November 13, 2015

Dear Colleagues:

This coming spring semester (2015), the Center for Diversity & Community, USD Office for Diversity, and the Center for Teaching and Learning will once again be sponsoring a student intergroup dialogue program entitled “Voices of Discovery” (VoD). The program was offered for the seventh time during this past fall semester and involved 16 faculty members and over 200 students in 13 different groups. Student participation in the Voices program depends heavily on the support of USD faculty. Thus, I am writing to invite you and your students to participate in this important initiative.

Voices of Discovery is a project designed to structure interaction between diverse groups with the goal of creating greater understanding about intergroup/diversity issues. More specifically, the program brings together small groups of undergraduate students (8-10 students per group) representing different groups for intergroup dialogues. Examples of groups include a White/Student of Color group; a GLBTIQ/heterosexual group; an International/US group, a Native American/non-native group and a Gender Identity group.

Each group meets for two hours per week for five weeks and is facilitated by two graduate students. The goal is to create a safe space to engender greater interaction between diverse groups and understanding about intergroup/diversity issues. The groups will start meeting on February 1, 2016, continue for five weeks, and end on March 4, 2016.

Faculty who elect to support the program have previously provided students with course points for participating in the five-week program. Student participation works best if they are given points (rather than extra credit), although we defer this option to the respective faculty member. Students are required to attend all five sessions of the group to which they have been assigned. In exchange, attendance is taken at all meetings and reported at the end of the program back to the respective faculty member so that they can assign a grade to each participating student. In addition, some faculty members have requested that students write an essay, undertake a class presentation regarding their experience in the program, or undertake a diversity project to demonstrate the knowledge and experienced gained in the program.

Beginning this spring we will institute a new process for faculty and student participation. Our new website, www.usd.edu/voices, will go live December 7, 2015. This website will be the hub of information regarding the program and contain resources for faculty, students, and facilitators. As a faculty member you will be able to complete our online form to express your interest in having your class(es) participate in the program. Students will be able to use the same website to apply for the program.
The following is an example of how to insert the program into your syllabus:

“The Voices of Discovery is an intergroup dialogue program designed to create greater understanding between diverse groups of students through safe dialogues. The program will feature groups such as white/student of color group, GLBTIQ/heterosexual group, International/US group, Native American/non-Native group and a Women’s/ Men’s group. Each group will meet for two hours per week on campus for five weeks and led by trained facilitators. Pizza will be served at each meeting. To participate, fill out the application for the program and you will be informed shortly regarding the group in which you will participate. For participation in the program, you will receive XX course points.

Please consider supporting the program. To do so, please visit www.usd.edu/voices on or after December 7th. If you have questions regarding the program or participation contact us at voices@usd.edu or call (605) 677-7248.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Lamont A. Sellers
Director
Center for Diversity & Community