

Case Study

Working in partnership with University Health Services to change understandings and incorporate new strategies for diversity, bias, cross-cultural communication, and cultural humility.

Healthy Dialogues on Diversity

WITHIN BERKELEY'S University Health Services division (UHS), the diversity committee has big plans for staff development and organizational transformation. In partnership with the campus's Multicultural Education Program (MEP), the committee recently launched a comprehensive, organization-wide staff training initiative on workplace diversity, unconscious bias, cross-cultural communication, and cultural humility for all employees. This includes healthcare providers, administrative staff, technical staff, health educators, and organizational managers.

As the university's health and wellness center, UHS is a vibrant 300+ person organization that provides medical, mental health, and health promotion services to all Berkeley students and occupational health services to faculty and staff. Its diversity committee serves as an advisory group to the executive director and administration, providing recommendations and feedback on weaving equity, inclusion, and diversity into the organization's work. Committee members include both frontline staff and managers. Some of the group's past successes have included leading community book and toy drives, hosting an annual "Celebration of Diversity" potluck, and creating a toolkit for supervisors and managers to improve inclusivity in hiring practices.

The idea for the new training initiative grew from UHS staff development activities and the organization's recent strategic planning process for equity, inclusion, and diversity. In 2010, with grant funding from Berkeley's Initiative on Leadership in Diversity, UHS invited the Interactive Theater Project to present scenario-based trainings on workplace climate to staff managers, students, and faculty in a workshop-style setting. The workshops were well

received by those who participated and sparked interest in deeper and broader conversation on diversity issues.

In 2011, as part of the organization's strategic planning process for equity, inclusion, and diversity, the diversity committee reached out to MEP for help in designing an organization-wide training effort. Bene Gatzert, UHS strategic initiatives manager and an active member of the diversity committee, shared the purpose for this initiative, "One goal was to explore equity and inclusion issues as they relate to nurturing a vibrant work culture at UHS. Another goal was ensuring our staff is as culturally competent or as culturally humble as they can be in their work because we serve such diverse communities."

Berkeley's Multicultural Education Program

The Multicultural Education Program is one of six initiatives funded by the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund that support institutional change and create a positive campus climate for diversity. The program offers campuswide workshops designed to foster self-awareness, intergroup understanding, and practical skills for building welcoming and healthy environments. Sessions include:

- » Looking In / Looking Out:
Exploring Workplace Diversity
- » First Take / Second Look:
Exploring Unconscious Bias
- » Let's Talk: Engaging in
Cross-Cultural Communication

Prior to the strategic planning process, several UHS diversity committee members participated in these



Bene Gatzert from
University Health Services

trainings and found them helpful and rewarding. As a way to deepen the shared dialogue on diversity practices across the organization, the committee proposed bringing the full workshop series to UHS as a whole. The organization's leadership endorsed the proposal in early 2014, and UHS is now partnering with MEP to train most of its 300+ health service employees. Over the course of two years, every staff member, including part-time staff, will participate in MEP's three-workshop sequence, after which they will receive a certificate of completion. Supervisors will also go through an additional session on creating inclusive work environments and employing diverse hiring practices.

Diversity committee members coordinated this ambitious project, dividing UHS staff into approximately 15 cross-departmental cohorts, each of which will go through the full training sequence together. To build respect and community across the organization, each cohort intentionally includes participants from several UHS program areas—for example, counseling services, medical records, physical therapy, and information technology. During the course of the three workshop sessions, cohort members from various levels in the organization share perspectives and strategies, drawing on both their own identities and their differing positions and disciplines. To deepen the MEP training experience for

UHS staff, MEP collaborated with the UHS diversity committee to develop case scenarios based on actual UHS situations. "Incorporating the lived UHS work experience into the workshops greatly enhanced the MEP workshop interactions and heightened the sense of reality about the workshop topics," said Dr. Sidalia Reel, director of Staff Diversity Initiatives and MEP manager.

Dialogue and Diversity in University Health Services

Overall, despite the substantial time commitment involved, most UHS staff members have welcomed the opportunity to learn more about diversity issues and collaborate with their fellow healthcare workers. "My first thoughts were, 'Oh, another meeting.' But then I was interested in seeing what the campus was promoting [with regard to diversity issues], and curious to see what people's feedback would be," said Diane Drew, who manages the information center at UHS.

