

## **Coping with College Series**

### **Guerilla Theatre Addresses Diversity Throughout Our Campus**

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"You don't mean to tell us you're not gay!"

"Being black means going to class on the first day and not seeing another black person. It means having to educate others about my race because I'm the only person of color they know who they can ask!"

"I run and I run and I do aerobics and I eat lettuce and carrots and celery sticks and still I can't lost that last 10 pounds, but who the hell am I trying to get skinny for anyway!"

"Men are expected to be able to shoot and kill or be killed, without question. Where's the power in that?"

What's all this about? These are lines from Guerrilla Theatre. These are issues some can, and some can't identify with. For some students this is "telling it like it is."

There are some issues we can all identify with -- time pressure, academic pressure, themes common to students everywhere.

But, in a world with diversity, there are some problems and struggles we may not understand because they're not part of our own experience. Issues like wondering if a professor will make assumptions about our abilities based on our race or gender. Or worrying that a roommate will hate us because of our sexual orientation. It is easy enough to focus on issues that related to our experience, but being aware and sensitive of the concerns of others is not always so easy.

I would suggest that it is crucial, however. The ability to understand others, and to empathize with others is a foundational step in developing social conscience and in developing leadership skills.

You might then ask, "OK, so why has it taken so long for cultural issues to be taught in business schools?" And my reaction would be that there is a difference between being a manager and being a leader. Managers may know how to organize, but leaders need to be able to empathize.

Understanding where others are "coming from" is a major building block in conflict resolution and cooperative problem solving. Moreover, some of the leading players in business industry are starting to incorporate social and cultural issues in their training, recruitment and planning endeavors.

Look at the evolution of marketing strategies in recent years as a focus and appreciation of the impact that industry has on the environment has blossomed. There was a day when advocates for a safe, clean environment were thought to be "fringe."

Now it seems that the diversity of views about having a healthy planet are being heard and evaluated more carefully. Valuing diversity can help us all by maximizing the number of good ideas that different perspectives and different cultures have to offer.

Whether it's making the student with a physical disability feel welcomed in his or her new college environment or listening to perspectives that honor nature and ecosystems, if you would like to know more about diversity issues or [get involved in Guerrilla Theatre](#), there may be a place for you.

Guerrilla Theatre is comprised of students from many different majors - some with no prior theatre experience - who use theatre to address social and diversity issues on campus. Students in Guerrilla Theatre value the diversity they see in themselves and others.

The troupe is making a difference on campus by doing performances in residence halls, for student organizations, in classes and sometimes for faculty and staff programs.

The troupe always welcomes new members. We invite students who bring different types of diversity to the group. If you think you would like to do some "acting on social issues" you can [contact Ron Dow](#) or [myself](#) for more information about joining the troupe.