CATS

ACE Service Learning Day~ I AM Human

ACE students, both high school juniors and seniors, participated in a Service Learning Project in which they watched the “I Am Human” video and created tokens of gratitude. After watching the documentary, small group discussions followed with students sharing their experiences. Individuals expressed being a victim of derogatory language and inadvertently using such language. Feedback indicated students were surprised language and discriminatory issues existed on a college campus. They assumed use of derogatory language was an immaturity people grew out of and did not occur in an academic setting.

Self-reported surveys (N=100) indicated 74% of students thought about language they used when interacting with others most or all of the time, 67% of students disclosed others use derogatory language in their presence and, 31% agreed/strongly agreed they personally used words that were demeaning and inappropriate. Results could be indicative of people being ashamed to admit using derogatory language and inappropriate exchanges even when participating in an anonymous survey. Responses also show, 83% admit they could make changes to their word choice, which provides hope of potential ameliorative actions and awareness of behavioral changes.

90% of respondents conceded words they use could harm someone. For this population, derogatory words included: Retard, Illegal Alien, Nigger, Faggot, Fat Ass, Sissy, Slut, Shemale, Skinny, Beaner, Wetback, Cracker, ect. These words are consistent with the documentary examples, showing potential relationship to the college’s demographics. Student’s suggested counteracting such language by:

* Confronting people and explain the affect they have.
* Being more open about it and how it affects us all.
* Offering character courses that explain and set social norms based upon respect for students attending an institution.
* Standing up and say “This is not okay”.
* Giving less power to words, because they have as much power as we give them.
* Promoting respect.

The positive dialog was affected by a participants comment. A student declared, “These things happen and people should just toughen up”, indicating further education is likely needed on the subject of derogatory language.

An active learning, applied activity coalesced the event. By focusing on positive behaviors and interactions, the Service Learning activity included ACE students creating tokens of gratitude. Kind words and expressions of thanks were expressed on ceramic tiles and then given as gifts during the 2016 United Way Luncheon to EMCC employees.

When considering future Service Learning events on derogatory language, consideration should be given to sustain the learning. Potential ideas include:

1. More time for dialogue and processing information.
2. Individualized student commitment to advocate for positive change and language in their interactions.
3. Tangible reminder to display their commitment to derogatory-free language.