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Minority Experience

As a future U of I graduate, we are expected to understand the needs and demands of teaching in a diverse society; after completing each minority experience I learned very specific and general ways of how I can address my students and improve their educational needs. Although it was challenging and always a little scary, doing it made me understand that each of my students' experiences life a little differently, and thus has challenges of their own. I hope as a future teacher that I will safely address my students needs without offending them, but I believe through these experiences that number one thing everyone wants is just someone to try and understand. Curiosity is permitted.

The temple experience was definitely the one I feared the most - hence I finished it first. Religion has always been challenging to me because I have never associated it with something close to me. I've known people with strong religious beliefs and those with none and everyone in between, but only Christianity. Islam and Judaism always seemed so distant from me. I do know that for most people who are religious religion plays a huge role in their life. So, as a future teacher I believe it is necessary for me to reach out and understand my students backgrounds and beliefs - and more importantly show that I care to understand. Knowing that I attempted to understand will be key in gaining my students respect and appreciation. At the Synagogue I was challenged because everything was new to me. I had to walk in and do my best to understand and although I thought I had some knowledge of Jewish faith afterwards I came to understand that really I had no idea. This idea will also apply in my classroom; sometimes I may think I understand my students, but this experience helps me realize that there is far more to learn than what I originally thought. Visiting Sinai Temple is one example of how I can challenge my self to better understand my students.

While at the tea ceremony (after I had stopped worrying so much), I realized that in America we think we have so much diversity, but really our country kills it. I still keep thinking about how much we all deserve to maintain variety and uniqueness to truly have any kind of original thought or even passionate belief. I think of all the subdivisions, all the families, all of our fashions, all our music and think about how it lacks so much creativity and originality. Even though the tea ceremony is an ancient tradition, and one that has stayed the same, it makes me think that I must push my students to appreciate and hone their individuality. The tea ceremony and Japanese culture in general maintains is beauty because it is distinct. In America we lack distinctions and instead we reproduce the same houses, fashions, ideas, people over and over again because we do not truly encourage individuality. In my classroom I will. Maintaining individuality, and the concept of a strong, motivated individual, is one of my main goals as a teacher. The tea ceremony is one way my students can see how true individuality is indispensible - it has lasted for generations. I want my students to realize that if they believe strong enough in something it too can last a lifetime.

Salsa Night for me was the experience that taught me to ask, to try, to make mistakes. While dancing I messed up, but I kept trying. When my partners used a foreign word, I asked what it meant. Working on these 2 things specifically taught me that we must seek out our diverse knowledge. It is our job to try and better understand everyone; to do so we must try and not let our mistakes hold us back. The men I danced with I bet thought I was just a silly girl sometimes. There I was just trying to dance, trying to talk to them - they were of course older than me, which was also different since it was not another campus bar - but I tried because I knew I had to and more importantly it was in an environment I was not scared in. Everyone seemed welcoming to me and now I understand that the comfort is key is encouraging people to branch out and try something new. When I am a teacher I must create a classroom that flourishes under welcoming words and atmosphere.

Being at the drag show taught me how all of our differences can bring us together is we unite under one thing. For the classroom it can be to learn, to flourish, to understand the world - at C-street it was due to their different sexual preferences. Even though most people united there under their sexual preferences, it was clear that some of the crowd as straight and came just for the fun, open experience. There, no one was judged. This reminds me that in the classroom, I have to ensure that none of my students are judged. To be judged would stop them from being an individual, would stop them from trying new things, and stop them from understanding others. I loved the drag show maybe most of all because it was such a liberating experience to watch all these people come together and support one idea. All of these people were different, and yet they managed to come to a place where they would stop judging each other based on silly things. I remember being in junior and senior high school and making fun of other girls - but I also remember being made fun of myself. Neither of those experiences made me feel good about anything. The resentment I have for making fun of others still haunts me. In my classroom I will continually remind myself that is I hope to impact my students, then I must teach them to not judge others.

While I volunteered in the soup kitchen, I could not stop myself from thinking, "why haven't I done this before? It seemed like such an easy task that meant so much to others. We should have to do stuff like that to graduate from school. I learned that we really should focus on being proactive. We learn so much in school but so little because so much goes to waste. We waste our education by failing to act; we learn that helping people is good, being kind to others is necessary, that we can make a difference - but we never get a chance to do anything. While in school I never had the chance to do something remarkable, and I wish I had. During the great Greek and Roman era, citizenry was one of the main purposes of schooling. Today, we have lost the idea of caring about our world, our government, and even our neighbors. When I am a teacher I will encourage my students to work in their communities, to read about the news, to become involved in political debates. Students need to focus on ideas like this because then they will see how real the problems are. When I was volunteering, I realized that many of the homeless had always been unfortunate. They had been forgotten and passed through school. They were unprepared for life - or they were students, facing the challenge of feeding themselves. How could we expect those kinds of students to succeed in school if they did not even have a safe place to sleep? Volunteering taught me that I must acknowledge that any of my students may be coming from a family who lacks necessary resources. As a teacher it will be my job to reach out and help.

