



PROGRAM REPORT

University of Richmond

August 18, 2006

Background:

The Virginia Conference for Community and Justice conducted a customized training for the University of Richmond on August 18, 2006. The training brought together four key student leader populations: general orientation advisors, international orientation advisors, pre-orientation advisors, and resident assistants. Utilizing both large and small group components, the training session featured a keynote presentation entitled "Break the Cycle: Be the Change," an interactive session consisting of skits, role plays, and facilitated dialogue. In breakout groups of up to 45 students each, participants engaged in a series of intensive, interactive discussions designed to challenge them to think critically about issues of identity, diversity, and prejudice. A customized curriculum was developed by VCCJ to strategically meet the needs of the University of Richmond, as determined through conversations and correspondence with the designated representative of the University administration.

The goal of the program was to provide the knowledge and skills for Orientation Advisors, International Orientation Advisors, Pre-Orientation Advisors, and Resident Assistants to create more inclusive and affirming living communities and learning environments at the University of Richmond. The objectives of the program were to provide a forum for participants to:

1. *Express an increased awareness of how attitudes, beliefs, behavior and language can impact the relationships among students at the University of Richmond*
2. *Have an increased understanding of the communication skills needed when working within a diverse community*
3. *Demonstrate an ability to intervene in an inter-group relations conflict as a result of skills learned in the program*
4. *Develop strategies to involve others in the process of increasing cohesiveness and inclusion of different groups at the University of Richmond*

Program Summary:

The initial breakout session focused on "Exploring Personal Identity." Through pair and small group conversations, participants were able to consider individual aspects of difference and personal experiences with prejudice. Through these conversations, norms and camaraderie were established that set a foundation for later discussion. The "Break the Cycle: Be the Change" keynote presentation focused broadly on the topic of prejudice, and particularly the sources and manifestations of prejudice in a variety of contexts. With a particular emphasis on the subtleties of prejudice, the keynote challenged participants to begin to explore what is truly involved in creating genuinely inclusive spaces.

Ensuing breakout sessions transitioned the program from raising knowledge to building skills. "Anticipating Challenges and Identifying Resources" offered an opportunity for participants to brainstorm the factors that might make it difficult for students to feel affirmed at the University based on their identities and then identify those resources on campus that support students of different identities. "Responding to Challenging Situations" provided a forum for role playing, with participants given different roles and identities to consider how to react to challenging interpersonal experiences with diversity and prejudice.

Climate at the University of Richmond:

Before the program began, participants completed pre-assessments. Data collected was used primarily to assess the climate at the University of Richmond and get an initial sense of participants' self-awareness around diversity issues. 193 participants completed the pre-assessment.

Table 1 presents participant pre-assessment responses to prompts regarding how often they heard certain comments at the University of Richmond in their past three months on campus:

TABLE 1 Frequency of Stereotypes		
In your last 3 months at UR, how often did you hear...	Often (30+ times)	Sometimes (10-29 times)
1. A stereotype based on <u>race</u>	28%	45%
2. A stereotype based on <u>gender</u>	28%	43%
3. A stereotype based on <u>sexual orientation</u>	27%	38%
4. A stereotype based on <u>religious identity</u>	9%	23%
5. A stereotype based on <u>body type</u>	28%	38%
6. A stereotype based on <u>ability status</u>	10%	22%
7. A stereotype based on <u>national origin</u>	12%	27%

The frequency of stereotypic comments demonstrates the need for multicultural programming and education at the University of Richmond. What is particularly striking is the high number of statements based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and body type. Program objectives aimed to raise participants' comfort levels in confronting such statements, with results noted in table 4.

Evaluation Data:

Table 2 presents overall impressions of this program, based on post-program responses.

TABLE 2 Overall Impressions of the Program	
	Strongly Agree/ Agree
Overall Reaction	
1. I would recommend this training to a friend.	86%
Awareness Raised	
2. I have an <u>increased</u> understanding and appreciation for people of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and ethnicities.	92%
3. I have an <u>increased</u> understanding of the effects of stereotypes and assumptions.	90%
4. I have a <u>better</u> understanding of the pain some people feel because of discrimination.	89%
5. I am <u>more</u> aware of my own stereotypes and prejudices.	83%

6. I am <i>more</i> aware of how I deal with conflicts and have good strategies for working through conflict with others.	82%
<i>Ability to Apply Learning</i>	
7. I am <i>more</i> open to having friends of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and ethnicities.	91%
8. I have learned skills that help me to work for causes and issues in which I believe.	80%
9. As a result of this training, I will be able to contribute to people getting along better at UR.	83%
10. I feel comfortable that I can use my skills and knowledge in my position at UR this year.	93%

