

# Impact of Civil Rights Movement Immersion Experience on UW- Eau Claire Student Participants

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## Objective

To determine if an immersion experience enhances a student's awareness of social injustice and diversity issues and whether it has an impact on a student's degree of racism.



## Abstract

The Civil Rights Pilgrimage is an evaluation study of the impact of immersion experiences on the development of multicultural competence at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Research was conducted by distributing a survey before the trip to test previous knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement; this survey also included the Modern Racism Scale, testing the participant's level of racist beliefs. When the trip was completed the students were given the exact same survey, with satisfaction questions added. With the variations in participant's responses we, as a research team, were able to evaluate the differences in knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement and the individual's racist attitudes. The data we have collected from the pilgrimage demonstrates an immense change in knowledge and racist attitudes. The participants developed a progressive notion of diversity today from looking at the at racial injustices of the past.

## Methods

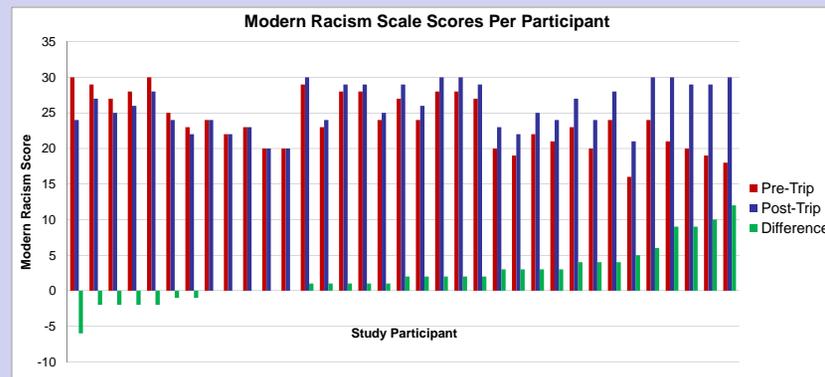
- There was a total of 35 university student participants between the ages of 18 and 24.
- 30 participants identified themselves as Caucasian. The remaining five participants identified themselves as African-American, African, Hispanic, Asian and Southeast Asian respectively.
- All 35 respondents reported participating in at least one university course related to diversity and/or diversity issues.
- Each participant completed a multicultural competency assessment, including an online survey, a writing sample that evaluated the participant's personal beliefs and perceptions of discrimination in today's society and the modern racism scale test.
- Each participant then completed a ten-day tour of various historical civil rights sites throughout the southern United States.
- Participants then completed another survey, writing sample and modern racism scale test following the immersion experience.
- Each student's decision to participate in the study was completely voluntary.

## The McConahay Modern Racism Scale Test

- This scale was developed in 1986 and poses questions regarding modern racism.
- The scale includes questions on the topic of racism in a Likert format with possible answers including: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

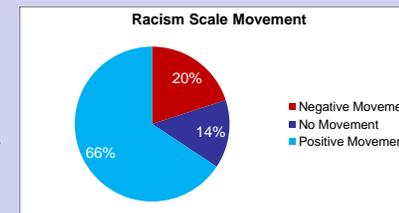
Questions
The Modern Racism Scale Items Used in the Present Study
1. Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to Blacks than they deserve.
2. It is easy to understand the anger of Black people in the United States. (Reverse scored).
3. Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States.
4. Over the past few years, Blacks have received more economically than they deserve.
5. Blacks have more influence upon school desegregation plans than they ought to have.
6. Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights.
7. Blacks should not push themselves where they are not wanted.
Note. From McConahay, J.B. (1996). Modern racism, ambivalence, and the modern racism scale.

## Results



This graph depicts the variations between the individual participant's answers to the Pre-Trip and Post-Trip Modern Racism survey. The portion of the graph that is of most interest to us as a research team is the "differences" in the scores. The higher the score, the less racist the answers of the participant. The lower the score, the more racist the answer. The graph shows each individual participant's Pre-Trip score, Post-Trip score, and the differences between the two scores. There were seven participants who had difference scores that were negative numbers. This means that their Post-Trip score was lower than their Pre-Trip score and instead of decreasing racist thoughts, they actually increased. Five participants showed no change between their Pre-Trip and Post-Trip scores and the other twenty-three participants showed increases in their scores from the Pre-Test to the Post-Tests scores.

The graph at the right shows the movement between the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores for the participants as a whole. Out of the thirty-five participants, twenty-three showed positive movement, five showed no movement, and seven showed negative movement.



## Discussion

- Limitations of this study are related but not limited to the number of students that participated and financial barriers restricting students from participating. The students who voluntarily chose to participate in this pilgrimage were likely already relatively open-minded and seeking to learn more about social justice and diversity issues.
- Implications of this research declare that immersion experiences are extremely beneficial to the learning environment and if possible, should expand its student base and be implemented within the school systems. Immersion experiences allow students to encounter social justice and race-related issues first-hand, creating a realistic historical perspective they may not have fully understood before.
- Future research may include a longitudinal study. There is also potential for study of similar experiences in different disciplines.

## Works Cited

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