Looking for a process to highlight for a DCoP Appreciative Inquiry, it didn’t take long to come upon the Working Across Differences Initiative (WADI). We look for a program, event, initiative or other idea that is working well towards improving campus climate, and WADI stands out.

WADI is a program led by the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) to improve their student’s understanding and appreciation of different cultural frames. The program works on the premise that intercultural competency is not assured through simple encounters with difference. An individual can increase their competency in stages, through incorporating learning experiences around difference, within and outside of the classroom. CFANS is committed to the proposition that all students graduate with the ability to recognize and work across differences as a core competency.

Beginning in 2013, participation in WADI has been part of the college experience for all CFANS undergrad students. At the beginning of the process, students took the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) assessment to provide a baseline to assess outcomes. The IDI measures an individual’s level of cultural competency along a range of five stages, moving from denial to minimization of difference to adaptation, or the ability to view the world from another cultural perspective.
Each participant who completes the IDI may request an analysis of the resulting scores and an Intercultural Development Plan (IDP). The plan offers tailored approaches to increasing competency and directs students to additional online resources. Where it is used in a classroom context, the class receives a presentation with their group outcome. It is frequently employed with an online Moodle module supporting intercultural learning. More importantly, WADI weaves intercultural content into the curriculum.  

The freshman who took the IDI in 2013 will retake the assessment in 2017. The expectation is that in these 4 years their scores will have moved forward along the continuum. A recent post administration of the IDI with this group indicated that the class is significantly ahead of the seniors who graduated in 2013 in their intercultural competence. The majority, 83% of these students have reported that they have a better understanding of what it means to be interculturally competent and 87% better appreciate the value of developing intercultural competence.

Karl Lorenz, DCoP member and Director of the Office for Diversity and Inclusion in the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, responded to our DCoP Appreciative Inquiry questions about WADI.

**Why did CFANS feel the need to develop WADI?**

There is little doubt that now, more than ever, our graduates need to have the skill to engage effectively in the context of difference: different values, cultural communities, life experiences and historical contingencies with both a local and global mindset.

“The ability to work effectively across difference is essential to student success in serving our national aspirations, meeting employer demands, and participating in the complex national and global grand challenges of our time…”  

**CFANS’ “Working Across Difference Initiative” has 3 primary goals:**

1. Enhance our ability to prepare students to work across difference, engage in complex problem solving, and enter into an increasingly diverse and globalized workforce.

2. Increase intentional integration of culturally relevant collegiate course content and pedagogy that reflects the needs and interests of diverse undergraduate students and addresses the unequal impacts of difference.

3. Create and integrate best practices to help students develop intercultural and global competencies and an increased awareness of issues relating to diversity and social justice.

We recognized that, while we had good investment in meeting the diversity and inclusion needs of faculty and staff in the college through various initiatives, we didn’t have anything comparable for our student population.

We decided rather than approach this through the lens of workshops and trainings, we would be more successful by identifying a systemic approach and integrate diversity and inclusion more
directly into the curriculum. That way, our efforts would be certain to reach a wider number of students, and not merely those willing to attend workshops: “the choir.”

Our goal is to build the content where the students are at rather than asking them to come to us. Moreover, we wanted something more than a once-and-done class or training that students might take. It also allows us to tailor the content specific to the majors where students engage their learning and see their professional/career opportunities. For example, we assist faculty in developing discipline-specific cases for class.

**How was the IDI assessment chosen to be part of this program?**

We had good experience employing the IDI in other contexts within the college. We recognized that it offered us a vetted, well established and widely used instrument that provided both an objective evaluation tool that could deliver valid and reliable quantitative data on outcomes we identified, as well as provide a developmental model we could employ in creating a shared language around student learning needs and goals.

We have also employed in-class questions to offer better insight into the qualitative experience students are having in classes that are incorporating WADI objectives and content.

**Author’s insight about the IDI Assessment:** Knowing I was specifically curious about the questions and the outcomes of the IDI as an integral part of this plan, Lorenz invited me to take the assessment. He then sat down with me to go over it, just as he does with CFANS students.

Overall, the assessment seemed accurate in revealing areas revealing my cultural strength areas, as well as areas I am still developing. My Intercultural Development Plan (IDP) pointed to some exercises to help me improve in these areas.

What was surprising to me was that the IDI not only gave me a score for my competency, but also for my own perception of my competency. This led to more questions:

**Why does the IDI give a score for participant’s perception of their competence, in addition to their actual competency rating?**

The IDI offers two scores: a raw response score (the subjects self-perceived orientation) and a weighted score (developmental orientation) that results from the application of an algorithm derived from considering the internal response consistency to various questions within the instrument.

