Learning Communities Curriculum Guide

The main reading material for this course is Vernā Myers " *What if I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*". Learning communities will spend each week discussing a few of the books chapters. The book is broken up into 25 short chapters and the chapters have been loosely grouped together into 8 different discussion topics (summarized in the charts below). In addition to the book discussion questions have been provided.

The book strays away from being theory based by using several personal or real life examples. As such, discussions should happen similarly. Group participants should try to use personal stories and speak from their own experiences.

In reading this book, you may not agree with everything that is said. Criticism is okay! We just ask that any thoughts you choose to share are used to enrich the overall group conversation.

This book *loosely* informs the discussion topics and questions. The goal of these questions is to create a starting point for conversation. It is our hope that the group will focus on answering the questions, but also groups are advised to allow for a more organic conversation than the questions may prompt.

If you need some additional context or guidance throughout this process, please feel free to reach out to any of the following people:

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Course Schedule Summary – *3 groups, each led by different facilitators discuss the same weekly topics. Based on your convenience, you have the option to attend: morning, lunchtime, or afternoon discussions. If possible, try to stay consistent with the same Community Learning Zone group to build upon conversations and connections!*

Week	Date (Wed or Thurs)	Topic	Readings (by chapter)
1	Feb. 26 or 27	Biases	1, 2, 6, 13
2	Mar. 4 or 5	Inclusion & Exclusion	4, 9, 10, 15
3	Mar. 11 or 12	Microaggressions & Microaffirmations	4, 12, 21
4	Mar. 25 or 26	Privilege/ Unearned Advantage	8, 20
5	Apr. 1 or 2	Cultural Competence	3, 5, 7
6	Apr. 8 or 9	Communication	17, 19
7	Apr. 15 or 16	Accountability	11, 16, 18, 22
8	Apr. 22 or 23	Continued Learning	24, 25

Session Outline
February 26 or 27
Topic: Biases Chapters: 1, 2, 6, 13 In "*What if I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*" Vernā Myers states: *"We have a picture in our heads of what a doctor, leader, astronaut, or even president should look like based on years of seeing only one group in this position due to the historical exclusion of others. We have also been told which one- up group is better or smarter or more reliable than another. Over a long time, sexist and racist ideas get embedded in our psyche…"* Think about a specific one-down group on campus. What assumptions do you think people make about this group? How do you see this playing out in the UMD school or classroom environment? Where do your perceptions of one-up and one-down groups come from? On page 63-64 of " *What if I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*" Myers gives several tips for recognizing and challenging descriptive bias. Are any of these tips helpful to your role as an advisor? If so, which one(s), why/ why not?
March 4 or 5
Topic: Inclusion & Exclusion Chapters: 4, 9, 10, 15 Think of a time when you had an interaction with someone who had different social or cultural norms. How easy was it for them to participate and fit in? Did either person have to change to do so? How or why? In "*What if I Say the Wrong Thing? 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People*" Vernā Myers states: *"We can't say we want difference and then ask people who are different from the dominant group to do their best impression of those who are already in the majority."* What is the author saying here? Do you agree with this statement? What does or does not resonate with you?

What favors or special privileges do people in the same groups tend to give to each other? Is this a problem? Explain your reasoning.

Topic: Microaggressions & Microaffirmations
Chapters:4, 12, 21

When people discuss microaggressions, a common response is that they are "innocent acts" and that the person who experiences them should "let go of the incident" and "not make a big deal out of it." Do you agree or disagree with this point of view? Does the intent change the impact of the microaggression for the one-down group?

Vernā Myers in "What if I Say the Wrong Thing" suggest that microaffirmations are a way to provide inclusivity and empathy to underrepresented groups. On page 100 and 101, several l tips are listed for someone wanting to practice committing microaffirmations. Some of those tips are summarized here:

- *"Drop by someone's office and shoot the breeze… you'd be surprised how the smallest contact can make a person feel seen and appreciated."*
- *"Remember to say thank you and acknowledge individual contributions."*
- *" Be able to ask appropriate questions about people's hobbies, families, and vacations. These are signs that you care enough to notice."*

Meanwhile in their essay, "*Empathy and Antiracist Feminist Coalitional Politics*" , scholars Maggie Caygill and Pavitra Sundar make contradictory points:

1.) *"Sympathy is based on a vertical power relationship. The privileged individual, the person not experiencing the pain, feels sorry for the disadvantaged 'other.' Sympathy, thus, reeks of superiority and condescension."*
2.) *"Empathy says, 'I understand your pain because it is like mine in these ways... Since I understand my own pain, I know what it must be like to be you.' … However, empathy is not just a simple case of putting oneself in another's shoes. The oppressed do not and cannot empathize with the lot of the privileged. It seems clear then that, like sympathy, empathy too relies on and reinforces a top-down power dynamic."*

What initial reactions do you have to these passages? What differences do you notice between the author's main points?

