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Cultural Challenges in Salt Lake Community College Student Association

(SLCCSA)

A Polynesian working with a Latina? An American working with a Syrian? All of these ethnicities (and more) can be found in the student association at Salt Lake community college (SLCCSA). Working in a multicultural environment could be considered as a fun way to learn how to interact with different cultures, and also a good way to experiment and ponder about your own culture and the huge quantity of diversity that we can find in The US. This paper is to inform about the multicultural interaction within the different ethnicities in the student association at SLCCSA. Their culture, ruling and communication patterns will be examined. It is important to understand that Salt Lake Community College is an environment of respect and disposition to work with people from other background, doesn’t matter their ethnicity, culture or religion. The hypothesis of this paper is: in a problem-solving situations diversity does influence what the outcome is going to be and how decisions are going to be taken. The research questions of this paper are: there are many ethnicities at SLCC and to better integrate them all we must improve our communication skills, and build relationships based on commonalities in culture and society. This study will be involving research of SLCC perspective of the ethnic groups in it, also contrast the differences presented in people working in SLCCSA. The communication theory, that will be the lens for this study is Accommodation theory.

Utah has been a state which priority has been inclusion and diversity. Even though other institutions have less diversity because of the high tuition, Salt Lake community college is an epitome of diversity and inclusion. It has been considered as the Utah’s most diverse higher education institution, according to the Utah State Department of education. This, is an accomplishment that has taken time, but it is a really important step in respect and accommodation for everyone. In the past, it was not like this, through years Utah’s environment has changed so much. Before the equal rights amendment fight, Utah was discriminatory and racist state (as equal as the entire nation) but, thanks of the influence of diverse churches (mostly the LDS church) the idea of multi-cultural society has been adopted. According to the web portal of Diversity and demographics at Salt Lake Community college “About 300,000 people along the Wasatch Front identify themselves as Latino. Recently, large numbers of Bosnian, Sudanese, Afghan, Bantu, and Burmese immigrants have settled in the city.” (**1**).

The process of adaptation to a new culture is difficult. Physical and psychological factors can have determined our accommodation to a certain place. In this case, Utah is a mostly white American state, with an LDS dominant religion. For a Latin American is hard to get used to this environment, and it is worse if you are not part of this church which basically, controls everything in the state. We all immigrants come with different beliefs and manners from our home countries. And of course, these sets of beliefs and manners will vary depending on the location and history of your country. For example: Polynesians and Asians really respect the idea of ancestry and elder people, in contrast for South Americans the importance is for young people rather than for elders. Little cultural conceptions like these can influence any kind of relationship within two cultures.

Salt Lake City is a diverse area, where every single culture has to learns or at least try to assimilate the idea that they share a common zone with other cultures which might be very different. In this idea we can include the development of intercultural sensibility because it can be used at any level. For example, as an immigrant who is coming to a new place and is starting to realize differences within groups or as a local who has gone through all this process of “assimilate” the existence of diversity but is has or hasn’t been effective to them. The individual has to go through the ethnocentric stage to an ethnorelative stage where he or she knows how to integrate themselves into a common ground with other cultures.

On the other hand, The US being a melting pot, can cause many resentment or hate ideals against immigrants or people from diversity. Even though this could be considered an issue of concern in today’s society most of the young people in The US are no practicing this idea anymore. On the contrary, young students are including themselves and including others in their ideas and programs. This, is influenced through education too, which is a clue factor in the process of ethnorelativism.

# Salt Lake Community college has positions of inclusion, not exclusion to all students. They also apply this idea in all their branches in college. One of the most important, SLCCSA is where we can clearly see the diversity presented in campus. People from all Background (advisors and students) share a common role and goal which is give the best of them to make college better. . In the webpage of SLCCSA, the executive council purpose statement states that “SLCC Student Association (SLCCSA) is an organization composed of student leaders who are driven to inspire, assist, guide, serve, represent, and include students of diverse cultures, abilities, and ages” (2). SLCCSA is divided in different boards: Senate, Clubs and Organizations, South Region, North Region, Central region, Publicity and Advertisement and President boards. It is important to mention that for the last 3 years in a row, Salt Lake community college Student body president has been a Latin American student. This is an epitome of diversity in all levels.

