DIVERSITY EDUCATION:
PROMOTING ETHICAL BEHAVIOR AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Ralph Ocon

Purdue University Calumet, Indiana; Email: ocon@calumet.purdue.edu

1. INTRODUCTION

Often, what happens in the workplace is a reflection of what is happening in society. For example, illegal drug use, violence, and diversity are major concerns in American society. Likewise, these issues are major concerns in most workplaces, regardless of the economic sector involved. Promoting ethical behavior has also been a concern for both American society and the business community (Zadek, 2004). Over the last several decades, much progress has been made in the area of ethical behavior and civil rights, resulting in the development of laws, policies and training designed to eliminate prejudice, harassment and discrimination in the workplace (Bennett-Alexander and Hartman, 2004).

However, in the wake of 9-11 and other recent events, both domestic and foreign, new emphasis has been placed on ways to reduce the fear or threat of terrorism and ensure national/homeland security (Freinkel, 2002). Unfortunately, these recent events have also created a fear of diversity, especially people from other cultures, and made some Americans so obsessed about terrorism and national security that they have forgotten about the importance of ethical behavior and the benefits of diversity. Some Americans believe that promoting national security and behaving ethically toward people of different cultural groups are mutually exclusive endeavors. However, it's imperative that American businesses do not forego the benefits of diversity and ethical behavior due to stereotypes and prejudice based on the fear about people from other cultures.

As is true with most societal and business concerns, academia can take the initiative in finding a solution for what appears to some to be a dichotomy in promoting ethical behavior and national security. Although various solutions have been advanced for dealing with these concerns, the one that offers the best scenario for everyone involved and therefore, has the highest probability for long term success is diversity education. Such education can promote ethical behavior, and the understanding and respect of people from other cultures while simultaneously reducing the threat of terrorism and promoting national security.

Having taught diversity management for several years, the instructor has witnessed the positive influence diversity education can have on intercultural relationships, and the thinking and behavior of students. The diversity management course is listed as OLS 454 in the Manufacturing Engineering Technologies and Supervision (METS) department at Purdue

University Calumet, in Hammond, Indiana. This paper will describe how ethical behavior and national security can simultaneously be achieved through diversity education and identify the diversity topics that should be taught to improve intercultural relationships.

2. FEAR OF DIVERSITY

Historically speaking, misunderstanding and fear about people from other cultures or people who are perceived to be different is not a new concern for American society or the workplace. History cites numerous examples of how ignorance of diversity or the lack of understanding about a given cultural group resulted in stereotyping, prejudice and inappropriate behavior (Cooper and White, 2004). What is new about the current fear is the potential for overreaction and the far reaching impact it may have for the U.S. and the rest of the world, especially given the importance of diversity and globalization for the success of the American business community. American businesses must exercise care to not undermine the decades of advances made in workforce diversity because of fears about people from other cultures. Left unchecked, this fear can escalate and not only impede further development in the area of diversity and ethical behavior, but reverse much of the progress made, resulting in greater misunderstanding, fear, prejudice and discrimination against different cultural groups in the American society and workplace, and the global community.

3. NATIONAL SECURITY, ETHICS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Can ethical behavior and national security be promoted simultaneously, or are they mutually exclusive endeavors requiring different approaches for each to be realized? Unfortunately, many Americans believe that to ensure national security it must be done at the expense of behaving ethically toward people of other cultures. Along with that belief is the different value placed on these two endeavors, with national security being viewed by many as the most urgent and important compared to ethical behavior. However, this belief is based on the emotion of fear, a lack of understanding about diversity, and the desire for an easy and immediate solution to a problem with potentially unlimited destructive consequences. Fear sometimes causes people to behave emotionally, irrationally and without thought to the long term consequences of decision-making and behavior. In the workplace, stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination resulting from the fear of people who are considered to be "different" can, not only undermine ethical behavior, but have a negative impact on organizational performance, morale and the ability to compete in the global economy.

The American business community has the unique opportunity to positively influence intercultural ethics and behavior on both a national and global scale at a time when it may not be popular to do so among some Americans. Rather than restricting or abandoning ethical standards when dealing with people from different cultures, corporate America has the social responsibility to treat everyone in a fair and equitable manner, and to act in ways that are consistent with being a positive role model for American society and the global community (Zadek, 2004). Through globalization, American companies will continue to be exposed to people from different cultures and as a result, have the opportunity to promote mutual understanding and respect. By

considering the long term consequences of their actions and business practices, the American business community can improve its global image and have a positive influence on intercultural relationship throughout the world. At a time when the U.S. is recognized as a military and economic superpower, with the help of the business community, it has the opportunity to be recognized and establish the standard for a humanitarian superpower. By promoting intercultural ethical behavior, American businesses can play a pivotal role in ensuring national security.

