

The Oregon State Library's 2007 Cultural Competence Initiative

written by Jessica Hopkins on behalf of the Cultural Competency Committee

In response to the Governor's Cultural Competency Initiative, the Oregon State Library board directed the library staff to explore avenues for building cultural competency. In late 2005 a group of staff from our library organized into a committee with the goal of making our library more culturally competent. We brainstormed what a culturally competent library would look like and how to get there. After some discussion we came up with a chart showing the stages of cultural competence with examples of how an individual might behave at each stage. A short time later we decided to make the committee a permanent one as we realized that cultural competency knowledge can always be improved upon.

We titled the project "2007 Cultural Competency Initiative." With further discussion we began to make plans for how we would offer staff members opportunities to increase their cultural competence. We wanted to engage our staff in a variety of activities which would appeal to different learning styles. It was decided to have one mandatory introductory session, followed by an assortment of other offerings for individuals to choose from.

Cultural competency resources were researched. A bibliography was created of our library's collection of relevant materials. Movies, books, and other resources outside the library were researched. A list was made of upcoming events that would count toward becoming more culturally competent. Two library staff members participated in the local YWCA's diversity conference planning committee.

We set a goal of creating at least six events for our staff to participate in besides the introductory session. We also wanted to ensure that each event would include discussion and active participation, not just attendance or passive learning. It was decided that each staff member would be required to participate in at least two events following the introductory one.

When all the preliminary planning was done, we had eleven events for staff to choose from, in addition to the introductory session. These included four films, two lectures, two panel discussions, an all day conference, a book discussion group, and a nearby drop in event titled Tribal Information Day. Tribal Information Day is an annual event held at the Capitol. There are singers and dancers from various tribes. The tribes also provide information tables with handouts.

The four films offered included Understanding Prejudice, MEET: Generations in the workplace, How biased are you?, and one about a family who had been in the Japanese internment camps during World War II titled A Family Gathering.

There was a panel on Chinese Culture. The panelists were: Rosalind Wang, bicultural librarian from the Multnomah County Library, Amy Lee, access librarian from the Fort Vancouver Regional Library, Jan Wang, cataloging librarian from Portland State University and Angela Lee, catalog librarian from the Washington County Cooperative Library Service. The panel discussed Chinese people around the world, their languages, and ways that they are similar and different from each other and the dominant American culture.

The other panel discussed developing culturally competent libraries. Rita Jimenez, Neighborhood Libraries Director from the Multnomah County Library and Marion Mercier of the Grand Ronde Tribal library each spoke about a community needs assessment completed by their library. Robin Purcetti from the Independence Public Library discussed their Spanish-English club. Carol Reich, Youth Services Manager of the Hillsboro Library presented information on their international storytimes. These are stories presented in a variety of languages by a volunteer native speaker.

The lectures included one on Frances Fuller Victor, a Northwestern woman historian and author. The second lecture concerned Japanese-American veterans from the Hood River area in Oregon.

The YWCA diversity conference was an all day event with a wide variety of workshops presented. The previously compiled bibliography of our cultural competence related holdings was offered as a handout at the conference. Workshop topics included racism, sexism, and gay issues.

The Cultural Competency Initiative was very successful. We met our participation goals and have received very positive feedback from staff on the events. Most members of the Cultural Competency Committee were very active in designing, hosting and facilitating the wide range of activities that we presented. The average employee attended two to three sessions. Average turnout per session was ten people, nearly a quarter of our total number of employees. Staff members who worked part time or were employed less than half the year were only required to attend one event instead of two.

Flexibility was important as adjustments were made over the year. Staff expressed interest in attending after hours events and other events not listed. The Cultural Competence Committee created a plan to accommodate these requests and provide training credit. Three staff members took advantage of this option.

Two of the original films were replaced when staff found newer or more valuable ones. The original plan for the book discussion was scrapped due to lack of interest. Committee members instead engaged staff in selecting a book. The one chosen was about Native American culture and white society. The group launched a very successful program which will serve as a model for future book discussions.

To wrap up the Initiative, staff held a celebration early in 2008. This highlighted the success of the program and shared staff input on the value of the Initiative. All supporting materials were collected onto a web page to serve as a resource for future development.