. Cultural competency provides both a pathway and a lens to accomplish this goal.

We are delighted and grateful for the opportunity to share our work in this *eJournal* forum, which we anticipate will move the needle toward more engaged scholarship around cultural competency pedagogy in public affairs programs. We are especially grateful to Andrew Lokie and Darrell Hamlin for the invitation to explore research on cultural competency through this themed issue. In 2016, the United States was at the start of what would become some of the tensest political times to date. Central to this tension was identity-politics rhetoric that brought into question standards of political leadership as well as proper execution of public-office tasks and missions that advance collective values of equity, democracy, and justice. As scholars and former professionals in public administration and urban planning, we were well aware of the disconnect between the academy and practitioner spaces as it relates to sharing important information and outcomes for mutual benefit and development. Both of these conditions fueled our sense of urgency around using the power of research to inform the preparation of current and future public-affairs professionals to navigate and advocate for all, particularly in precarious environments. As a result, we embarked upon a multi-institution study about effective ways to teach cultural competency to graduate students. Upon meeting Andrew and Darrell during a journal session at a conference and presenting our idea of highlighting other voices and perspectives about pedagogy and cultural competency, they warmly welcomed the proposal. We were especially excited about this opportunity given

that the *eJournal* is accessible to all for free, thus democratizing information available to both practitioners and scholars.

Our goals for this issue are to explore various definitions of cultural competency, which generally account for knowledge of norms and values unique to specific cultures. However, we build upon this general definition to include the knowledge of how cultural identity forms in various contexts and creates hierarchies, drives individual and community experiences, and results ultimately in social outcomes that shape societies. Furthermore, we posit that democratic and inclusive public management includes the knowledge of how culture and cultural bias impact policy and organizational decision making as well as practices in the public sector. As such, we assert that public institutions and actors have an ethical and professional duty to serve communities competently and inclusively, and that the practice of cultural competency is possible through preparation of public administrators and planners.

Given higher education's significant role in shaping public-affairs professions, institutions can provide critical knowledge to future practitioners through effective and impactful pedagogy. Yet, pedagogy is only one part of a larger academic system controlled by leadership and organizational traditions, norms, and values. This issue of the *eJournal* explores specific pedagogical approaches to and perspectives on cultivating cultural competency and the surrounding systems that can either hinder or support them. Importantly, this issue challenges the philosophical underpinnings of social science, especially as they relate to the tradition of public administration and urban planning. The articles represent a diversity of perspectives and expressions that challenge the structure of scholarship and the conservative nature of research and institutions of higher learning.

The contributors to this issue have research interests and teaching experience in public-affairs fields and topics, including public administration as well as urban and regional planning. They comprise a range of junior and seasoned scholars offering varied perspectives on approaches to culturally competent pedagogy, and they understand and represent a breadth of perspectives in community engagement and teaching. They also represent a variety of voices of "otherness" in American society and higher learning in public management. The articles highlight the advantages and challenges of cultural competency, while urging readers to assess more deeply the impact of philosophical and epistemological changes required to improve and expand academic contributions for enhancing equity and inclusion in American society.

The editors believe that these fields in particular are preparing professionals to understand and serve the public in all of its dimensions, experiences, cultures, and needs. When one looks closely at the formation of

professionals in the fields of public affairs, the increasing importance of addressing cultural competency and cultural humility in research and pedagogy becomes clear. This issue introduces new research and narratives related to building a culture of cultural inclusion through administrative, pedagogical, and teaching mechanisms.

Rationale for the Themed Issue

According to the U.S. census, the population in the United States is becoming more and more diverse racially, ethnically, and in terms of ability and age. By some accounts, the progression of racial and ethnic cohorts is on a steady track to replace older White populations, leading to a stronger representation of non-White populations in the future and making racial and ethnic diversity self-sustaining (VanHook & Lee, 2017). Indeed, racial and ethnic diversity is on the rise in urban and rural communities, and it is here to stay. According to VanHook and Lee (2017), 98% of metropolitan areas and 97% of small towns have steadily become more diverse. Moreover, the stark historical racial and ethnic separation of populations in cities and suburbs is eroding, and the emergence of non-majority cities has become clear. In addition, other categories of otherness, such as sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersectional identities, are contributing to the complexity of society.

On the surface, demographic change may not seem to constitute a directive for change in the way scholars conduct social research or educate public managers, but the fact is that public administrators and planners are responsible for representing and serving the changing interests of the population and working in an ever diversifying professional environment (Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2013). At a time when societal diversity and complexity are greater than ever, awareness of demographic change and its accompanying complications is an important factor for successful public management.