4. DIVERSITY EDUCATION AS THE SOLUTION

As is true with most fears, the solution for overcoming the fear and misunderstanding associated with people from different cultures and promoting ethical behavior lies with the knowledge that diversity education can provide (Cooper and White, 2004; Nieto, 2004). Diversity education, specifically intercultural understanding, can provide the knowledge necessary to create mutual understanding and respect between people from different cultures. Consequently, it is the most effective solution for dealing with the fear of people from other cultures, promoting ethical behavior and ensuring national security.

Through diversity education, managers and employees of American companies can learn how to effectively interact with people from different cultures, both in the U.S. and abroad. Such education can promote the mutual understanding and respect necessary for positive intercultural relationships and help American businesses to dispel some of the common, but negative myths and stereotypes about Americans, including their perceived indifference toward people of other cultures. The benefits resulting from such education will not only benefit U.S. businesses as they pursue globalization, but the global community in general. In the long term, diversity education can improve relationships between the U.S. and other cultures of the world while simultaneously promoting ethical behavior and reducing the fear or threat of terrorism. Given the interdependent nature of the global community, in time, people from different parts of the world may come to realize that they have more in common with each other than differences and by working together everyone can benefit.

As is true with most education, learning how to interact with people from different cultures is a continuous process and therefore, requires time and patience. Because learning is a gradual process, some of the benefits resulting from diversity education may not be realized until years later. However, the benefits of such education can produce long term dividends for everyone involved. Not only for the proponents of national security and ethical behavior, but also for the entire global community, resulting in a win-win-win scenario. A scenario where everyone involved wins or benefits is the only long term solution, since anything else will be short term (Covey, 2004).

5. IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

The omnipresent effects of globalization have increased the frequency of interaction and degree of interdependence between nations and diverse people forcing the business community to have to deal with diversity issues. Therefore, success for American businesses is contingent on the

abilities of managers and employees to understand and work with people with diverse backgrounds and cultures on both a national and international level. As the future leaders of business organizations and the global community, engineering students will need to learn how to effectively manage and interact with people who are different or perceived to be different. Engineering programs can take the initiative by providing diversity education to ensure that students develop the requisite skills for this endeavor.

Acknowledging the future leadership roles of engineering students, many engineering curriculums, including those in the METS department, have emphasized the importance of diversity education to help students develop their leadership skills. As future leaders, students will have a tremendous impact on upcoming events that will affect everyone everywhere. Consequently, diversity education is one of the key types of training engineering students must receive if they are going to be effective leaders.

6. BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY EDUCATION

Although diversity presents certain concerns that American society and the business community must learn to deal with, it also offers the potential for enormous benefits and opportunities. From a reduction in prejudice and discrimination to an improvement in self awareness and organizational teamwork, the benefits of diversity education can have a tremendous direct and indirect effect on individuals, American society and the workplace, and the global community. Table 1 lists some of the major benefits American businesses can derive from diversity education (Cooper and White, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Ocon, 2004).

Table 1: Benefits to American businesses from diversity education

Creates the acceptance of people as they are without regard to race, culture, gender or other immutable characteristics	Promotes ethical behavior by encouraging fair and equitable treatment for everyone
Promotes effective intercultural relationships	Recognition of diversity as a legitimate business issue and part of strategic planning
Improves teamwork and the ability to effectively compete in the global economy	Promotes a management style that is conducive with a diverse workforce
Recognition of employees' pride associated with cultural and ethnic heritage	Avoids/limits employment discrimination and lawsuits
Recognition that different thinking styles can promote creative decision-making and problem-solving, and innovative thinking	Recognition of diversity as a competitive resource/advantage
Promotes proactive behavior, by creating awareness of diversity issues and concerns	

As Table 1 indicates, the benefits of diversity education go beyond the debate surrounding national security and ethical behavior. By satisfying the proponents of national security and ethical behavior, along with improving intercultural relationships throughout the global community in general, diversity education can result in a win-win-win scenario.

7. IMPROVING INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Based on the instructor's research and, academic and industry experience in providing diversity education, using the issues based learning approach is an effective way to teach diversity and improve intercultural relationships (Ocon, 2004). The issues based learning approach identifies and uses critical diversity issues to expose students and/or trainees to a variety of diversity related concerns. This teaching/training approach has successfully been used in both academia and industry to promote the understanding of diversity. To improve intercultural relationships, several diversity topics need to be part of the diversity educational process. Table 2 lists the relevant diversity topics that need to be discussed to improve intercultural relationships (Cooper and White, 2004; Nieto, 2004; Ocon, 2004).

Table 2: <u>Diversity topics for improving intercultural relationships</u>

An overview of diversity, including an inclusive definition of diversity and identifying the benefits associated with diversity.	Understand how national security and business ethics can be promoted through diversity education and improved intercultural relationships.
Learn about different cultural values, including religious beliefs and guidelines for effective intercultural communication.	Understand how to resolve diversity related disputes
Learn about strategies to overcome stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.	Understand the pertinent (equal employment opportunity) laws related to diversity in the workplace.

