

## **Diversity and the CCSU Marriage and Family Therapy Program**

The Marriage and Family Therapy program at Central Connecticut State University defines human diversity as: “perceived variability along any category or dimension which differentiates individual persons, or groups of persons, one from another.” Insofar as all human beings are unique, diversity is a ubiquitous phenomenon resulting from the universal habit of perceiving differences both consciously and unconsciously. Awareness of diversity itself is neither a virtue nor a problem. However, judgment accompanying such awareness of diversity can be problematic, particularly when such judgments entail presumptions of superiority or inferiority, or expectations unfounded by direct experience with the particular individuals or groups perceived as similar or different from the perceiver. Historically, injustices have resulted from two broad types of acts: (1) those that result from unfounded judgments of specific persons or groups from the perceiver and (2) those that establish policies which result in favor or disfavor to persons or groups from any one or more category or dimension.

Some of the major categories that have been attended to with consequent injustices are: Race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and political belief. Some of the major dimensions are: Age, height, weight, physical attractiveness, and skin tone. We refer to such variables as HCADs (Historical Categories and Dimensions).

The Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program is deeply committed, as is Central Connecticut State University of which we are a part, to the goal of maximal opportunity for all persons, irrespective to their membership in any perceived categories and dimensions. To this end, our program has adopted a policy of open admissions to anyone having earned a Baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution with a G.P.A. of 2.7 or better. Recognizing that economic circumstances limit some persons from attending our program, we encourage students to seek financial aid and offer a limited number of graduate assistantships. To our knowledge, graduate education, at the two Connecticut State University MFT programs are the most affordable of any in the state.

Central Connecticut State University prides itself on its diversity and its emphasis on the “Non-traditional Student.” The MFT program has been designed to accommodate both full-time and part-time students. Most of the courses in the program are offered in the evenings; some are offered during Intersession and summer and occasionally weekends. The program is designed to allow both full-time and part-time students to stay together as a “cohort” through critical stages in their training, thus creating an atmosphere of cohesiveness and connection to each other and the program. Students value this atmosphere, finding that it generates support, reinforcement, collegiality, and a sense of “ownership” in the program. Over the past ten years, our program has attracted a student body diverse with respect to all the above-mentioned HCADs. We offer coursework that addresses the importance of respect for all persons; we support our MFT graduate student organization, which provides social as well as professional activities open to all. We encourage our students to inform their communities about our program, a policy which has resulted in continued HCAD diversity of our student body with respect to HCADs. We facilitate both practicum and internship placements with agencies that service an HCAD-diverse population.

Our program student body consists of over 20% males and 19% non-European-Americans, which attests to the success our policies allow us to enjoy in regard to racial and ethnic diversity. Because of our emphasis on diversity, our program attracts students of all walks of life, cultural backgrounds, and ethnic origins. We have attracted students from all over the world, and have had students in our program representing such countries as Brazil, Canada, China, Columbia, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Nicaragua, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Poland, Spain, Syria, Turkey, Vietnam, and the West Indies.

The following chart (Chart I), taken from the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Website, indicates the percentage of various HCADs in the MFT field in 1996. The second table (Chart II), which reports the percentages of these same categories found currently in our student body, shows that our program far exceeds the percentages of MFTs in the field.

<b>Chart I Racial Characteristics of Marriage and Family Therapists</b>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9 %	1.1 %
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.9%	0.4%
Hispanic	0.9%%	0.7%
Black	2.1%	1.1%
White	94.8%	96.0%
Not specified	0.4%	0.7%
Source: An update on human resources in mental health, <i>Mental Health United States, 1996</i> , Table 10.2		

<b>Chart II Racial Characteristics of Marriage and Family Therapy Students at CCSU (December, 2003)</b>	
	<i>All Students</i>
American Indian/Alaska Native	6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1%
Hispanic	6%
Black	6%
White	81%
Other (Native Foreign-born- Polish, Japanese, Iranian, Israeli)	4%
Source: CCSU 2003 COAMFTE Annual Report	

Our program faculty and clinical site supervisors are diverse along many dimensions of the historical categories and dimensions as stated above. Regarding our faculty, we have a gender balance of four males and four females; twenty-five percent can be classified as non-European-

American (i.e., African American and Latino). We are also diverse in respect to age, religious affiliation, educational backgrounds, clinical experiences, and many other HCADs.

The program offers a broad selection of clinical placements across the State of Connecticut in diverse settings as urban, suburban, and rural settings, and across the spectrum of clinical venues. Students have the opportunity to work with minority clients and field supervisors.