

inventing the future



Dealing with Our Differences

Cleveland State University leads the way in training diversity managers to handle an increasingly varied citizenry and workplace

BY ANTON ZUIKER

When Cincinnati erupted in social unrest last spring, after the police shooting of an African-American suspect, Marlene Feder was prepared to make a difference.

Feder had recently earned a master's degree from Cleveland State University in a little-known but forward-looking new discipline: diversity management. Using her training from CSU's Diversity Management Program, Feder helped the local office of the National Conference for Community and Justice to organize a Media Day of Dialogue, designed to encourage an honest and open discussion of diversity.

Facilitating such discussion, she says, involves making people "bump up against their differences" more thoughtfully. And that's exactly what the Diversity Management Program is designed to do – and to teach others how to do, says its director, CSU

psychology professor Deborah Plummer.

Diversity is not just about skin color, says Plummer; it has to do with all aspects of human difference – encompassing things like age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, ability, personality and social class.

As the American workforce has become increasingly diversified (read "less white-male"), the need for managers and executives able to negotiate these differences has grown.

The Greater Cleveland Roundtable came to that conclusion in 1997 and decided to find a way to train corporate and institutional leaders in diversity management. CSU's psychology department, responding to this need, implemented a certificate program in conjunction with the private Virginia-based NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, an organization formed in 1947 to eliminate oppression

by providing training in the theory and practice of group dynamics.

Plummer soon realized, though, that many people were interested in a full master's degree, and she changed the program accordingly. The fifth class – in academic parlance, it's called a cohort – includes fifteen master's students along with two seeking the certificate. The thirty-six-semester-hour program, which begins on August 24, can be completed in eighteen months. (As we went to press, there were still one or two slots.)

"Our goal is to train practitioners who can produce meaningful change," says Steve Slane, a psychology professor and instructor in the program. For this reason, he says, CSU's program uses the scholar-practitioner model. While the program trains students to respond to diversity issues in the workplace and social events like Cincinnati's unrest, it also encourages students to produce new ways of thinking about diversity.