8. ASSESSMENT

Each semester, several assessment tools are used to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the diversity education provided (including material on how to improve intercultural relationships) in the instructor's diversity management course. The results from these assessments reinforce the effectiveness of diversity education and the position taken in this paper. Listed below are some of the assessment tools the instructors used with last semester's class to evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of the diversity education provided.

8.1 Course evaluations

The instructor evaluates the effectiveness of the diversity education provided in OLS 454 using student evaluations which consist of between 16-20 questions about the course. Table 3 lists the average rating from student evaluations for 2000- 2004.

Table 3: <u>Average rating from student evaluations for OLS 454.</u>

Year:	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Semester:	Fall	Fall	Fall	Fall	Fall
Students:	17	15	16	14	18
Avg. Rating:	4.72	4.86	4.88	4.72	4.86

Rating Scale: (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Undecided, (2) Disagree, (1) Strongly Disagree

8.2 Pre and Post Test

To evaluate the effectiveness and degree of learning that occurred in the OLS 454, the instructor administered a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and a post-test at the end of the semester. The questions asked on both test were the same and reflected a sample of the various diversity issues covered in the course. Table 4 lists the results from last semester's pre and post test.

Table 4: <u>Results from the pre-test and post-test for OLS 454 (Fall 2004)</u>

(Pre-test) number of students: 19	(Post-test) number of students: 18
Average percent of correct answers: 44%	Average percent of correct answers: 74.7%

8.3 Student Continuous Improvement Surveys

Continuous improvement is the nomenclature used in academia and industry for the process of evaluation and improvement. Each semester the instructor administers such a survey for OLS 454 to evaluate and improve the course for the subsequent semester. The concerns identified in this paper, ethical behavior and national/homeland security, are frequently discussed in the instructor's diversity course. As a result, when students who have taken the instructor's course are asked what type of diversity education is needed to improve intercultural relationships, their responses are consistent with the topics identified in Table 2. Table 5 lists the average rating from selective responses to questions from last semester's survey.

Table 5: <u>Average rating of selective responses from the Continuous Improvement Survey (Fall 2004)</u>

On a scale from 1-5 (1= little change and 5= great change) rate how your perception of people from other cultures has been influenced as a result of this course: 3.39	On a scale from 1-5 (1= little value and 5= great value) rate how important diversity education is for improving relationships between people of different cultures: 4.5
On a scale from 1-5 (1= not optimistic and 5= highly optimistic) rate how optimistic you are about improved relationships between people of different cultures in the long term (10 years) without diversity education/training: 3.04	On a scale from 1-5 (1= little improvement and 5= major improvement) rate your belief on how well diversity education/training can improve the following areas:
Reducing stereotyping: 3.94	Reducing prejudice: 4.25
Reducing discrimination: 4.19	Improving communication between cultures: 4.0
Improving national security: 3.5	Reducing terrorism: 3.5

On a scale from 1-5 (1= little benefit and 5= much benefit), rate the degree of benefit for each group resulting from diversity education:
     People of the world: 4.63   The American people: 4.75
     American Businesses: 4.56 International Business Community: 4.4	

9. CONCLUSION

As globalization continues, interaction between people from different cultures is going to increase. Unfortunately, the current fear resulting from the threat of global terrorism and concerns about how to promote national security has the potential to undermine ethical behavior and the benefits associated with diversity. How American society and the business community respond to this fear will have a profound influence on the prospects for national security, globalization, intercultural ethics and diversity in general. Throughout history, education has been t he solution for overcoming people related concerns, including fears about people from other cultures. In the long term, the most effective solution for simultaneously promoting national security and ethical behavior toward people from different cultures is through diversity education. The benefits resulting from this type of education go beyond the concerns about national security and ethical behavior, and affect all aspects of human interaction.

REFERENCES

Bennett-Alexander, D.D. and Hartman, L.P. (2004). *Employment Law for Business*. 77-513. McGraw-Hill/Irwin, New York.

Cooper, K. and White, R.E. (2004). *Burning Issues: Foundations of Education.* 47-53 and 111- 162. Scarecrow Education, Lanham.

Covey, S. (2004). The Secrets of his Success. *Fortune Magazine* (Interview by Fenner, E.), **150,** (11), 156-168.

Freinkel, S. (2002).Taking on the Unthinkable. *Reader's Digest* , **Feb.**, 61-66.

Nieto, S. (2004). Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education. *Harvard Educational Review* (Review by Carter, D.J.), **74,** (4), 465-467.

Ocon, R. (2004). Using Issues to Teaching Diversity: An Interactive Learning Approach. A*SEE/IEEE 2004 Frontiers in Education Conference, 0-7803-8553, (S1G), 15-19*.

Zadek, S. (2004). The Path to Corporate Responsibility. *Harvard Business Review*, **82,** (12), 125-132.