

Leadership for cultural diversity

Awareness of one's civic duties becomes acute at the University. It is here that the youth of a society comprehend in depth the various polysemic dimensions of multiculturalism that they have been experiencing growing up. It is also here - where for the first time they are treated as mature adults - they have to deal with cultural diversity not as an isolated influence on their private lives, but as a phenomenon that affects broad policies, enriches the environment where they work, learn and grow, but also one with the potential to create frictions that jeopardize social cohesion and hinder growth. There is much at stake here: Universities are largely autonomous institutions, students participate actively in decision making, and students from different cultures must now work together to lead their institutions. All the issues of cultural diversity that challenge contemporary societies are now their issues-both the good and the bad. Even in Universities with a homogeneous student body, it is still the case that students deal with fellow students from other institutions. The issues which may have been "personal" in earlier years now become institutional and social issues. How do university doctoral students take on an active leadership role in dealing with the issues posed by multiculturalism?

This seminar will examine how leadership can turn knowledge about cultural diversity into grass roots empowerment for change. We will examine how doctoral students deal with the diversity of the student body, and the leadership roles they take to create a harmonious environment. The seminar will be developed around two important premises: (1) dialogue around multiculturalism as the way to engage doctoral students towards participatory action and (2) dialogue as it informs practice is an effective way to exercise leadership in the classroom. We will engage students in a dialogue to articulate—and therefore understand – the challenges posed by multiculturalism. Structured dialogue will help reflect on the frictions of multiculturalism, but the project aims to turn reflection into action, by training future leaders for the leadership roles needed to handle diversity. This is done - in addition to the formal seminars by the academics - by viewing relevant cinema productions. Modern youthful tools - Website, blogs edited by students, Facebook, videoclips – will be initiated during the seminar to empower them at the grass roots level.

A noteworthy aspect of the seminar is that it brings together Universities from several EuroMed Universities. In this light, the seminar will not only examine a problem faced by many countries in the region, it will also bring them together to understand these issues at the macro regional level.

In this context doctoral students will develop those leadership practices and roles that will lead their institutions away from conflict, eliminate the frictions of multiculturalism and capitalize on the strengths inherent in it. Of course, presumably, high school education has taught them how to deal with these issues. But usually primary education teaches how to change the environment, how to change perceptions and attitudes, how to separate what people "want" in a multicultural environment, from what they really "need". They are (somewhat) prepared to live in a multicultural society but not how to lead in a multicultural context. And by leadership, we refer to the doctoral student who will be on the lead tomorrow and the same time they will face the challenges of cultural diversity in the future career.