With increasingly diverse communities has come an increasingly diverse workforce, which includes the fields of public management. The burden on higher education is at least two-fold since colleges and universities must prepare public managers to be effective and equitable in public-service delivery and to work effectively within diverse professional environments (Carizalles, 2010; Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2013; Rice, 2012; Sabharwal et al., 2013; Rice 2017). In this case, an effort to improve and build upon the pedagogical and administrative efforts to meet the demands of the public-management professional requirement for cultural competence is an important and growing part of programing in master's-level public management degrees.

For students and faculty within the academy, inclusion is important for student development and success (Foldy, 2004). However, while student and

faculty diversity has increased within higher education, it has not done so to the extent of equitable representation of the larger population. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, enrollment in graduate programs in 2008 was diversifying but still comprised mostly White students at 63.9%. Similarly, according to NASPAA, White students made up 57% of master's degrees in public affairs and administration in 2005 (Wyatt-Nichol & Antwi-Boasiako, 2008). Faculty of color are notably underrepresented. In one study, faculty of color (i.e., Black, Hispanic, and Asian) across selected institutions in the United States represented between 23% and 32% of faculty in the social sciences (Koedel, 2017). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics show that 21% of all faculty are faculty of color, including Blacks, Asians, and Pacific Islanders in 2015. Faculty representing non-heteronormative White identities is unclear. Remedies for the lack of diversity in the classroom have included calls for improved curriculum, social interaction and community involvement, and self-awareness and reflection (Carizzales, 2010; Foldy, 2004; Rice, 2007). Yet, an improvement in the representation of diversity within the student body and faculty can help to develop a sense of inclusion, empowerment, and cultural relevance for all students (Foldy, 2004).

Today's public managers must be aware of and actively advocate for social equity (Frederickson, 2007), making culturally competent curriculum relevant within the profession (Carizzales, 2010). This journal issue highlights movements in the preparation of public managers as advocates for social equity and social capital. Achieving social equity in society depends heavily on public-service managers. An awareness of societal complexities and the impact of policy and practice on complex communities is critical to the successful public management (Frederickson, 2005). The effective public servant must be equipped with a framework of culturally competent values and an ability to provide public service within the complex context of a diverse, multicultural public arena (Rice, 2007; Sabharwal et al., 2014).

Although creating awareness of the impact of diversity in communities is largely the responsibility of educational institutions, many researchers maintain that this responsibility has not been met, citing the need for culturally competent forms of education within colleges and universities, especially within master's programs in public administration, public affairs, and urban and regional planning (Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2013; Sabharwal et al., 2014; Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014). Cultural competency has emerged as a complex field of research and educational practice that relies on institutional support for curriculum development and administrative needs. The importance of culturally competent pedagogy and research has pushed faculty and administrators in higher education institutions to focus more sharply on the complexities of an

increasingly diverse population (Sabharwal et al., 2014) and to consider whether they are providing educational structure for effective public administrators or perpetuating what some call educational malpractice.

Fostering awareness, however, has not been well supported in social research or higher education curricula. Several studies have exposed the lack of culturally competent practices in research (Bonilla Silva & Zuberi, 2008; Rice, 2007) and the resulting challenges in creating culturally competent curricula. Generally, the academy lacks an appreciation for a diversity of voices and stories that support a mission of preparing students for a diverse workforce and equitable service delivery (Hewins-Maroney & Williams, 2013).

Public-management departments within higher education face obstacles to scholarship development and to the administrative support and representation of diverse faculty. Most graduate programs claim values grounded in achieving diversity of students and faculty in the pursuit of creative and inclusive research and teaching. Diversity statements are common in the applications and information available to prospective students, and are routinely communicated by university administration to students and faculty. However, most graduate programs are not representative of the populations their students will serve and lack a diversity of experience and an interest in multiculturalism (Sabharwal et al., 2014). At present, the academy in general is unfit to prepare public managers to serve communities in a culturally competent manner. In an effort to address these shortcomings, institutions must develop a culture of cultural competency in relation to administration, faculty, research, scholarship, and teaching.

All of these factors impact the efficacy of well-intentioned educational efforts to increase student awareness and effectiveness in their fields. Equally important is the creation of learning communities made up of faculty and students of diverse ethnicities, lifestyles, and worldviews to enhance an environment for balanced learning that fosters expression and cultural relevance.

