Outcomes from a Dialogue about Diversity in a Graduate Learning Community

Supporting underrepresented students’ persistence and success in the agricultural field continues to be a struggle for the profession. One intentional learning community fellowship program actively supports graduate students from underrepresented communities at a Predominately White Institution utilizing tenants from Intergroup Dialogue andragogy during a regular meeting. Intergroup dialogue is a public process designed to involve individuals and groups in an exploration of societal issues such as politics, racism, religion, and culture that are often flashpoints for polarization and social conflict. Utilizing these tenants at a meeting, program administrators share outcomes from a dialogue. Initial outcomes included greater awareness of privileged and marginalized groups at the university, realizations of shared struggles between group members, community building, and the desire for continued conversations on the topic of diversity/climate. This dialogue setting can serve as a bridging mechanism through which agricultural educators may utilize to explore departmental, college and institutional climate. We define intergroup dialogue and provide examples from academic settings of how intergroup dialogue has been applied to conflicts around topics of race and ethnic nationality, sexual orientation, religion, and culture. We share the learning outcomes (both intentional and unintentional) along with observations collected through field notes and the program evaluation. We recommend professional practice suggestions for agricultural educators to take to understand and use intergroup dialogue in their own contexts.