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Privilege, Class and the Christian Response:

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Abstract

American society tells us that to be successful in the world we must gain much wealth; we are judged by our ability to collect “toys,” live beyond comfort and in many ways live for ourselves. Yet the Bible calls us, as Christians, to an entirely different lifestyle; a life of generosity. In order to do this we must first recognize the privilege we have been blessed with and the extreme wealth we have to offer the world. This hands-on workshop allows college students, who are often more privileged than they know, to discover first-hand the disparity that exists in our world.

Privilege, Class and the Christian Response: A Hands-On Workshop

Purpose:

The High Sierra Semester is an off-campus program of Azusa Pacific University which takes place in the heart of the Sierra Nevada's at Bass Lake, CA. The program offers unique community for students, faculty and staff and strives to develop the whole student. Each semester twenty to forty students leave the main campus for four months of study in the mountains, the only problem is an obvious lack of diversity amidst the student body. In an effort to raise awareness about aspects of diversity as they pertain to college students; this hands-on workshop was developed to coincide with the spiritual direction and climate of the Spring 2008 High Sierra semester.

Needs Assessment:

Two primary needs influenced the development of this unique program. The first was a simple need to encourage students to consider issues pertaining to diversity as there is relatively little diversity at High Sierra. Like most college students, the students at High Sierra readily embrace the term "starving college student" despite that reality that for many of them this term really does not apply. Prior to the workshop, one student pointed out that while he was expected to live on a budget this is part of real life, not a sign that he is starving. The student went on to admit that many students, himself included, will return to main campus and jump into their cars, a privilege that most the world does not enjoy and yet we take it for granted.

It is also important to recognize that while most students at APU are not starving college students, there are some that are honestly working their way through college. Because of all the time they must spend working they are often not able to afford any extras, this could include a car. The time required of the student at work may cause other

side effects on their ability to succeed in school. Student affairs professionals need to help students understand and recognize the disparity that is all around them.

A second reason for this program was the spiritual climate of the campus at present. Two weeks ago a student shared in chapel some of his thoughts regarding a life of poverty and a life of generosity. He shared his convictions on his entitlement attitude toward many things in life. He encouraged the community at large to consider how and where they were investing their money and to question their beliefs about what they are entitled to. The conversations that have ensued since chapel have helped the Spiritual Accountability & Resource (SAR) team recognize the need for this type of conversation to continue. As Christians we have the opportunity to look at diversity as a part of our kingdom work that we are called to. In order to love people unconditionally we must first understand who they are and where they are coming from.

As a result of the desire to encourage discussions about aspects of diversity and a spiritual climate open to discussions pertaining to diversity as it affects the way we approach our calling in life.

Desired Outcomes/ Learning Outcomes:

- High Sierra students will be exposed to an aspect of diversity that was perhaps overlooked
- High Sierra students will be encouraged to challenge their previously held notions of privilege and entitlement
- The entire High Sierra community will engage in a common learning experience
- High Sierra students will come face to face with the dietary realities of people in other countries

- SAR Team members (consisting of the Graduate Assistant, Resident Director and two student leaders) will be challenged to lead the community in discussion and debrief after the activity
- High Sierra will embrace and promote the belief of APU in their “pursuit of diversity [which] involves fulfilling Christ’s command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27). [And] support a diverse university across lines of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic status, class, age, and ability” (<http://www.apu.edu/about/diversity/>)
- The workshop will further conversations around campus pertaining to privilege and class
- Students will be challenged to evaluate their approach to privilege and class as it relates to their Christian faith

Materials Needed:

- Three different colored tokens to define where participants will dine
- A large dining hall where three distinct dining experiences can be set up; one dining area with formal dining (to represent first world dining experiences), one dining area that is not necessarily comfortable but still adequate (to represent second world dining experiences), and a final dining area on the floor with only butcher paper to serve as a table (to represent third world dining experiences).
(See Appendix I for recommended dining set up)
- Cooperation with a kitchen staff that is willing to provide an all you can eat buffet (for first world diners), one small entrée item meal (for second world diners), and a bowl of rice and dirty water (for third world diners).

- Directions for each of the tables (See appendix II)
- A copy of the Nooma video Rich and a projector or way to show the video

Forma/ Outline of Events:

- I. Participants enter the dining hall
 - a. As participants enter the dining hall they will draw a colored chip that will indicate which table they will be dining at
 - b. After all participants have entered gather them in a circle to pray for the meal and tell participants which dining experience their colored chip entitles them to
 - c. Encourage participants to read the directions on their table as they sit
 - d. Facilitators should be around and available to answer questions
- II. Dinner is served
 - a. Allow participants a few minutes to read instructions and meet the other people at their table before dismissing the first world table to help themselves at the buffet. The first world can enjoy their choice of juice, soda, water with ice, or milk.
 - b. Approximately five minutes after the first world table begins dining bring out preset servings for the second world that will allow them to enjoy one small serving of the entrée. They should also be served clean water with no ice to drink.
 - c. Between ten to fifteen minutes after dinner begins the third world table should be served one scoop of rice. The rice will be served in bowls

and there will not be any silverware provided. Additionally, this table will be served “dirty” (food colored) water with no ice.

