

UMSAEP Report
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Project Title:

SisterScholars Making Connections Across Cultures: A Comparative Exploration of African American and South African Black Women's Academic Aspirations, Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Degree Attainment.

Project Summary:

In what ways can an international program foster student and faculty development? I was hosted by the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) to explore the ways in which an international partnership between UMSL and UWC could assist in the development of programming to support the academic development and degree attainment of Black/Colored women at UWC and African American women at the University of Missouri – St. Louis (UMSL). I learned from staff and faculty at UWC regarding the ways in which they are working to promote general wellness, development, and positive graduation rates among Black/Colored female students. I proposed implementing a weekly or bi-monthly support group for women of color that would connect the female students enrolled at the University of Missouri – St. Louis with female students enrolled at the University of the Western Cape. The goals of this initiative would be to: (1) expand student's international understanding and awareness of the lives of other college women globally, (2) provide an avenue for female students to share their personal and academic stories with each other across international campuses, and (3) provide a vehicle for students to share their strategies toward personal development and degree attainment.

Another research area of mine is the internationalization of counseling. During my visit to UWC I had the privilege of meeting with members of the Department of Psychology department under the leadership of Dr. Michelle Antipatin. I was able to collect data regarding how culture impacts the practice of counseling in South Africa. This research is in direct correlation with my overall work as a counselor educator dedicated to cultural competence. While at UWC I also provided workshops in the area of helping professionals increase their international and cultural awareness of issues related to working with diverse populations (with a particular focus on women's issues).

Project Objectives:

1. To explore how an international partnership between UMSL and UWC might promote academic development and degree attainment of Black women at both universities.
2. Make connections with faculty and university personnel regarding the ways in which UMSL and UWC might collaborate to enhance the graduation rates of Black women.
4. Explore future collaborative research opportunities with UWC faculty regarding

international women's issues.

5. Expand my current understanding of the ways in which South African mental health professionals and other service professionals work to meet the needs of their diverse populations.

6. To share my expertise in the area of how counselors in the US honor diversity and develop cultural competencies.

Between July 21-August 4, 2013 I visited UWC to work with Mr. Leolyn Jackson, Director of International Programs, Dr. Tammy Shefer, Director of Women's and Gender Studies, Dr. Michelle Andipatin, Chair of the Department of Psychology, and Dr. Birgit Schrieber, Director of the Centre of Student Support Services and other faculty to discuss how an international collaboration may meet the above project objectives.

Detailed Scholarly Activities during Visit:

1. Delivered two workshops for the academic community at UWC: (1) Counseling Women Across the Lifespan and (2), SisterScholars in Training;

Workshop title #1: Counseling Women Across the Lifespan: Using Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) as a Conceptual Framework (July 25, 2013)

Program Description:

What are some of the challenges women face during their early teen years? What challenges do they face during young/adulthood, middle-age years and older? Using Relational Cultural Theory, this interactive presentation will explore contemporary issues and strategies for counseling women across the lifespan.

Workshop Title #2: SisterScholars-in-Training: A Support Group for African American Students (July 31, 2013)

Program Description:

This interactive program highlights the presenter's experiences leading personal growth groups for African American female college students. The presenter will discuss positive outcomes, challenges experienced, and process lessons learned regarding group planning, implementation, and research data collection designed to promote academic and personal development of female college students.

2. Held meetings with administrators to discuss collaboration and partnerships (Leolyn Jackson, Tammy Shefer, Michelle Andipatin, and Birgit Schreiber);
3. Held meetings with Shahieda Jansen, Mental health counselor at the Centre for Student Support Services, Office of Therapeutic Services and Dr. Mario Smith, Lecturer in the Department of Psychology;

4. Met with faculty and students in the Department of Psychology;
5. Collected data and interviewed clinical mental health professionals in the area of counseling to understand how the nature of counseling services in South Africa;
6. Conducted interview with Langa township traditional healers regarding mental health practices;
7. Visited the *Mayibuye Centre for Research* on the campus of UWC to collect data on Apartheid and its impact on the psyche of African students.
8. Conducted ethnographic field observations of daily living in nearby townships of Langa and Guguletu; and
9. Participated in general social and networking with faculty at UWC to learn more about the institution and opportunities for research collaboration.

Outcomes Generated at a result of UMSAEP participation:

- The attendance at both workshops I presented was very good. Students, faculty, and staff were present where there was an in-depth healthy intellectual exchange of ideas and research possibilities. As a result of these presentations I have expanded my international network to include scholars from UWC, in addition to engage in ongoing discussions about joint research projects.
- Further, as a result of my workshop presentations, I have been appointed as an external reviewer for the Department of Psychology at UWC. In this capacity I will provide external assessment of masters and doctoral level theses and dissertations.
- Currently I am developing an international *SisterScholars* peer-mentoring program that links female students at UMSL with UWC female students using technology and the internet as a central mode of communication. I will partner with Dr. Andipatin, Head of Psychology to incorporate an international email penpal program that will link students together. Currently both campuses are identifying female students to participate in the project. It is my hope that this initial project will be the beginning of many more international collaborations designed to (1) foster research about women's development in higher education, and (2) examine creative ways to foster global and multicultural awareness among students.
- As a result of my meeting with Drs. Shefer and Andipatin, potential long-term research have been discussed: (1) an examination of women's issues as they pursue doctoral studies, and (2) a comparative examination of historically

economically-oppressed women and how they achieve degree attainment.

- In my discussions with Dr. Schreiber, Director of the Centre for Student Support Services (CSSS) it is my understanding that she was not enthusiastic about developing a program that focuses solely on women, but is still open to considering it. As Director of CSSS - a Centre composed of five offices: The Offices for (1) Student Disabilities, (2) Student Development, (3) Academic Support, (4) Therapeutic Services, and (5) Leadership and Social Responsibility Dr. Schrieber would like to see programming that would be attractive to both males and females. Since my meeting with Dr. Schrieber in August, we have continued to dialogue via email and have agreed to develop a project long-term.
- I was also able to collect data for my research study “Counseling Across Cultures.” An ethnographic examination of how culture impacts the practice of counseling in different countries in Africa. I was able to collect rich data via in-depth interviews with mental health professionals in at UWC, the surrounding community, in addition to having the rare opportunity to interview a traditional healer in the township of Langa. As a result of this data collection, I am completing work on two manuscripts: *Counseling in African Communities*, and *Cultural Considerations in Data Collection*, which is a look at cultural competencies researchers need to be develop when collecting and disseminating research in a cross-cultural setting. Lastly, my overall experience of visiting Cape Town, SA for the first time and collecting data has helped in my long-term project and forthcoming book entitled *Counseling Across Cultures* which is a qualitative study of cultural diversity and counseling practices in African communities.