Overall Reaction:

86% of participants agreed with the prompt *“I would recommend this training to a friend,”* with 50% strongly agreeing with that statement. Comments affirmed the positive impression of the program, with responses including *“every U of R student should attend,”* *“This training is AWESOME and should absolutely be mandatory for [all] OAs/RAs,”* and *“it would be nice if this program were introduced to the general student body.”*

Awareness Raised:

A significant portion of the training was designated to raise participants’ awareness of issues of prejudice and identity, particularly related to the subtleties of discrimination. Studies show that participation in multicultural workshops increases knowledge of one’s own identity and willingness to recognize differences between self and others (Parker, et al 1998), factors critical to the development of leaders able to embrace diversity.

Evaluation data confirmed respondent learning with 90% of participants agreeing with the statement *“I have an increased understanding and appreciation of people of different races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and ethnicities.”* Regarding self awareness, 83% of participants agreed with the prompt that *“I am more aware of my own stereotypes and prejudices.”* Furthermore, 89% agreed that *“I have a better understanding of the pain some people feel because of discrimination,”* demonstrating growth in the level of empathy. These high scores reflect significant learning and support the idea that many of the program objectives related to awareness were met. One student even described the program as a *“wonderful realization,”* with another noting that *“the honest, personal stories were most useful.”* In addition to these immediate positive responses, is also important to recognize that heightened awareness is often not realized until long after programs end, so answers related to learning outcomes could be even more encouraging months after the training.

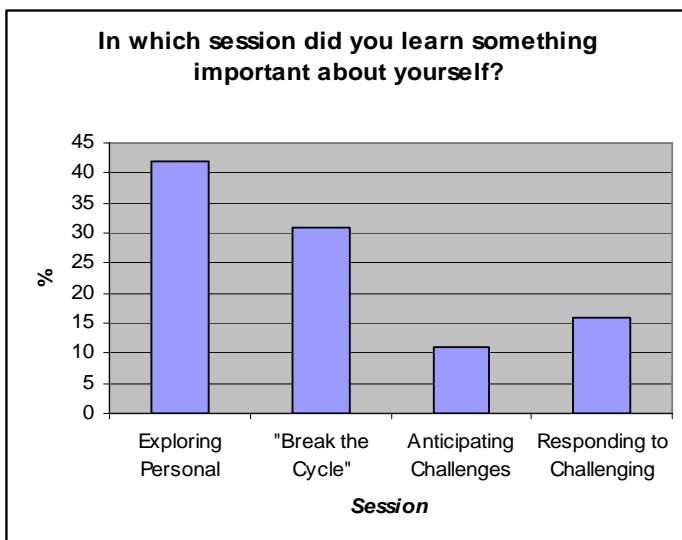
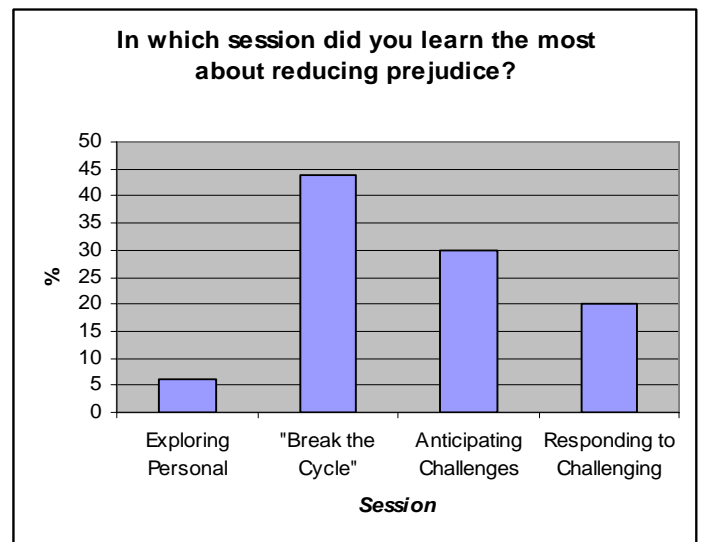
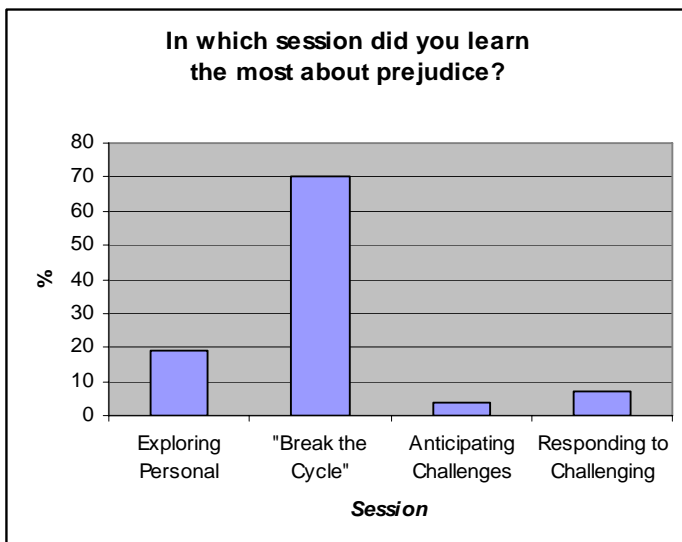
Ability to Apply Learning:

