



Through a lengthy, institution-wide effort, Delta State University identified “improving cultural competency” as its QEP topic for 2014-2019. During the research, cultural competency distinguished itself as a timely and relevant topic for students at a regional institution. Delta State is located in the Mississippi Delta, a geographical area that serves as a microcosm of multiculturalism and provides a prime opportunity for students to have multiple, layered, and constant opportunities to experience cultural diversity. *Improving Cultural Competency* will use the environmental factors and the rich history of the Delta to develop and enhance the intercultural skills of its students.

Through the activities of the QEP, students will discover and learn about other cultures; confront and understand cultural biases and differences; develop and improve intercultural communication skills; develop and practice empathic skills; and engage effectively within a globalized society. As the literature suggests, working in an increasingly multicultural society and global economy takes more than just simple interaction. Cultural competency is not innate and cannot be assumed; by taking full advantage of its location, rich history, and bountiful cultural resources, Delta State is proactive in improving its students’ worldview.

The QEP has adopted as its definition of cultural competency “effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts,” used by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) in the “Intercultural Competence and Knowledge Value Rubric.” The definition is adapted from J.M. Bennett (2008) in “Transformative training: Designing programs for culture learning,” in *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Understanding and utilizing cultural diversity to build successful organizations*, ed. M. A. Moodian. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. The QEP has operationalized its definition of cultural competency by adopting *intercultural communication* as the method by which to gauge student achievement of outcomes in those “effective and appropriate interactions.”

Improving Cultural Competency has three primary student learning outcomes: (1) Describe various aspects of cultural diversity; (2) Articulate a shared understanding and support of cross-cultural experiences; (3) Evaluate cultural perspectives with openness and respect. To implement the plan, the QEP uses several strategies to infuse cultural competency into the undergraduate academic experience from start to finish. In the first year seminar, mentors imbed multiple intercultural experiences and activities. In general education courses and in major-specific, upper division courses, academic departments incorporate cultural competency via academic assignments aligned with inter- and multi-cultural objectives specific to the discipline. Finally, the plan supports, promotes, and creates culturally rich and instructive extracurricular events. To create and maintain an institution-wide environment of cultural competency, development opportunities are scheduled for faculty, staff, and administrators. The assessment of the plan is systematic and rigorous and includes departmental evaluation reports on SLO’s, the nationally-normed Global Perspective Inventory for freshmen and seniors, general education curriculum and learning outcomes evaluations, event-specific surveys, and review by the QEP Coordinator and the QEP Advisory Group.

Delta State University has committed to the efforts of *Improving Cultural Competency* with the dedication of human and financial resources for the five-year implementation. The QEP coordinator will oversee the implementation of strategies, faculty development activities, extracurricular scheduling, and the assessment plan.

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