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Using a Historical Tour to Teach Extension Audiences About Diversity and Human Rights

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Using a Historical Tour to Teach Extension Audiences About Diversity and Human Rights

Abstract

Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights is a traveling workshop designed to teach about the roots of the state's people and their human rights challenges. Designers planned to acquaint participants with the richness and diversity of Idaho's past and broaden their perspective on the way in which past residents coped with issues not much different from those current residents face. Participants report gains in knowledge of Idaho's past and present challenges of human rights and diversity and plan to apply that knowledge in their daily lives. Educators can modify and replicate Idaho's Journey to fit any state or region.

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Introduction

Idaho is the third fastest growing state in the nation (Bernstein, 2006), with dramatic population shifts that have altered the character and dynamics of communities. Notable changes include

growth in Latino representation, influxes of retirees, changes in the religious makeup of communities, increases in migrant groups, issues of Native American sovereignty, and a shift from an agrarian and natural resource-based economy to service and technology industries. Besides these issues, Idaho developed a poor human rights reputation when the Neo-Nazi Aryan Nations established a headquarters in northern Idaho. Added together, Idaho has many human rights issues that need to be addressed with education and compassion.

To help Idaho communities cope with these issues, University of Idaho Extension developed an educational program to approach concerns about intergroup tension and human rights. Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights is a traveling workshop designed to train participants in the historical roots of Idaho's constituent groups and the state's challenges as well as successes in human rights and inclusiveness throughout its history.

Idaho's Journey for Diversity and Human Rights

Organizers designed Idaho's Journey so participants could:

- Directly experience the events and people relevant to diversity and human rights in Idaho.
- Recognize the diversity within Idaho and its historical roots.
- Learn strategies to increase human rights awareness and challenge stereotypes.

Idaho's Journey is a 2- or 3-day workshop in which participants travel, stay, and eat together, learning about the human rights and diversity issues of the region. Whenever possible, representatives of a group's history tell the stories of that community. Historical experts, often university professors, supplement local presentations.

Idaho's Journey was launched in northern Idaho in July 2005. In Coeur d'Alene, leaders of the area Human Rights Task Force described how they overcame the hate message of the Neo-Nazi organization, the Aryan Nations, by following the teachings of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Although it took 20 years, the "compound" of the Aryan Nations is now a peace park.

On the second day, participants traveled to the Coeur d'Alene Reservation to hear the experiences of Coeur d'Alene tribal elders and their ancestors in the boarding school system. The Journey concluded in Wallace, where participants learned about suffragist May Hutton, who helped Idaho women win voting rights in 1896, the fourth state in the nation to grant women's suffrage. Participants also learned about the often-deadly efforts to unionize the silver mining industry in that area.

Three additional workshops have been held throughout the state, incorporating historical landmarks such as Idaho's Ann Frank Memorial, Idaho City Historical Museum, Pioneer Cemeteries in Boise and Idaho City, Spanish Village, the Basque Center, the Minidoka Internment National Monument, Three Island Crossing on the Oregon Trail, the Fort Hall Replica, and the Sho-Ban Tribal Museum.

To date, the four Journeys have attracted an average of 20 participants. This size allows groups to visit smaller historical sites, to share transportation and stay together at a single hotel, and to develop meaningful relationships among themselves.

Program Planning and Funding

Extension organizers received a planning grant for regional meetings to bring together groups and individuals who could provide the historical and human rights background necessary for the success of the Journeys. Organizers met with representatives from state agencies, including Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Commerce and Labor, and the Idaho Human Rights Commission. National agencies participating included the National Parks Service and the U.S. Forest Service. Idaho nonprofit groups that helped organize the Journeys consisted of the NAACP, the Idaho Hispanic Caucus, the Agency for New Americans, the Idaho Human Rights Education Center, the Kootenai County Human Rights Task Force, and the Idaho Black History Museum. Three of Idaho's largest tribes were involved in planning and execution of the Journeys, including the Sho-Ban, the Coeur d'Alene, and the Nez Perce tribes.