- d. The goal is for the first world diners to recognize their ability to refill their plates as many times as they would like and share with those seated at the second or third world tables.

III. Debrief activity

- a. After all participants have finished dining bring the group together for a time of debrief.
- b. It is important that facilitators come prepared with a few questions to get the conversation started. (See Appendix III for sample questions)
- c. Facilitators must be equipped to help participants process their feelings and thoughts enabling participants to walk away with some sense of conclusion.

IV. Watch Nooma video

- a. This part of the workshop could easily be dropped if the organizing party does not subscribe to a Christian worldview.
- b. If participants are still hungry it is probably wise to open up the buffet bar to everyone, allow them 15 minutes to get food and migrate to an area where you can show the video
- c. A transition from the discussion to the video is extremely important. The goal here is to help participants see their privilege through their Christian worldview and recognize the calling in their life to live generously.

- d. This video, which is about 12 minutes in length, provides a biblical perspective on privilege and class.
 - i. The video encourages viewers to recognize the needs all around us, it is not just people overseas that are starving and in need.
 - ii. Additionally, the video argues that privilege is not limited to fiscal resources; we have been blessed so that we may bless others.

V. Allow for follow up conversation

- a. This section can easily be adapted to fit the needs of the facilitator and participants but the following is how it was handled for High Sierra.
- b. One of the facilitators gave a wrap up speech after the video (not to exceed two minutes).
 - i. The SAR team had previously decided to adopt the saying “Live Generously” to go along with the workshop
 - ii. The facilitator encouraged participants to look for class and privilege disparities all around them and to meet the tangible needs that they are able to meet out of the blessings they have received.
- c. Participants were dismissed to go meet with their small groups (a regularly scheduled time that is part of High Sierra student’s chapel requirement). Small group leaders were also a part of the workshop

- d. The following day the SAR team placed reminder verses in every participant's mailbox.

Evaluation/Reactions

As the workshop only took place earlier this week evaluations and reactions are still be received but initial reactions were extremely promising. During the discussion students shared their frustration about being randomly assigned to a socioeconomic status which they did nothing to deserve. Students also came to recognize that in many ways that was the point; those of us coming from wealthy families did nothing to deserve it, we just happened to be blessed with a wealthy family. The same is true for those born in families with a low socioeconomic status. Students were readily engaged in conversation and discussion and truly brought deep thoughts and open minds into the activity.

Many small groups continued discussion around the activity of the night. Small group leaders have confirmed that students honestly took the lesson to heart and desired to talk more about what it meant to live a life of generosity, even as college students who may or may not have extra spending cash.

Professors and their families who also attended the evening workshop and meal have stated that it not only initiated conversations with students but also with their families as well. In a program that is so sensitive to integration professors have worked hard to integrate the experience into their lectures and classroom discussions; even contemplating ways to extend the lesson into their classrooms.

Additionally, the SAR team members were expected to meet and debrief the activity as well. Each was expected to bring three positives of the workshop and three "could be improved" statements. From these a folder is being put together for future

leaders and facilitators to use if they should choose to facilitate the event again. Also ideas for expanding this lesson have been coming in from multiple people.

I believe that for the way this event was designed and the purposes it was meant to fill the only way to truly evaluate it is through the lives of the participants. So the initial feedback and the ensuing conversations have been very promising to me. I think the great test will be in a few weeks when the issue is revisited; will students remember what they learned or processed or will it be another forgotten lesson? If I had to create and use an evaluation form it would look something like the form found in Appendix IV.

On the whole the workshop was a successful activity for all students, faculty and staff. It is most certainly an event I would like to repeat again the future; I have valued receiving many of the extension ideas. Perhaps in the future we will be able to expand the workshop and the ensuing discussion.

Annotated Bibliography

Azusa Pacific University. (2008). Diversity. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from Azusa Pacific University's website: <http://www.apu.edu/about/diversity/>.

This website clearly outlines the beliefs of Azusa Pacific University specifically as they pertain to issues of diversity. The school's beliefs are clearly outlined and defined on their website. This website helped influence the creator of this workshop in that it helped the creator identify the standard that all APU affiliated programs are to meet. This website helped the creator set benchmarks by which to measure the overall growth of the community as it relates to diversity.