All of my experiences taught me something extremely valuable, but mostly they taught me that we must look at all of our students as diverse, different, challenging individuals. As teachers, we hold our students hands as the pass from one stage to another. Some of them are fighting all of the odds to succeed, and it is our job to see that they do succeed. I appreciate this experience because it helps me obtain a broad spectrum of ideas that I never would have experienced. Each of these ideas now plays a key role in determining the kind of teacher I will be. As I progress as a student and an educator, I must always remind myself of the differences each of us went through in order to be the person we are right now.

Experiences:

1.Visited the Sinai Temple for services Friday September 24 at 7:30.

Entering the temple I felt nervous because I was not sure what to expect. I am scared enough when I attend church services with my friends on occasion, and service for a completely different religion is even more challenging. Although it was all new to me, I was not expecting that women sat differently than men. I had heard of that practice in Islam but never in Judaism. I got there early so that I could walk around and explore a little before the service. The temple seemed welcoming but still I was nervous for the service. I did not know what kind of rituals they did or what I would be left out of. It ended up being a lot confusing, but not terrible. To better understand I would definitely need the help of a friend or someone who works with in the temple. After the ceremony, the lady I sat next to conversed briefly with me. She could clearly tell I did not belong, but she was not offended. She was happy to see someone trying to understand her way of life.

2. Attended Tea Ceremony at the Japan House on Thursday September 30 at 2pm.

Attending the Tea Ceremony was a beautiful experience. It's unlike anything I have experienced and definitely helped remind me of the characteristics of patience and precision. I walked in nervous because I had no clue what was really going to happen. For me the ceremony was a challenge because it is so thought out and careful - but that helped me reflect and challenge that aspect of who I am. The hosts were welcoming but very calm. They themselves reflected the peace of the tea ceremony that is something that I frequently see through Japanese culture. The ceremony felt like it took longer than it actually did - but it was not time wasted or me feeling bored. I think it was simply because doing things so calmly was a new thing to me. It's impossible to imagine seeing a tea ceremony adapted to the America lifestyle but it feels like something we need. It is a challenging experience to describe because of the exact process of turning the bowl and bowing and the Japanese words but the worry I had went away after time. Since I walked in nervous, at first all I could think about was everything else I needed to do, but worrying made me sloppy while processing the ceremony. As I let myself into the idea of being peaceful and letting my worries go it went a lot more smoothly.

3. Attended Salsa Night at Cowboy Monkey on October 13, 2010

During salsa night, I walked into a bar filled with people of Latin America descent - this was a new experience for me. I walked in feeling shy. I was hesitant to go from the start but I figured it would be a good experience to try something new. In high school, I studied French, so I have had no experience to any Latin American or Spanish culture. The music, the dancing, and the language were all new to me. I felt shy at first - mainly because I did not want to be disrespectful in the way that I acted - this is a common theme in all my experiences so far. I wanted to try dancing and try talking to the people there, but I could not connect with them the way that I usually can when I go out. Soon, I warmed up and began somewhat dancing, but of course it was not the Salsa or the Merengue. I ended up dancing with 3 different men that night, and each one taught me something different. The first 2 were extremely nice and helped me feel welcome by asking me about school and my experience dancing. When I told them it was my first time, they seemed excited to help teach me and were good teachers. My last dance partner was in my opinion extremely talented and he taught me a lot. At times, they would reference words or dances of which I had no knowledge. When I didn't know, I felt silly for having not taken Spanish in high school - but my dance partners were definitely eager to explain or help me understand.

4. Visited C-Street during Drag Night November 14th

This was both my first time visiting C-Street and being at any kind of gay/drag experience so it was totally new. Even though I have had some friendships with gay or lesbian friends, I have never been in such a large group of people who ha the same kind of mentality. Everyone was really friendly and outgoing - if anything they were too much. It was a lot to take in but at the same time really fun. The drag show was over the top and even though it was something new to me, I could feel in the crowd that this is a place of real openness. The drag show made me feel a little uneasy just because it was so blatant. In America we are really conservative about sex, especially homosexual sex, but I handled it well. I always thought I was really open to homosexuality but being there just showed me again that what I am not used to will always be a challenge. Even with that said, I loved how the crowd was so open. No one cared who dressed as what or acted in what way - well other than cheering for their favorite queen. It was clearly a non-judgmental community that I wish we could see more of on a day-to-day basis.

5. Volunteered for Home Sweet Home Ministries in Bloomington by preparing food for homeless people.

This experience was far different than my others. I did not get as much interaction with the people I was serving as I had expected, but I believe it was just as rewarding. While volunteering, I worked on preparing the meal for the day and preparing for Thanksgiving meal coming up as well as serving the people who were there. Each year they try and do something special during Thanksgiving for people who do not have family or the necessities to experience a fulfilling Thanksgiving dinner. I could not participate on Thanksgiving this year but I'd like to in the future after working before it. While serving I could see the clear need and appreciation from them. It helped me realize that this is a problem all of us forget about but can easily be helped. Working with the others behind the scene who were also preparing for Thanksgiving reminded me of all the good people in the world and that they can come from anywhere. One of the ladies I could just tell was pretty wealthy and normally I would not expect her to be participating in something like this but seeing her there made me understand the extremes people live through. She was really nice and helped welcome me into my job. She worked with me as we sorted food and made lists of what we would need for Thanksgiving Day. I could see from her work that this was something she really loved doing because of the impact it had on everyone else.