This issue raises important considerations for embarking upon culturally competent approaches to teaching and provides tools and building blocks for impactful and effective higher education experiences and practices, in hopes that both can lead to better community engagement, enhanced public values, and professional behaviors. Public management programs include layers of cooperation from, for instance, university administrators, departments, research, scholarship, professors, and students. In this issue, readers will find contributions from faculty and researchers who are refining foundational elements of culturally competent programs in public management. This collection of scholarship spans a broad survey of experiences and research with the shared goal of preparing culturally competent professions by examining challenges, barriers, and successes in the academy. Though representing diverse voices and varied levels of

experience and expertise, all of the articles contribute to the understanding of cultural competence in public management and steps for unpacking the role of cultural competence within higher education. They address the limitations of curricular contributions of the past, confront the lack of student and faculty diversity, analyze approaches to teaching for contemporary changes in a diverse society, and consider philosophical approaches to framing and effecting change.

Issue Overview and Organization

This themed issue opens with an article by Elizabeth Sweet entitled, “Cultural Humility: An Open Door for Planners to Locate Themselves and Decolonize Planning Theory, Education, and Practice.” Sweet engages with the concept of cultural humility as a way for planning faculty, students, and practitioners to commit to ongoing self-reflection and critique of their social, cultural, racial, gendered, and other identities, and how they are implicated in inequality, especially when working in communities of color. She advocates for greater reflexivity among public affairs professionals in an effort to relinquish their status as expert and gatekeeper and to decolonize planning theory and practice to prevent the often-destructive history of planning in communities of color from being repeated.

Ivis Garcia Zambrana invites readers to connect cultural humility to leadership and social innovation as tools to train students and inform the practice of urban planning. Her article, “Leadership and Social Innovation: Overcoming Critical Theory, Positivism, and Postmodernism in Planning Education,” builds on the cultural humility, leadership, and social innovation literature to provide a foundation upon which these tools might be cultivated deliberately and creatively by professional planners and those in public affairs. This article also presents cultural humility as one of the many tools that educators might employ to train students for planning practice. More importantly, it seeks conduits for generating empowerment and excitement within the professional planning and urban affairs community and within public-affairs graduate and undergraduate education throughout the country.

Colleagues Alexis Jemal and Sarah Bussey explore critical consciousness (CC) in their article, “Transformative Action: A Theoretical Framework for Breaking New Ground.” The authors explore the divergent scholarship within CC theory and practice and offer a theoretical framework for transformative action, which consists of three hierarchical levels of action—critical, avoidant, and destructive—for each level of the socio-ecosystem and which may serve as a model for community-based practitioners, such as those in the fields of social work and public affairs. They argue that transformation is necessary to deconstruct the social institutions in the United States that maintain and perpetuate systemic inequity and create dehumanizing consequences. Through

critical transformative action, community workers can make visible the hidden socio-structural factors that perpetuate institutionalized racism and White privilege.

In their article entitled “Building Sustainable Civic Capacity in Urban Education Reform: Actors, Perceptions, and Recommendations for Inclusive Public Policy,” Michael Guo-Brennan and Linyuan Guo-Brennan examine the perceptions and relationships of various actors in urban education reform in Chicago, Illinois, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and offer a deeper understanding of the barriers to and opportunities for fostering greater civic capacity and engagement in urban education reform, and for developing inclusive educational policy. Their findings suggest that sustained civic capacity and engagement in urban education change efforts allow for systematic improvements in educational development and innovation. Moreover, the results of their research indicated that structural openness to new actors, stakeholders, and the reconceptualization of education as a worthy good can lead to enhanced educational quality, equity, and inclusion, particularly in urban areas.

Colleagues Monique López, Adonia Lugo, Omar Vargas, and Allison Mattheis use critical race theory to support community-based advocacy and to inform culturally competent urban planning curriculum in their article, “Counternarratives of Community-Based Advocacy as a Source of Knowledge for Urban Planning.” The authors highlight the possibilities of deepening the planning and urban design process through the inclusion of diverse voices and counternarratives. They also challenge the norms of planning practice by comparing the impact of more inclusive practices in other fields.

April Jackson, Marla Parker, Lisa Turner DeVera, Ivis Garcia Zambrana, Tisha Holmes, Ellen Shiau, and Christina Medina reflect on institutional experiences of administrators and faculty in urban planning and public administration programs regarding integration of culturally competent pedagogy within their degree programs, colleges, and universities. Their article, “Moving the Needle: Early Findings on Faculty Approaches to Integrating Culturally Competent Pedagogy into Educational Spaces,” highlights faculty and administrator perspectives on the experience of conceiving, planning, and implementing measures to integrate cultural competency into the teaching, learning, and administration of public affairs and planning programs at four U.S. institutions. Early findings from their research show that teaching students to be aware of their own bias, integrating hands-on coursework, and requiring diversity curriculum offer strategies to build cultural competence among students. However, higher education public affairs programs still face barriers to the development of culturally competent curriculum and pedagogical approaches,

namely a lack of diversity and shared values, as well as a fractured system of teaching and administration.