Along with the regular training curriculum, MEP staff tailored the UHS workshops to a health service audience, orienting their instructional focus to suit the unique set of issues that arise in the healthcare field. For instance, MEP developed a new component on cultural humility, an important concept



Sidalia Reel, Director of Staff Diversity Initiatives

in medical and mental health services. As Drew explained, “Many of our patients are visiting scholars, international students, people from all over the world. You have to be more patient and have to understand that they’re coming from a different lifestyle and environment.” Tailoring the workshops to the participants eased the initial uncertainty some felt about the training content, as they came to more fully understand the relevance of diversity and bias issues to their profession.

Each of MEP’s two-hour workshops consists of facilitator-led interactions, experiential learning techniques, and small- and large-group interactive exchange among participants. These interactions include exercises such as one-on-one interviews, scenario explorations, and a participatory look at divergent communication styles, as well as one-minute autobiographical exchanges anchored around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Participants are invited to “step up, then step back,” to make their contribution to the group and then allow others to do the same.

“One minute is not a lot of time,” said Greg Ryan, an ergonomist at UHS, and one of the co-chairs of the diversity committee. “You have to ask yourself ‘What am I going to focus on? What’s important to

me?’ and then you learn the same thing about the other person. In a short period of time, you get to know someone a lot closer than you knew them before. It forces you to think about your life in a different light and think about someone else’s life in a different light as well.”

Working across departments and cultural backgrounds has also promoted the sharing of approaches for interrupting bias throughout the organization and the development of empathy and connection within each cohort. Dr. Debra Nelson, a clinic physician as well as a new diversity committee member, said of her participation in the workshops, “I learned a lot about my colleagues, some of whom I’ve been working with for a long time.”

At the end of each workshop, individual participants summarize their experience by completing the sentence “I appreciate...” on a piece of paper. Collected responses have been overwhelmingly positive, with most answers indicating that participants appreciated the opportunity to interact and learn about one another.

Committee member Gatzert noted that the personal reflection pieces about people’s own lives and experiences were particularly important for her.

“Part of what we want to foster is the idea of lifelong learning — and especially around these issues to know that it’s an ongoing process to both learn and unlearn,” Gatzert said. She also appreciated the discussions of unconscious bias, power and privilege, and microaggressions, which she thinks will help staff members better understand and shape the impacts they have on others.

Today, UHS administration is developing an evaluation plan to quantify the success of the workshop requirement. In the meantime, UHS staff members are more openly discussing issues of diversity and inclusion both within their units and with members of their cohorts. “I feel more comfortable approaching people that were in my group even though I don’t work with them because we talked with each other during the workshops,” said Nelson.

The diversity committee is also exploring ways to reinforce how people are benefitting from the trainings so that the learning lives on beyond the sessions themselves. The organization has an all-staff newsletter, and the committee is considering other ways and venues to reinforce to continue to highlight equity and inclusion on a regular basis.

The Catalyst Moment

University Health Services brought in the Multicultural Education Program to train their full staff on issues related to diversity, bias, cross-cultural communication, and cultural humility and to help incorporate new strategies for addressing these issues into all levels of the organization’s work.

Best Practices

- » Provide interactive workshops that combine personal reflection with conceptual understanding and concrete strategy sharing.

- » Use a cross-department cohort-training model to both examine diversity issues and build community.
- » Customize workshop content to meet the needs of a specific field (in this case, health services).
- » Develop follow-up supports to encourage continued engagement with workshop topics and strategies.

Lessons Learned

- » Organizational leadership and buy-in are crucial to sustaining an initiative of this breadth and magnitude, particularly in the face of scheduling challenges, potential resistance, and competing priorities.
- » Creating a safe and respectful space is often more easily and effectively done by outside facilitators than by leaders internal to a group or organization. The UHS diversity committee appreciated how MEP’s facilitators navigated complex — sometimes personal — issues within the organizational context.
- » An organizational infrastructure (in this case, the diversity committee) must be in place to coordinate, promote, evaluate, and follow up on training efforts.

What’s Next

- » University Health Services will continue implementing its cohort training initiative with the Multicultural Education Program, as well as maintaining its other equity, inclusion, and diversity efforts. MEP will continue to offer workshops and customized coaching to both administrative and academic units across the Berkeley campus, as well as customizing services for external clients, including training, facilitator development, and consulting.