2009 Faculty Retreat  
Cases involving Diversity Issues in the Classroom

Overall
Ten faculty break-out sessions were conducted for over one hour during the faculty retreat on September 8, 2009.

The breakout sessions included facilitated discussions of two case studies (attached), selected by CEDI task force members for their relevance to Campus Climate Survey results, for their relative economy of expression, and their open-endedness for the purposes of stimulating conversation. Two case studies were selected to account for different kinds of scenarios in classrooms related to different disciplines. The first case study was chosen because it highlighted a type of situation reported in the Campus Climate Survey where the reported difficulties, even in the classroom, stem from student comments and behavior. The second case study was chosen, among other things, for the way it raises issues common to an increasingly international student body, issues particularly germane to science classrooms, and issues of group work, identified as a considerable source of tension in the Campus Climate Survey.

Evaluation of Exercise
This is but one exercise among faculty that is part of a much broader effort by the Community Equity and Diversity Initiative to promote a healthier campus climate. Still, the evaluations for the exercise were quite positive. Of the 47 Faculty Retreat Evaluation Respondents who attended the breakout sessions, the following marks were given the case study breakout discussion. Faculty respondents overwhelmingly welcomed the opportunity to examine with one another difficult diversity related classroom situations, and reported gaining new insights from the conversations. Constructive criticisms of the exercise called for more time, for more Carleton-specific cases, and for more vigorously directed discussions.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Poor</td>
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N=47 respondents attending the breakout sessions
CASE STUDY I

The class is discussing a novel in which a Native American teenager is sexually abused by her stepfather. One white student says it’s an important thing to depict, because “we all know that male dominance and violence against women is more widespread and damaging in minority communities than white communities.” She argues that the novel courageously represent a cultural difference that needs to be brought to light. A few students look uncomfortable, and someone changes the subject entirely. An African-American student speaks up, “Excuse me for interrupting, but that was messed up. At first it sounded like a feminist comment, but it’s really a racist comment.” The students look to the professor. What should s/he do?
Source: Temple University Center for Teaching and Learning (used at faculty retreat with permission).

CASE STUDY II

Mike Bertal always rolled up his sleeves when he entered his design classroom. A highly motivated and physically active professor in his late thirties, Mike still remembered what it was like to be a college student. He was committed to improving the educational experience of the next generation of engineers.

This semester, Mike was teaching an introductory engineering design course at his university – a large, public institution in the United States. Mike enjoyed involving his students in lively experiential activities, such as discussions of real-world applications and ethical and environmental issues. His teaching was founded on principles of collaborative learning. In recognition of his high satisfaction ratings from students, Mike recently won a university award for excellence in teaching.

One student in his class, who had recently come to the United States for undergraduate studies, seemed particularly reserved, perhaps even uncomfortable. The student did not participate in group discussions. His projects, although they were proficient, accurate and detailed, did not offer evidence of original thinking or creativity. Mike was concerned about the issue, but had not yet talked with the student.

Halfway into the semester, Mike gave his students an assignment which did not involve group work. This project required that his students develop a simple and practical solution to an engineering problem. This assignment would count for 25% of the students’ grades in the class. Many of the students were excited about their task and began generating ideas immediately. They continued to gesture and describe their projects as they walked out into the hallway.

The international student approached Mike cautiously as Mike was gathering up his books. Addressing Mike formally, the student said, “Professor Bertal, I do not understand this project.”

Source: U. Wisconsin, Madison, Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning, *Case Book Diversity Resources* (used in breakout session with permission)