Shengli Dong, Aleksandra Nesic, Christina Colgary, Jadelyn Martinez, and Jessika Guerard build on the concept of cultural competence and highlight intercultural competence training for faculty as a strategy to foster holistic engagement for international students. Their article, “Mindfulness, Motivation, and Intercultural Competency Among Faculty and Staff: Examining Impacts of the Global Partner Certificate Workshops,” examines the correlations of motivation, mindfulness, and intercultural competency among faculty and staff through the framework of self-determination theory. Results of their study demonstrated that mindfulness and intrinsic motivation may have a positive impact on intercultural competency. The authors discuss the implications of the study in light of incorporating motivational and mindfulness strategies into intercultural training for faculty.

Dmitri Seals’ article “Cultural Research to Action: Course Design for Intersectional Cultural Competency” explores the intersectional understandings of diversity in cultural sociology and argues for an approach that accounts for the dynamism and internal diversity of cultural categories. He analyzes a pilot project in cultural sociology using discourse analysis, participatory action research, and intersectionality theory to engage students in designing culturally competent programs and policies. By reviewing current models of cultural competency in public affairs to situate a preliminary analysis of course materials, student surveys, and student work, the author offers a toolkit for programs and professors seeking to enrich public affairs practice with the cultural study of intersectional difference.

Petra Doan and Angela Lieber, in their article “Queering Cultural Competence for Planning and Public Policy,” provide a much-needed perspective on culturally competent pedagogy as openly LGBTQ scholars who have worked to incorporate their identities into their teaching about queer cultural competence. Key insights from their work teaching at public institutions in social sciences and social work suggest the need to create open and affirming classrooms, the importance of opening spaces for discussions with students about naming and pronouns, and the usefulness of course-specific LGBTQ materials to reinforce the understanding that queer identity often intersects with racial and class positions to exacerbate a wide variety of planning and public policy issues.

In “Aligning Our Pedagogy and Practices with Our Cultural Competency Goals: Clarifying the Learning Continuum,” José Meléndez reflects on all of the articles in this journal issue in the context of his experiences teaching and learning in complex, diverse environments. He relates his appreciation for the diversity of experience, objectives, and perceptions of theory and practice to his own teaching

and introduces key frameworks such as praxial pedagogy, understanding by design, and activity systems to highlight the importance of teaching for critical awareness of epistemic bases of modern and postmodern scholarship and practice. Furthermore, as a framework for supporting culturally competent pedagogy, cultural historical activity theory is especially relevant to this special issue as a way to promote expansive learning, which is reflected in the transformation of changes in practices that meet social and collective needs.

In the final article, Joseph Romance offers a book review of George Voinovich's *Empowering the Public-Private Partnership: Future of America's Local Government*. He highlights the strategies implemented under Voinovich's tenure as mayor of Cleveland to illustrate how lasting public-private partnerships were formed to change the climate of city government and facilitated the revitalization of Cleveland. As Joseph notes by way of Voinovich's example, the key to effective leadership may be simply awakening public spiritedness among a diverse set of stakeholders and then harnessing it to good purpose.

In closing, we hope this special issue inspires readers in several ways. First, for educators and administrators who already engage in and support culturally competent pedagogy, we hope this issue engenders inspiration and innovation in their continued efforts and validates their incorporation of cultural competency into curricula and their approaches to teaching. Second, for educators and administrators who may not be engaging in or promoting this kind of work, we hope this issue spurs thoughtful consideration of incorporating cultural competence. For community and professional practitioners, we hope this issue provides food for thought in creating meaningful collaborations with academic partners. Finally, for all community, professional, and education stakeholders, we hope this issue inspires collaborative conversations about cultural competency resulting in meaningful action-oriented research, richer student experiences, healthier institutions, professional development, and enhanced public outcomes. We close this introduction by thanking the reviewers who took the time to provide thoughtful, engaged critique of all of the articles here and helped to move the manuscripts forward to publication. We would also like to thank the editorial team at the *eJournal* for being open to publishing this much-needed special issue and working so closely with us to move the publication process forward. Most importantly, we thank our readers not only for viewing this issue, but also for their meaningful feedback—which we encourage and welcome.

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