



It's Not Just A _____ Thing By Jessica Pettitt

With budget cuts turning to budget slashes and college campuses carrying the social weight of social justice trainings, what are you to do as a diversity programming board or campus activities advisor? It is a tough reality check that “doing more with less” doesn’t seem to answer. After working in Student Life for a decade, here are some free (yes, free!) suggestions on how to stretch the dollars you have left without looking further than your desk or adding something new to your in box.

It's Not Just A Speaker Thing

As a diversity speaker myself, I will disclose a secret. You have to pinky swear not to tell anyone. Ok? Lean close... here it goes... You are already doing Diversity programming on your campus. Shhhh... don't get so excited with your rebuttals, let me explain. On your campus, there are more than likely several departments that bring in speakers other than Campus Activities. Think about your academic departments, campus wide speaker series, alumni programming, etc. Campus Activities could co-sponsor (money) or co-market (visibility) with these programs. I encourage you to attend and bring your friends as well. Ask yourself when is the last time you attended (not worked) a program. You get to learn something too. Also, when working to bring in a speaker, bring in a diverse group of speakers that also speak to a wide audience. Does your relationship/safer sex program include LGBT relationships? Does your MLK Week speaker address sexism? Do you only bring in speakers of particular racial or ethnic groups during specific times of the year? If so, know that they can speak the other 11 months of the year on topics that are relevant to you campus too! Bringing in a speaker during their “off-peak” time actually can get you a discount on the program as well! This may seem odd, but it is rarely done on campuses. I more often hear more often that additional programming is needed than I hear about groups supporting all of a campus’ initiatives and utilizing outsiders for a larger purpose.

It's Not Just A New Thing

Take a second to jot down your university’s traditions, honor codes, and sayings. How can you use what the campus already rallies around to reach a broader audience with a more inclusive message? Take Homecoming, for example, and ask yourself how can you welcome back all of the students that make up your campus? What can you do to honor campus pride with non-traditional students, veterans, student parents, commuters, and





those that don't play or enjoy sporting events? Utilize current themes and mottos to paint broader strokes of inclusion for all voices that make up your campus community.

It's Not Just A Space Thing

If you work on a campus that believes diversity or social justice programming is the responsibility of someone else, another department, or that a new student group needs to be formed first - I believe you are wrong. Use what you have. What if weekly discussion questions are posted on campus, in the student newspaper, or on dining hall tables? Could you start conversations – even difficult one's – and trust your community to have a dialog? If not, perhaps, offer on-going programming or resources on self-reflection, authentic dialog, intergroup conversations utilizing groups and academic departments already in place. Lastly, take someone to lunch! Start a “take the other to lunch campaign” – folks gotta eat right? If you can give discussion prompts and teach people how to talk to one another – not about what they know they disagree on, but to listen and learn about the people themselves – you are building connections and community! Being as though I don't work on one campus, I host open dialog conference calls every month and have found that by providing a space, folks from all over the country benefit from great conversations. Sharing and listening is FREE!

It's Not Just An Outsider Thing

What I find most exciting about social justice programming, is that everything that you need is already around you. No store runs or t-shirts required! Look around your office, campus, local community and see what is already happening. Moreover, find out from other people's perspectives what is happening. To see other's experiences on your campus – you have to ask. Why not ask for comments on a blog or facebook page? You could even go really old school, and have a blank bulletin board with a prompting question to solicit people passing by feedback, thoughts, and comments. For example, “Where do you feel safest on campus?” and see where people identify. Then, do a conversation program there or at least contact the students, staff, faculty, and community members associated with that space. On one campus, I got disposable cameras donated and asked members of my campus community to take pictures of “social justice.” This was open ended and I got lots of images to share with the larger community about the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful realities of that campus. I eventually took all of the pictures and connected them together into a social justice blanket that we displayed on the campus activities center to generate further conversations. You don't always have to bring someone in from the outside to get an inside view of your campus experience.

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966 Lloyd Street, Eureka, California 95503 • (917) 543-0966 • contactme@iamsocialjustice.com





Take a good look at your programming and budget situation. Once you have access to your campus resources, traditions, and on-going programming, make it a priority to incorporate voices that are silenced but have lived experiences that are marginalized by the majority based story on your campus. Remember, social justice programming isn't about doing something new or more with less. Social justice programming is about reaching a wider audience with broader strokes of reality, complexity, and intersectionality that make our campuses unique from one another.

To continue stirring up conversations, contact Jessica directly at jess@iamsocialjustice.com.

