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I Thought I Knew All About Diversity—But There’s Always More to Learn

By Anjella Warnshuis
UCF Forum columnist
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I have many fond memories of listening to former UCF President John C. Hitt talk about the importance of being both diverse *and* inclusive. The items are equally important because we could be diverse and not get along, or we could be inclusive by all thinking alike—but diverse thoughts are needed for growth.

I have always sought out opportunities to learn and prepare for the future. I find human behavior fascinating. I took my first psychology class in high school and attended the Math Science Initiative Project during summers when I took psychology electives, conducted research and presented at symposiums. In college I took more psychology

classes and added philosophy to the mix. It's been a couple of decades and I still read *Psychology Today* sometimes for fun.

When I started taking some classes through UCF's Office of Diversity and Inclusion years ago, I felt like I already had a pretty strong knowledge base of how people think. As a member of several disadvantaged groups, I thought there wasn't much for me to learn in these areas, but this is the type of topic I am intrigued by so I started taking classes.

A lot of the classes weren't necessarily new information in terms of the theories but I was exposed to content that I had not seen before. I learned *The Danger of a Single Story* from author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and saw just how small my world was, despite my international travels. I was reminded in class of the power of words as we explored the origins of derogatory phrases, some of which are still used. I had the opportunity to dive deeper in the history of the early American settlers' impact on the native population and civil rights than I ever had before.

I earned my Diversity Certificate and became a UCF Inclusion Champion but there was still more to learn. Last year I applied for UCF's [Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity](#) (SEED) program, where we learn about a variety of topics relating to diversity such as sexism, racism, classism, etc. The yearlong program gives us the opportunity to not just talk about a subject but to have the time to provide deeper reflection into how that topic has personally impacted our lives.

It's one thing to look at the messages being distributed in society and another to look at how those messages have played out in your individual life.

Titles and rank are left at the door and we've gotten to know our cohort members on a personal level. We laugh together. We cry together. We grow together.

For me, the best part of SEED has been what I've learned about myself. The exercises have forced me to examine myself in a way I had not previously. It's one thing to look at the messages being distributed in society and another to look at how those messages have played out in your individual life.

What messages have you accepted? What messages have you contributed to the continuation of without questioning? What can you personally do to make a difference, even if that difference is only in how you present yourself?

SEED has helped me to understand the value of my voice. For a long time I didn't really think I had a voice. I recently realized that I had been using my voice on behalf of others and to make sure that rules were followed but I became silent when it was time to advocate for myself.

I am thankful for having the opportunity to participate in professional development to make me stronger. I encourage others to apply for the next SEED cohort or other professional development courses.

You never know what you might find out about yourself once you go digging.