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Rochelle P. Ripple

Jose' Villavicencio

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The Committee on Diversity's Plan of Action

Rochelle P. Ripple and José Villavicencio

Recent work of the College of Education's Committee on Diversity has included plans to provide a curriculum and experiences aimed at increasing all education candidates' knowledge of, sensitivity to, and strategies and techniques for teaching diverse P-12 students. This comprehensive plan was initiated in the 2002-2003 academic year with a workshop conducted for faculty, administration, and staff of the COE. The workshop raised awareness of the diverse nature of P-12 students (and connected this awareness with bringing these students to higher levels of learning). Diversity was also defined more broadly to include race, gender, cultural background, religion, geographical area of origin, disability, sexual preference, and traditional/non-traditional family structure. In response to expressed interest a survey was conducted in the summer of 2003 (Bradfield, 2003). It was administered to all faculty, administrators, and staff, as well as to current and former students, who both dropped out as well as graduated.

Recommendations (Bradfield, 2004) derived from the results of the survey sparked the development of three specific programs:

(1) A course, Diversity in Education, was developed and implemented in Fall Semester, 2004. The course is required in most undergraduate teacher education programs. Special emphases are placed on teaching the education students how to develop an inclusive and collaborative classroom. The curriculum is based on the following planning considerations: Accommodations, Attendance, Controversial Topics, Cultural Reference Points, Instructional Strategies, Grouping Students for Learning, Working with Course Content, Student Critiques of Course Content, Responding to Student Identities, and Inequities in the Classroom. The instructors are always aware of gender dynamics in classroom discussions, which often focuses on common situations in P-12 classrooms (Kardia & Saunders, 2004).

(2) The College of Education Committee on Diversity has begun a program aimed at providing support to students in order to encourage retention until graduation. The drop-out rate increases at the end of the sophomore year and, according to the 2003 survey, some students felt isolated and a lack of support because of

their (perceived) differences. "Project ACE" – Avenue for a Culture of Excellence, is characterized by a triad consisting of a faculty member, an upper-class education student, a community person or P-12 classroom teacher, and five students. This group forms a team that meets monthly (or more often as needed) to socialize and study for exams.

(3) The Committee on Diversity has also developed a committee to intervene in disputes that might arise between students and faculty. The team consists of students with a faculty advisor. The team determines if issues brought to them can be resolved at that level or need to be sent forward to a higher level.

The aforementioned commitments are a part of the College of Education's mission "To achieve excellence by guiding individuals as they develop the proficiency, expertise, and leadership consistent with their professional roles as teachers, counselors and leaders". Excellence in teaching embodies the use of best practices to improve student learning in diverse P-12 classrooms as well as at the university level. Excellence in scholarship embodies seeking out and exploring multiple viewpoints, embracing diversity as it enriches the candidates' intellectual lives and positively impacts their professional performances.

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Dr. Rochelle P. Ripple is a Professor of Education at Columbus State University in the Department of Teacher Education. Her current research interests include diversity in education and education of at-risk students.

Dr. José A. Villavicencio is an Associate Professor of Education at Columbus State University in the Department of Teacher Education. His current research interests include second language instruction and diversity in education.