

An expanding notion of diversity

Is the idea of diversity becoming--well, more diverse?

Many students and faculty believe that it is.

The burgeoning definition is reflected by the changing demographics of psychology students and by extension Americans as a whole, by new issues that students are studying, and by a more sophisticated understanding of what diversity means, faculty and students say.

"The definition of diversity is broadening a lot, so it's not just a focus on race and ethnic background, but also on sexual orientation, religious diversity, first-generation students, international students, students with disabilities, nontraditional students, rural students, older students, and students with families," says Amina Mahmood, a fifth-year student at the University of Iowa's counseling psychology program and the APAGS member-at-large, diversity focus. "All of these pieces really help to enrich a program."

For example, while faculty of the social-personality psychology program of The Graduate Center at the City University of New York (CUNY) have long taught their classes through the lens of race, class and sexuality, today, students are coming up with projects in a wealth of other diversity areas, including transgendered development, experiences of undocumented immigrants and issues faced by people who live in more than one country, says Michelle Fine, PhD, distinguished professor of psychology there.

"When diversity is the starting point, amazing intellectual opportunities just kind of multiply," Fine says.

Another expanding way of viewing diversity is to see diversity variables in context, says Sara McClelland, a fourth-year student in the CUNY Graduate Center program.

"We know from work done over the last 20 years that race, class and gender don't exist in isolation,"

says McClelland, who is applying a contextual approach to her own research on sexuality education (see page 38). "I feel like my work is part of creating a new language and new ways of complicating what we mean by diversity."

The changing view of diversity also means that within-group differences are gaining more attention, Mahmood comments. Even white European-Americans, for instance, come from a wealth of backgrounds and cultures, she says.

"You could potentially just have a class filled with just one racial or ethnic group," Mahmood notes, "and that group in itself could be very diverse because of the experiences of those individuals."

-T. DeAngelis