With Vernā Myers tips, are these effective interventions? Are there times when some are more appropriate or effective than others? How and why? Have you tried any of these interventions? If so, were there any unexpected responses? Explain.

What, if any, might be a limitation to relying on empathy and micro affirmations as a tool for diversity and inclusivity?

March 25 or 26

Topic: Privilege/ Unearned Advantage
Chapters: 8, 20

Read the following text by Peggy McIntosh prior to answering the questions below:
"*White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*"

McIntosh list several general examples of white privilege. What might white privilege look like in your role as an advisor?

The UMD campus emphasizes creating safe and affirming spaces for all. How does privilege hinder safety and affirmation for all?

What might your role as an advisor be in challenging white privilege and making space for one-down groups?

Contrary to Myers, Meg Bolger in " *Why I don't facilitate privilege walks anymore and what I do instead*" shares their thoughts about the effectiveness of privilege walks. They state:

> *"The main reason that I don't facilitate privilege walks is that I believe privilege walks rely on the experiences of people with marginalized identities to create a powerful learning experience for people with privilege. Participants who have less privilege are asked to publicly share many of their experiences of being marginalized so that people (like me, who have had a lot of privileged experiences) could learn from that difference. So we could be aware of the privilege that we have and they do not."*

Have you done a privilege walk or other group activity on unearned advantage? Who do you think benefited from that activity?

What makes Bolger's argument different from Myers? How does this inform your thoughts on group activities like the privilege walk?

What is the next step after acknowledging privilege?

April 1 or 2

Topic: Cultural Competence
Chapters: 3, 5, 7

Did you grow up in a diverse environment? What made it diverse or not diverse? Who was present? Who was absent? Why do you think certain groups were included or left out?

In Habit #3 Myers argues that we all have culture. How are cultures differently valued?

You can have a diverse environment but still have inequitable distributions of power. Do you see examples of this playing out on campus?

Myers provides tips for being culturally effective and culturally ineffective throughout the book. How do you define cultural effectiveness? Are there any limitations to this definition?

Should cultural effectiveness be a goal? What ideas do you have for diversity, inclusivity, and equity beyond being culturally effective?

April 8 or 9

Topic: Communication
Chapters: 17, 19

This Learning Community was formed as a way to enhance your communication skills. As such, reflect on your experiences in these group conversations. Think about different group dynamics that may have emerged and then answer the following questions:

- How comfortable were you in sharing your thoughts with the group? What helped or hurt the process?

- Were there certain topics that have been more challenging than others for you or the group? What made it challenging/ not challenging?

- What feedback did you give to each other? Was it well received? Why/ Why not?

- Are there things that others did to make you feel comfortable to share your thoughts? What did or didn't work?

- How did you know others were listening to you and how did you show others you were listening to them?

April 15 or 16

Topic: Accountability
Chapters: 11, 16, 18, 22

What have you been taught about accountability?

What forms of justice or accountability does our campus currently practice? Is this similar or different to the forms of justice you practice in your role as an advisor?

What role do you usually take in conversations with advisees? Friends? Coworkers/ Students? Does this role shift when someone says the wrong thing or harm occurs?

On pages 77-79 Vernā Myers provides several verbal tips you can say. Do these seem like they would address the harm? How might they be useful? Or not useful?

April 22 or 23

Topic: Continued Learning
Chapters: 24, 25

Consider this statement from "*Diversity is for White People: The Big Lie Behind a Well-intended Word*" by Ellen Berrey:

> *"Appealing to diversity can unite people across differences that divide us deeply. It affirms a much needed basis of commonality — a shared, self-reinforcing commitment to each other. But with what other issue of inequity do we think that the solution is just talking about it?...We need... more effective action."*

What effective actions (immediate or long term) can you take to support a diverse and inclusive classroom/campus?

What topics did you grow in? What topics would you be open to more training on? What do you hope to get from more trainings around that topic?

In what ways are you supporting students to make a more strategic impact on the campus's culture? What is your "call to action" for others regarding diversity and inclusion efforts?