In SLCCSA each board take different roles in campus. Central, South and North region are in charge of organizing events for all the student body and keeping their respective regions as best as they can. Senate is in charge of representing students in front of the executive council. Presidents board include the student body president and the vice-president which are “the face” of SLCC in events. Lastly, Clubs and Organizations engross the biggest populations of all boards. It works specifically with clubs and Organizations in campus (80+). All these boards gathered a big number of students from different backgrounds and cultures. All of them, should be “synchronized” at the time of taking any decision of any importance. This, has been achieved through high communication skills. The differences between Latinos, Tongans, Polynesians, Asians, Europeans, Africans, etc. don’t interfere in any process because they all know what our common goal is: represent SLCCSA.

According to the information that we have gathered before, we can apply this idea to the Accommodation Theory. It emphasizes the adjustments that people do while communicating. It takes place when people try to emphasize or minimize the social difference between the others whom they interact with. The factors that lead to the accommodation activity are adjustments which can be through verbal communication or through gestures. On the other hand, this theory elaborates the human tendency to adjust their behavior while interacting. The main reason behind this behavior is the social differences between two people. Environment also affects the communication. People accommodate their communication activities to get approval and to set a positive image.

This theory is applicable in various communication processes, but it is specifically well-designed to fit into an organization community. It can be used to communicate effectively among employees and employers as well as adapting themselves to any multi-cultural communication. As an example we can say: *A business student from Tonga is a new vice-president in clubs and organizations board*. While understanding about the environment, she came to know her group team which is a diverse group that includes Latin American people, Indian, American and Nigerian students. When she got an opportunity to interact with them she noticed the various accents presented in the group, some were easier to understand than another. So, she applied in this situation an accommodation theory where she changed her behavior in communication in order to understand her team and make the best of them.

The cultural differences in a problem-solving situation could influence what the outcome is going to be and how decision are taken, but it does not mean that it is less effective. Taking in count everyone’s perspective is really important, and this multi-cultural organization gathers everyone’s ideas and try to apply them in a common way, so all cultures participate and propone their view point towards an issue.

As a solution, SLCC has many programs to integrate all ethnicities in a “common ground”. The office for diversity and multicultural affairs at SLCC states that: “We promote interactive learning by delving into the complexities of our multifaceted (age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, and disability) identities. In appreciation of one’s “authentic self”, we celebrate diverse cultures authentically and enhance multicultural awareness and responsiveness through training's, programs and services, in an effort to transform communities”(**3**). Thought participation in open audiences and panels about issues in campus is a good way to amplify your voice. Another option is to participate in a club or Organization which support or follows a same idea or believe. These and many more other actions have been taken in campus to gather everyone’s opinion and not create a voiceless community. In addition, just as simple as listening to other people, and try to understand what their view points are like and why. Also, trying to get out of you comfort zone and try help people who might have disadvantages compared to you that you don’t know, but they want to do the best as they can and you can be an important support for them.

SLCCSA slogan is use commonalities to build a better relationship within the student association: “We create leadership environments and hands on experience providing students opportunities to have a voice, get involved, find their place, and shape moments of inspiration” (**4**). This fact is really important in a multi-cultural environment, and this idea has grown a better connection and relation in the office. As an example: a South American woman can relate herself with a Saudi Arabian guy whose culture is very different from hers, but they also share common values and goals.

In conclusion, it is important to recall what we all have learned through live (cultural and personal values) in order to build a better and safe environment for everyone. The hypothesis has been studied based on the Communication theory of accommodation, and we have proved that we can all relate to people from different ethnicities without causing any damage or suffering. We now know that many ethnicities are in SLCC, how we can integrate them in one common idea and how can we use commonalities to build a better relationship within the student association. It is important to always take in count that asking is valid, but always respecting and using a correct vocabulary. On the other hand, we can use this multicultural environment as an opportunity to challenges stereotypes or generalizations. Because, positive things might happen or become available for you and the community in general.

Never is too late to learn something new, and through multicultural experiences wisdom and new learning become available for everyone who is opened enough to understand and not judge. In order to have a successful relation, it is important to put all your prejudices down and step out of you comfort zone. Remembering that no one is like you and we are all different is my best recommendation in this type of multicultural opportunities, also developing a closer relation with your team is always a good option to achieve a better communication within the group and organization in general.

Works cited Page

**1** [**http://www.slcc.edu/explore/slc/slc-diversity.aspx**](http://www.slcc.edu/explore/slc/slc-diversity.aspx)

**2. https://www.slcc.edu/sll/slccsa.aspx**

**3. http://www.slcc.edu/multicultural/**

**4. http://www.slcc.edu/sll/index.aspx**