# Incorporating Cultural Humility in Online Library Instruction

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## Summary

In 2019, NNLM SEA overhauled its online Grants and Proposal Writing On Demand course to incorporate cultural humility concepts into the instruction. The course showed multiple opportunities to discuss these concepts, particularly regarding project planning for writing a grant proposal. The course also contained potential microaggressions that assumed specific cultural or ethnic backgrounds among participants. Registrations in the course increased in the months after the updates, with no change in the course completion rate. These results suggest that instruction that incorporates cultural humility may be a draw for participants, and that opportunities to incorporate it exist in classes on a wide range of topics.

## Challenges

One challenge was tying cultural humility concepts to the course material. Because grant-writing largely involves following instructions from funders, it might not be clear how to practice cultural humility when writing a grant proposal. Another challenge was a dearth of participant feedback to work from. Participants who complete the course are asked to complete a standard course evaluation, but it does not specifically ask about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## Acknowledgement

## Process

The most significant changes in the course dealt with project planning, for both the project to be funded and for the process of proposal-writing itself. New course content was developed to include the following points:

- Relationships with potential project partners should be cultivated outside the grant application process, so that the partners are not treated just as a means of winning a grant. This is particularly important with partners representing marginalized or underrepresented groups who have been historically exploited by those with more power.
- To the greatest extent possible, members of a project's target audience should be involved in the planning of that process.
- For projects intended to reach populations who face discrimination, cultural humility requires members of more privileged groups to readily accept correction and make changes to create a more welcoming environment. This is a lifelong and open-ended process.

Other course content required less extensive changes to remove possible microaggressions. Examples of these changes included:

- Recommending a proofreader who is fluent in the application's language, rather than a "native English speaker." This change acknowledges that someone who learned English as a foreign language can be a competent proofreader.
- Changing language to avoid credentialism and recognize contributions of people working in different roles, such as substituting "staff, volunteers and partners" for "librarians" when discussing project staff.

The revised course was published on September 30, 2019, and promoted through NNLM SEA's social media accounts and blog. The publicity around the revised course discussed the effort to incorporate cultural humility, as well as other changes.

## Results

In the nine months after the new course's debut, engagement increased significantly. Enrollments in the course increased by 21% compared to the same period one year before. The completion rate remained constant at 15%, which is typical among NNLM's on-demand online classes. Participants who completed the course received an evaluation survey; the percentage of respondents reporting satisfaction with the course increased from 85% to 100%, but given the small sample size of people who completed the survey, it is not sufficient to reach conclusions.



Enrollment in Grants and Proposal Writing On Demand, Before and After Updates
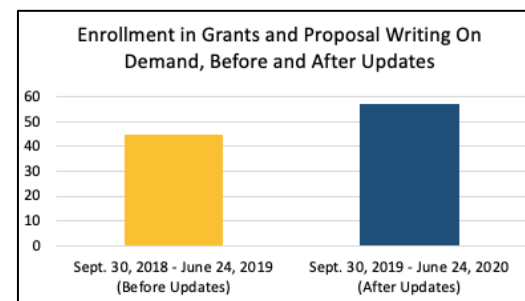
## Discussion

The project successfully incorporated cultural humility into Grants and Proposal Writing On Demand, even though the connection between grant-writing and cultural humility was not immediately obvious. This suggests that instructors can find ways to incorporate cultural humility in courses on many specific topics. The increase in registration after the updates may suggest that participants might see such updates as valuable, though data from the evaluations for this course are inconclusive on this point.

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