

CULTURAL DIVERSITY FROM A DESIGN PERSPECTIVE: A DESIGN BOOK PROPOSAL

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A major goal of every college and university is to help their students gain appreciation for the importance of understanding Cultural Diversity in an increasingly multicultural and global society. We feel that a text that looks at Cultural Diversity from a design perspective will accomplish several goals.

To help design educators appreciate the contributions they can make to prepare of their students for living in a global environment.

To provide design educators with an opportunity to contribute a chapter, chapter section, case studies and/or drawings and photographs of a culture they represent, have visited, and/or studied.

A panel of design educators will discuss strategies for cross-cultural collaborations in education and techniques for making connections in the global environment through development of a cultural diversity textbook.

Some years ago Martin Luther King Junior compared cultural diversity to a house. He said, "This is a great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace." (King, Jr., 1967)

"By the year 2025, 50% of all public school students (in the USA) will be minority students. That's going to challenge the whole definition of minority and non-minority." says Gerald Tirozzi, the U.S. Department of Education's Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education. (Jones, 1997)

This new focus will require teachers who have sensitivity to, and understanding of, a multitude of cultures in this increasingly diverse world. To prepare all students for the global environment and workplace of the future, universities too must prepare students for life and work in a multicultural society. To this end, a great number of diversity courses have proliferated on college and university campuses in recent years,

with the goal of helping students gain skills in communication and interacting with people of different cultures.

Unfortunately, there are no appropriate texts for these courses. In considering the need for meaningful resources for these courses, a group of housing and design educators has developed a proposal for a design-related Cultural Diversity text. They decided that a textbook addressing Cultural Diversity from a Design Perspective could:

Provide an interesting textbook that might be used in a general education course taught by a design educator. The large enrollments generated by general education classes can help compensate for the small enrollments necessary in studio courses.

Bring all university students a positive, interesting approach to Cultural Diversity that has potential to help build their appreciation of the diversity of our complex society and for the role culture plays in the design of habitable space.

Provide future professionals in design, business, and social services with insight into the ways in which different cultural groups experience the environment. For example, recently the owner of a new gasoline station in a predominantly Oriental area of Los Angeles hired a Feng Shui consultant to plan the orientation of gas pumps for the station.

Introductory chapters for the book will address the physical (i.e., house and entrance orientation) and psychological (i.e., privacy) components of house design that are influenced by religion, ethnicity, climate, etc. Research on the relationships between residential design and cultural orientation will be cited.

Following the introductory section, there will be sections and chapters for specific racial and cultural groups in the United States. These will include:

- Native American
- African American
- Asian
 - Chinese
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - South East Asian
- Muslim
 - from Iran
 - from Jerusalem
 - from India

Authors will report their progress in the development of the book proposal. In addition, one panel member will tell how she developed and gained approval for a design course on Cultural Diversity and will share the trials and tribulations of searching for appropriate teaching materials for the course.

References

Jones, C. (1997). Educators Challenged by Diversity's Demands. In USA Today, September 24: 1a-2a.

King, M.L. (1967). Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? Boston: Beacon Press, 167.