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Recycling Incompetence: A Reflection on Cultural Competency Development in Graduate Preparation

Khaled J. Ismail

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I am a graduate student in a higher education administration and policy program—a future administrator, if you will—who is not required to develop cultural competency prior to graduation.

My colleagues and I are able to discuss issues of access and success for minority and underrepresented students using theoretical, philosophical, and even moral perspectives. Likewise, many of my peers in graduate programs across the country can analyze policy, evaluate programs, and make recommendations related to equity in education.

Unfortunately, many will also conflate social justice with diversity, mistaking accommodation for inclusion. We tout our liberal use of gender-affirming language, throw around buzzwords like dialogue, and have developed our liberal use of gender-affirming language, throwing around buzzwords like dialogue, and have developed training, education, and critical engagement within educational programs. But at some point, we have to take responsibility too.

The cycle of producing and reproducing incompetence needs to stop, and it is our responsibility to call for it. If we are to truly value Black life, if we are to truly commit to justice and equity in all aspects of higher education, and if we believe we are responsible for the future of this mess, then we must do better. The question of how this all can be implemented has been thoroughly studied and corroborated by scholars and practitioners time and time again.

What are we waiting for?

In Solidarity,
Khaled Ismail