Langhout, R., Rosselli, F. & Feinstein, J. (2007). Assessing classism in academic settings. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(2), pp. 145-184.

The authors of this article recognize that classism, a type of discrimination which devalues and discounts people of lower social class, has been largely ignored by psychological literature. It is especially important to examine classism in college settings because it is such an important developmental phase for young adults as they determine their identity. The authors take time to define social class, and examine the stories of students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Their examination helps them to conclude that social class does, in fact, affect how students adjust to life at college, this conclusion held true for students of all racial backgrounds as well. The authors hypothesize that large numbers of college students experience classism in the university setting.

Ostrove, J. & Long, S. (2007). Social class and belonging: implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(4), pp. 363-389.

This article argues, and successfully supports, the belief that a student's social class background impacts the student's ability to adjust to college and develop a sense of belonging. The authors went on to argue that a student's sense of belonging serves as a strong predictor of social adjustment to college, academic performance, and the overall college experience for students. In fact, a student's socioeconomic background appears to have substantial influence on numerous college outcomes through the development of a sense of belonging. For these authors it all comes back to a student's ability to feel like they belong and the socioeconomic background of a student can greatly affect his or her ability to feel like they belong.

Paulsen, M. & John, E. (2007). Social class and college costs. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(2), pp. 189-236.

The authors of this article recognize that over the past twenty years higher education costs have been raising due to a lack of state and federal support. Further the government has shifted away from offering students grants preferring instead loans. As a result the authors ask the question; has the change in cost for college influenced students from varying socioeconomic backgrounds ability to attend college? The article continues to examine the varying literature in the field but seems to adopt the beliefs of the financial nexus model. This model holds that college choice and persistence are linked and valuable in the pursuit to obtain funding for college.

Smith, L. (2006). Addressing classism, extending multicultural competence, and serving the poor. *American Psychologist*, May/June, pp. 338-339.

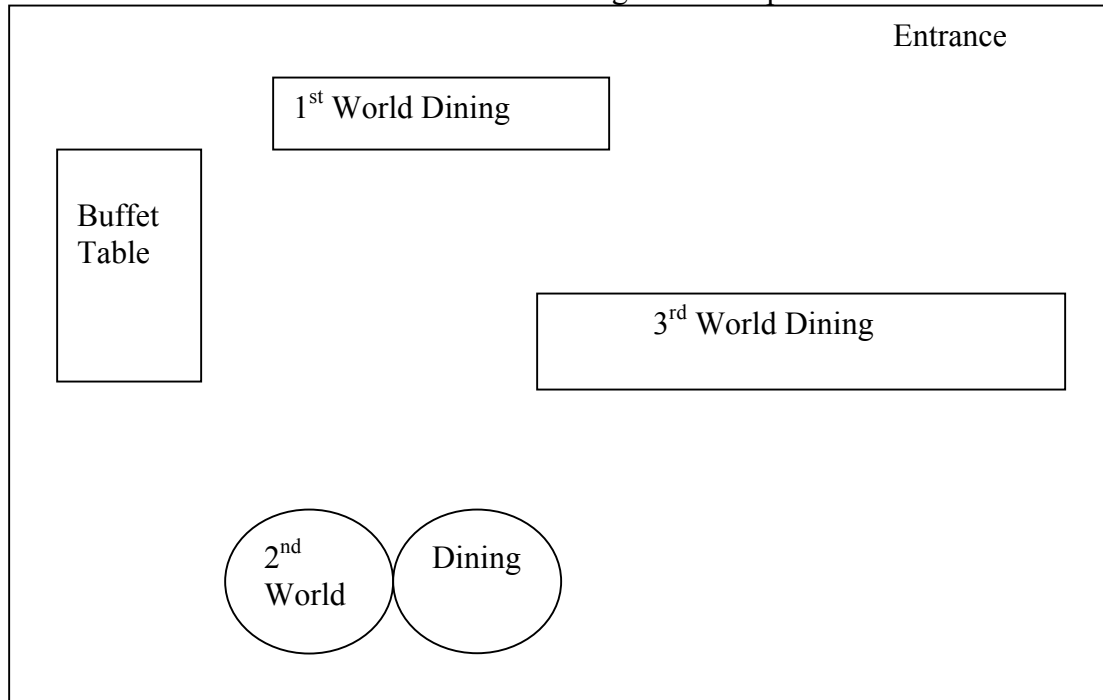
Smith is a working psychologist who recognized the disparity of services available to the poor. She claims that psychologists avoid working with people of low socioeconomic status, not because of their status, but rather because they are trying to avoid failure. Through this claim the author reinforces in the idea of classism within the world of psychology. The author's primary argument in this article is that classism is a viable form of discrimination. It is no different than racism, sexism, or even heterosexism. She argues, very successfully, that even the term, poor, can be considered a form of discrimination.