Additional meetings brought together educators from colleges within the University of Idaho, including professors in history, archeology, sociology, women's studies, and Native American studies. Educators from other Idaho colleges and universities also provided information about sites in different areas of the state. This program has allowed colleges not usually involved in Extension outreach to participate as full partners in an experience with a positive impact on participants and the University of Idaho.

Program expenses for Idaho's Journey include transportation, overnight accommodations, meals, speaker honoraria, marketing, and advertising. Program costs have been funded by participant fees (\$125-200 per person), business sponsorships, and grant funds. University of Idaho Extension Districts have also provided funding to lower costs for participants.

Program marketing has focused on specific groups who would find the Journey most relevant to

their work or daily experience. Extension educators involved in each Journey passed out brochures, spoke with media contacts, and worked with human rights groups to market the program to teachers, human rights groups, and community leaders.

Idaho's Journey Outcomes

Program effectiveness was tested using a retrospective pre-test methodology, with participants rating their knowledge and skills at the end of the program and retrospectively rating their understanding at the beginning of the program. Ratings were made on a 7 point scale, with 0=low and 6=high. A matched-pairs t-test comparing pre and post ratings for each question shows sizeable and significant changes for all questions. Table 1 shows responses for the first Idaho's Journey. The three other Idaho Journeys showed comparable effects. Those data are not included but are available from the authors upon request.

Table 1.
Participant Survey Ratings for North Idaho's Journey, July 2005

Survey Questions	Mean Scores		
	Posttest	Pretest	t-test
My knowledge of the people and events important to Idaho's past and present challenges of diversity and human rights.	4.23	2.46	t(12)=6.32*
My knowledge of how Idaho's past challenges can help us understand present day issues of diversity and human rights.	4.69	2.46	t(12)=6.86*
My knowledge of strategies that have been successful in addressing issues of diversity and human rights in Idaho.	4.23	2.23	t(12)=5.59*
My ability to speak up or take action on issues of diversity and human rights.	4.85	3.54	t(12)=3.17*
My connections to others in Idaho concerned about diversity and human rights.	4.61	3.00	t(12)=4.88*
My commitment to helping address issues of diversity and human rights.	5.23	4.00	t(12)=2.70*
*p<.01			

Table 2.
Participant Qualitative Comments from North Idaho's Journey, July 2005

Survey Questions	Participant Responses
How has Idaho's Journey affected your view of Idaho and its people?	It is very important to be proactive within our community and "spread the word" about inclusiveness.
	I am reminded of the richness and complexity of Idaho's culture and the many cross currents that affect our perceptions.
	I appreciate the resiliency of people. It gives me hope in the light of current human rights struggles in Idaho.
	I saw the depth of pain still felt today by some of the groups with unresolved grief. This awareness will help me confront my assumption that things that happened a long time ago are over and dealt with.
What have you learned that you will put into practice in your home community?	I will speak for those in need when confronted with situations that need my input.
	I will share historical struggles with my students so they can relate with their current economic, racial, and ethnic struggles.
	I am more committed to hearing both sides of the story before making decisions.
What would you tell others who are thinking about taking this Journey?	This is an opportunity to 'be there' and to hear first hand from those who have participated and bore witness to history, and from those who have best examined those events.
	You will get below the surface of the obvious to discover the heart and culture of Idaho's most valuable

history--its diverse populations.

They will be amazed! It is well worth it — full of rich information that gives depth and compassion to the understanding of human rights.

The Journey Continues

Idaho's Journey moves to different regions of the state each year. Over several years, the program can develop a cadre of individuals well grounded in Idaho's human rights and diversity issues and their historical roots. A solid historical perspective on the campaigns of the past can shore up the resolve of individuals to persevere in their current human rights work. Shared Idaho's Journey experiences can help build a statewide network to support the work of groups and individuals. In these ways, this Extension program will help develop communities that more effectively include the full diversity of their residents.

References

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