The perceived score offers individuals insight into their assumed understanding of intercultural competence (where we imagine ourselves functioning), versus the stage we actually operate at, relative to our intercultural competence.

The difference between the actual and self-perceived scores highlights an opportunity gap and the awareness to be intentional in closing the gap in over or under estimating our actual practice.
Greater awareness of the difference between the perceived and actual skill means growing towards a more authentic appreciation of one’s competence and practice. Often I find that the perceived score reflects an understanding of the need to function/respond at the self-perceived stage, but that practice at that stage is aspirational or inconsistent.

Another way of looking at it is that we anticipate our need for growth, and that’s not a bad thing to know. It supports my growth to acknowledge how far out of alignment my perception of my competence is, relative to my actual ability to integrate, practice and achieve intercultural goals.

**How has WADI been received by students, faculty and leadership?**

**Students,** in general, have responded quite positively. They recognize this is increasingly demanded from them in a globalized and multicultural world.

Students view intercultural competence as a helpful personal and professional skill. Though, as you might expect, the interest and acceptance of a deepened focus on diversity themes and intercultural topics depends on where the students are in their development. Those in the earlier orientations of denial and polarization sometimes don’t see the relevance.

**CFANS faculty** had been exposed to the need for greater intercultural competence and the developmental model that underlies the IDI for quite some time prior to proposing the WADI curricular initiative. Moreover, the commitment from leadership to an effective diversity and inclusion agenda throughout the college was well understood.

In some areas there was significant faculty interest, and in other areas greater faculty resistance to incorporating diversity content into their classes.

Some faculty mentioned that they were expert in their disciplinary field, but didn’t know how (or want the responsibility) to teach diversity content. They were concerned they could lose control of the class over difficult topics that they had limited knowledge of themselves.

To approach early adopter faculty and those resisting, we decided to pilot the effort with faculty who had an active interest in participating and demonstrate how this can be done in the classroom. That led to the **Teaching Across Difference (TAD)** faculty cohort model.

With TAD we pulled together 3 faculty cohorts and provided them with support to review their syllabus and develop strategies for including more diversity content and pedagogical approaches. They were facilitated by a faculty member who had experience doing this work and were offered additional (indispensable) support from the staff from the Center for Educational Innovation.

Their success has lead to faculty leadership in some departments that are now reviewing their classes to identify effective candidate courses for integrating this approach.
Leadership in the college has been supportive and they provided funding critical to develop faculty interest in engaging this initiative. We held a kickoff event for WADI with good representation from our administrative leadership.

**What elements of the program do you feel are particularly successful?**

Faculty are beginning to realize that this work holds the potential for publishable scholarship and conference presentations. That is providing a new avenue for some to see professional merit and advancement in incorporating WADI.

We are seeing independent action on the part of some departments to review and adapt their curriculum to meet the goals of the Working Across Difference Initiative.

- Faculty remain interested in the Teaching Across Difference approach and we have launched a new cohort this year.
- Providing evidence of success to faculty and offering them critical support, works.
- Identifying and rewarding early-adopter faculty, is critical.

As we refine the model and extend its reach, more departments are adapting their curriculum to parallel WADI, whether they use that appellation or not.

Reaching into all freshman orientation to the major classes is important, as it has set the expectation of students to see more of this content in other courses in the major.

We are realizing student gains in measured intercultural competence.

Final question: **What advice would you offer other units who might be interested in adopting a similar program?**

In addition to the comments above:

- **You need college leadership involvement**--an expectation that diversity matters and effort in that direction will be rewarded. Employing a strategy of intercultural competence facilitates introducing diversity concepts in a non-divisive manner.

- **A valid and reliable measurement tool is essential** - be prepared to defend it.

- **Make the business and educational case for the initiative.** Demonstrate how this strengthens/furthers student learning, student career success, reputation of the college, faculty interest and innovation.

- **Have a strategy in place for how to unfold the initiative and a roadmap to desired outcomes.** But leave sufficient flexibility to allow for a culture of practice to emerge, based on faculty interest.

- Faculty are key, so it is essential to **provide participating faculty with time, support and reward for their involvement**, at least initially, to build momentum.
• Understand your collegiate culture and anticipate where there is interest and where there is a potential for resistance, recognizing that some resistance is inevitable.

Our thanks to Karl Lorenz and CFANS for providing this model for our DCoP Appreciative Inquiry.

For questions regarding this article and DCoP Appreciative Inquiries, contact Amelie Hyams (hyams003@umn.edu) and for questions regarding WADI, contact Karl Lorenz (klorenz@umn.edu).

For more details on the philosophy behind WADI, you can access the Prezi presentation (as shown in the image at the top): http://bit.ly/2dUvKl0