Walpole, M. (2003). Socioeconomic status and college: how SES affects college experiences and outcomes. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(1), pp. 45-73.

Once again this author recognizes the lack of representation and literature regarding students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The author states that students from low SES backgrounds entered the public eye with the introduction of the G.I. Bill which provided public funding for all soldiers. However, in our current day offers little public support for students thus reducing their access to higher education. The author created a longitudinal study which allowed researchers to examine the SES backgrounds, plans and aspirations for students over the course of nine years. The results stated that even though students from a low SES background may be more upwardly mobile than their parents they are still at more of a disadvantage than students from a high SES.

Appendix I

Recommended Dining Hall Set-up



First World Dining

- Participants should be spaced out around table given plenty of personal space, this can represent the individualism that is rampant in many 1st world/ high class societies
- The table should be set with a table cloth, a full place setting, nicely folded napkins a pitcher of water with ice, and possibly milk
- Their proximity to the buffet table is key and keep them separated from the other diners

Second World Dining

- Participants are squeezed around smaller tables. Participants find their table adequate but tight, this is more open to community
- The table should be set with plates, cups, forks and knives. Napkins are disposable and perhaps out of a container.
- This table has clean water with very little ice but no milk.

Third World Dining

- Participants are forced to sit on the floor and squeeze around a long piece of butcher paper (mainly to prevent messes)
- The table is set with either; one cup and one paper cup (for rice) or with one cup and one bowl. There is no silverware and no napkins. The table is given water that has been dyed with food coloring to give the appearance of being dirty and there is no ice.

Appendix II

Directions for the individual tables

Table 1:

Congratulations, you are a part of the privileged few. You are a part of the 15% of the world that lives in first world conditions. You have unlimited access to food tonight. Please feel free to get up, and fill, and even refill, your plates as much as you want. You can talk to anyone you want but don't be surprised if people from other countries do not respond to you when you try to talk to them. You are very privileged and a very small percentage of the room tonight. Feel free to do with those privileges as you see fit.

Table 2:

Good evening, you are the second world country. In reality, 2nd world countries make up 25% of the world. You, unfortunately, are not as privileged as the rest of the room this evening. You must stay at your table tonight and you are not allowed to refill anything on your table except your water jugs. Feel free to talk amongst yourselves but you are not allowed to talk to anyone else, even if they try to talk to you. If you need to use the restroom feel free to do so. A server will be by with your food momentarily.

Table 3:

Good evening, you are the third world country. I am sorry to say that you are the least privileged and largest group in the room this evening. In reality, 60% of the world lives in third world conditions. You are not allowed to leave your area tonight and you will not be receiving much food either. You are not allowed to refill anything at your table including your water jugs. If you need to use the restroom please feel free to do so. You may talk amongst yourselves but do not talk to anyone else in the room even if they try to talk to you.

Appendix III

Sample After-Activity Questions

- What were your initial reactions when you discovered which group you had randomly been assigned to?
- To the third world: What were your thoughts and feelings as you saw the other tables eating? As you saw your water?
- To the second world: What were your thoughts as you watched the dining experiences of the other the other two tables?
- To the first world: What were your thoughts as you ate while the other two tables watched?
- What was the community like at each of your tables; is this meaningful?
- What have you learned from this experience?
- How does what you experienced tonight affect how you approach the world?
- To the first world: if tried to talk to people at other tables, how did you feel about their lack of respect?
- If food was shared (to the second and third world): How did it feel to receive food from the first world?
- If food was shared (to the first world): How did it feel to share food with the other people in the room?

These are just questions to get the discussion going. Each time this activity is set up the results will be different, they will at least present in some unique way. For this reason the facilitators should be sure to watch the participants during the activity so that questions can be catered to events of the night.

Appendix IV

Sample program evaluation form

Name: _____ Year in School _____

Name of Program: _____

Date of Program: _____ Location: _____

Was this a program you were excited about attending: Y N

Please rank the following with 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest:

I felt the program was well planned 1 2 3 4 5

Program used time effectively 1 2 3 4 5

Facilitators were sensitive to needs 1 2 3 4 5

I was supported and encouraged to assess a new aspect of diversity 1 2 3 4 5

I understand how this issue relates to my faith 1 2 3 4 5

I was challenged to think outside my bubble 1 2 3 4 5

Facilitators were equipped to answer questions and help participants process the evening's activity. 1 2 3 4 5

Overall I would rate this event as good experience that I would share 1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for taking the time to share your comments. If you have any additionally comments that you feel we can benefit from please write them in the space below or on the back. THANK YOU!