



Institutional Changes to Reduce Stereotype Threat at Wayne State University

Stereotype threat involves hidden or overt biases that can cause added stress on members of diverse groups (i.e., groups with negative stereotypes) which, over time, undermine the performance, motivation and health of the students. The subtle nature of stereotype threat often makes it difficult to identify. In keeping with Wayne State University's Urban mission of preparing a diverse body of students to excel in an increasingly complex global society, retention of minority students is key, and a lecture given by Dr. Claude Steele from Stanford University (available online) discussed how stereotype threat presents itself, and how instructors can structure courses to circumvent the threat ((UCTV), 2013). Various stimuli can trigger the stereotype threat in at risk students, such as low number of minority enrollment, difficulty in subjects with stereotypically poor minority performance, etc...

The following institutional changes (taken from Dr. Steele's lecture) could help reduce stereotype threat for incoming minorities ((UCTV), 2013):

1. Have the administration and instructors assure incoming freshmen minorities that "they can do it." The administration/instructors should provide role models in various fields, and convince the students that their race or gender will not be a factor in their success in college.
2. Allow sufficient numbers of minorities to enroll in courses that harbor stereotypes of poor minority performance, to achieve a "critical mass," i.e., enough minorities present in the class to insure all minorities feel comfortable.
3. Have incoming at risk minority students watch a video of more senior minority students discuss some of their initial concerns about academic life at a university, and how the student overcame such obstacles. This is a variance of an intervention conducted by Walton and Cohen, aimed at assuring students that their experiences and hesitations are shared by others (Walton & Cohen, 2011).
4. Remove the stereotype contingencies (i.e., groups using race as a membership criteria) that spawn negative stereotypes at the university.



Office for
Teaching &
Learning

Purdy/Kresge Library
5265 Cass Avenue
Detroit, MI 48202

Phone: 313.577.0001
Fax: 313.577.6777
otl.wayne.edu

References

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