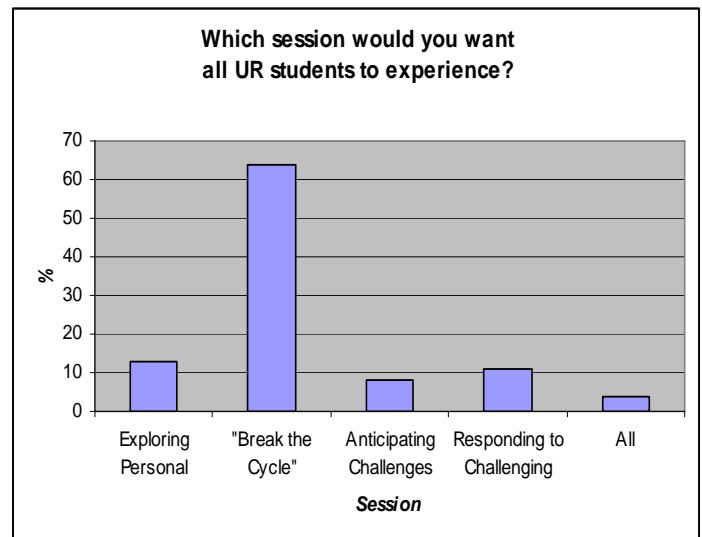
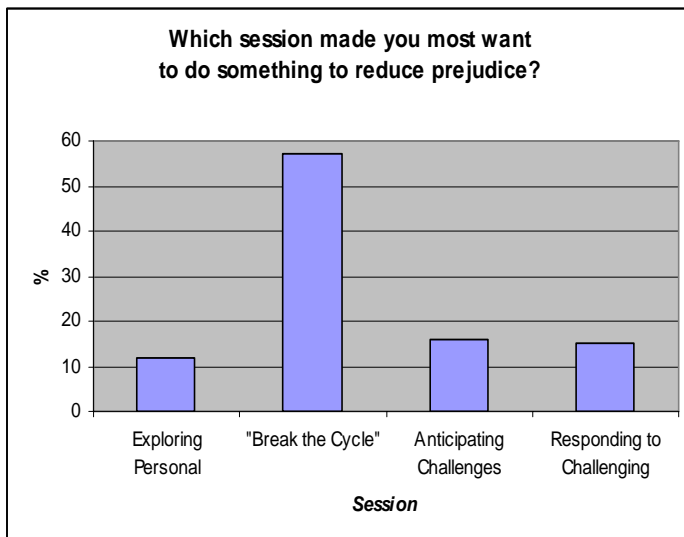
The closing breakout session of the program was designed for skill-building, with a focus on conflict resolution and interpersonal communication skills. 80% of participants agreed that *“I have learned skills that help me to work for causes and issues in which I believe.”* To the prompt *“I will be able to contribute to people getting along better at UR,”* 83% agreed, with nearly 50% strongly agreeing. One participant commented that *“the skits we did in our own groups were interesting because they were so realistic.”* Another, recognizing the need for the information learned to be applied, commented *“it is imperative that what we learned is passed down to incoming students.”*

TABLE 3 Value of Workshops (1=no increase; 7=greatly increased knowledge)	
Session	Mean
Exploring Personal Identity	4.77
"Break the Cycle: Be the Change" Presentation	5.25
Anticipating Challenges & Identifying Resources	5.07
Responding to Challenging Situations	5.06

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each session conducted during the training increased their knowledge or provided new insights. Table 3 presents the results. "Break the Cycle: Be the Change" was noted as the most powerful, but all were ranked highly in terms of raising knowledge or providing new insights.

In addition to assessing the value of each workshop, participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to the activities. The six charts below present the results.





The results demonstrate that the “Break the Cycle: Be the Change” session had the highest impact with regards to learning about prejudice. Self-awareness was most heightened by “Exploring Personal Experiences,” and capacity and skill building were most enhanced by “Responding to Challenging Situations.” “Anticipating Challenges and Identifying Resources” was ranked second in terms of learning the most about reducing prejudice and giving skills to act as an agent of change.

The program curriculum was designed using the “Confirmation, Contradiction, Continuity” model for multicultural education (Goodman, 2001). Early components focused on building rapport and developing safety for the conversation. Student comments supported those results, with comments about the first session noting that it “[provided] greater understanding of self,” and “it is simple but effective. Every student at UR could do [this] easily and walk away with something.”

The contradiction phase challenged assumptions and previously held notions in an effort to raise awareness. Comments about “Break the Cycle: Be the Change” included that “the presentation is too ‘in your face’ to be ignored,” “[was] very intense and impactful,” and that “it not only shows prejudices; it evokes personal emotions otherwise hidden.”

Continuity offers a forum to develop skills to apply learning following the program. Student comments included “people have real situations that come up, and it is important that everyone have the skills to react to difficult problems,” “[this] was a realistic way to learn about prejudices and how to handle them,” and “this forced me to reflect and think about my own preconceived notions and their influence on my mind and thoughts.”

The positive responses to each of the four sessions in the training program demonstrates that the curriculum met the “Confirmation, Contradiction, Continuity” model. The success of the design is further reinforced by post-assessment responses to prompts regarding comfort in confronting stereotypes. Table 4 presents the results.

TABLE 4 Comfort Confronting Stereotypes		
How comfortable are you in the following situations?	Completely Comfortable	Sometimes Comfortable
1. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>race</u>	38%	52%
2. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>gender</u>	57%	38%
3. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>sexual orientation</u>	42%	49%
4. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>religious identity</u>	54%	45%
5. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>body type</u>	50%	41%
6. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>ability status</u>	52%	42%
7. Confronting a stereotype based on <u>national origin</u>	52%	45%

The high response rates indicate a strong commitment to developing inclusive and bias-free spaces across the University of Richmond campus. Particularly notable are the fact that 90% of student respondents are at least somewhat comfortable confronting stereotypes on all of the issues offered.

Discussion and Recommendations:

Participant feedback shows the effectiveness of the program in meeting stated objectives. Particularly notable are the amount of evaluation prompts with at least 80% agreement. Respondents obviously felt that the experience was a valuable use of their time, that their awareness was raised, and that they gained skills that would be useful in their leadership positions at the University of Richmond.

Two challenges, both in developing the curriculum and delivering the program, were in the size of the group and the number of leadership positions being trained at once. Typical VCCJ programs work with small audiences of no more than 40 people at a time. When discussing personal issues of identity and discrimination, it becomes difficult to personalize the subject and feel individually motivated to work for change when the number of participants is in the hundreds, as was the case in this program. The task becomes even more challenging when the desire is to go deep enough to consider elements of inclusive diversity, although data demonstrates that some important progress was made in that regard.

Furthermore, the fact that general orientation advisors, international orientation advisors, pre-orientation advisors, and resident assistants all have different responsibilities made it difficult to develop a curriculum that could be applicable for all contexts and needs. That said, evaluation data did not differ significantly depending on participants' positions, meaning that the curriculum was received well by all positions. And, some student comments reflected an appreciation for the different perspectives being in the same room, so there was some benefit to keeping everyone together. At the same time, there might be a better and more customized way to deliver the material if the groups all met together for one session (like the "Break the Cycle: Be the Change" presentation) and then had position-specific training in separate groups. That should be a consideration for future programs.

The time of day and amount of time designated for the program could also be considered when planning for the future. Having the program on a Friday evening and as the first session for Orientation Advisors posed some challenges, primarily seen in terms of student energy level and anecdotal comments made during the program. That said, very few post-assessment comments referenced those issues, with only 4% of participants commenting that they felt the evening was too long.

Overall, evaluation data demonstrates that participants had a very positive experience, in which they developed strong connections, raised personal awareness, and developed skills to apply their learning. Several factors contributed to the success of the training. The commitment of the University of Richmond to designate significant time to multicultural education is important and communicates a level of investment that seemed to be understood and appreciated by student participants. The students themselves were willing to take risks, share with others, and grapple deeply with the issues being introduced. Holding the program uninterrupted for several hours allowed for a greater sense of intimacy and bonding and forced the participants to consider difficult issues in a more honest and candid way. Finally, the program curriculum, strategically designed to meet the needs of the University of Richmond, was found to be thought provoking, and challenging, and was overwhelmingly well-received.