

# UWEC [AND] the Selma-Eau Claire Domestic Intercultural Immersion ASB: An Exploration of the Impacts of High-Impact Practices on Blugold Attitudes Surrounding EDI Initiatives & Strategic Guidepost Goals

The Power of **AND**

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## INTRODUCTION

As a campus with a current Strategic Guidepost Goal of working toward a student body that includes 20 percent enrollment of students of color and closing the opportunity gap, UWEC recognizes potential implicit biases inherent within institutional practices at UWEC that need to be addressed (Schmidt, 2015). This research explores student experiences with the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange Alternative Spring Break (ASB) trip, a university-supported Domestic Intercultural Immersion (DII) experience. The primary purpose of this high-impact experience is to expose Blugolds to history, activism, and nation-wide community partnerships to intentionally work to support Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI) initiatives on campus. Conclusions and implications exemplify the significance of DII ASB trips in supporting the development, implementation, and embracing of EDI initiatives to impact organizational culture on campus, assessed and contextualized utilizing tenets of Social Judgment Theory (Griffin, 2006).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- RQ1:** What, if any, changes in cultural competence (as defined by the AAC&U Rubric) exist in correlation with pre- and post-assessment of the Selma-Eau Claire ASB integrative learning experience?  
**RQ2:** What themes emerge in student narratives that contribute to changes in attitudes towards racism?

## METHODS:

### Data Collection

- Qualitative data for the research question was collected via convenience sampling of focus group interviews with students who participated in the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange over the 2016 spring break. Eight females and one male were interviewed on his/her overall experience on the trip, how his/her perception of the social climate regarding race relations in the United States has changed, and which instance on the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange challenged his/her worldview.
- Quantitative data was collected via an online Qualtrics survey. All twenty-one students completed the survey both before and after going to Selma, Alabama.
- Participant Demographics
  - 3 students identified as male, 18 identified as female
  - 2 students self-identified as African American, 18 identified as White, 1 identified as Asian American
  - 9 first year, 4 second year, 3 third year, and 5 fourth year students

### Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the online Qualtrics survey drawing upon elements from the Symbolic Racism 2000 Scale (Henry, P. J., & Sears, D. O., 2002), White Privilege Attitudes Scale (Pinterits, E. J., Poteat, V. P., & Spanierman, L. B., 2009), and the AAC&U rubrics to assess cultural competence (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2009).
- Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative focus group interview data.

## SOCIAL JUDGMENT THEORY

Sheriff's Social Judgment Theory assumes upon first hearing a new piece of information, we judge where it would land on an attitude scale that we have in our minds based upon our current knowledge of the topic.

There are three zones in which the new information could fall in: the latitude of acceptance, latitude of non-commitment, or latitude of rejection. Our ego-involvement greatly influences into which zone we place a topic. Ego-involvement refers to how important a topic is to oneself.

When a message contrasts with someone with high ego-involvement, he/she will perceive that message as being further from his/her anchor than it really is. Conversely, when a message falls within the latitude of acceptance of a person with high ego-involvement, he/she will perceive himself/herself and the speaker as having the same opinion.

In order to shift our attitudes, we must first judge how close or far a message is from our anchored position. Once judgment is complete, we are able to adjust our attitude to accommodate the new information accordingly.

The message that is most successful in persuading us to adjust our attitudes is the one that is most discrepant from our anchored position yet falls within our latitude of acceptance. However, if we judge a message to be within our latitude of rejection, we will dismiss the message by adjusting our attitude away from what we think the speaker is advocating.

## LIBERAL EDUCATION: INTEGRATIVE LEARNING

The overarching goal of incorporating the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange ASB trip in CI/WMNS 111: Gender, Race, Class, & Communication: The Social Construction of Identity is to integrate learning across courses and disciplines, and between campus and community life.

### Element 1: Connections to Experience

- Students enrolled in CI/WMNS 111 effectively develop examples of life experiences that connect to the class and the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange ASB trip

### Element 2: Connections Across Disciplines

- Students enrolled in CI/WMNS 111 demonstrate an ability to effectively connect content from the disciplines of Communication Studies and Women's Studies to the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange ASB trip to address social issues locally.

### Element 3: Transfer Between Contexts

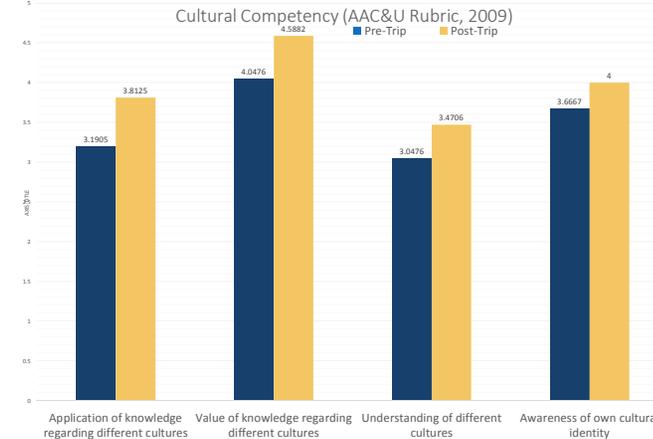
- Students enrolled in course curriculum apply skills and knowledge gained from the class and the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange ASB trip from one academic or experimental setting to another to solve problems or address issues with confidence.

(Integrative Learning Rubric Worksheet, 2012)

## RESULTS

**RQ1:** What, if any, changes in cultural competence (as defined by the AAC&U Rubric) exist in correlation with pre- and post-assessment of the Selma-Eau Claire ASB integrative learning experience?

- While the changes were not significant, all aspects of cultural competence increased after the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange ASB trip.



**RQ2:** What themes emerge in student narratives that contribute to changes in attitudes toward racism?

**Interview Question:** "Please describe your perception of the social climate surrounding race relations in the United States after having gone on this trip."

- White Privilege Awareness**
  - "Us being able to go on this trip is evidence of white privilege. The fact that we are able to come to Selma, have a life-changing experience, but leave after a week and have the option to forget what we saw is an example of privilege."
  - "It is easy to think that racism doesn't happen. But when I went to Selma and realized that is not the case, it made me think about my white privilege because I don't have to be aware of the police brutality, inequality, and racism that still exists because it doesn't directly affect me."
- Implicit Bias Acknowledgement**
  - "Based on what I have experienced in my CI and sociology classes, it is interesting because the comments I hear from students in the classes regarding social issues on campus and their white privilege troubles me because they are naive about it. It is obvious from their comments that they have biases that they are not even aware of."
  - "So many people have prejudices either consciously or subconsciously. It is so important to tap into those and acknowledge them to begin the process of eliminating them."
- Climate of Silence and Discomfort**
  - "Race relations in the United States is not discussed enough, but it is also very heavy. It is discussed unproductively like in politics and humor. It is not in a welcoming place where we can discuss it openly and understand one another. [...] In Eau Claire, it is the same way."
  - "The general aura is discomfort. Everybody knows racism is happening. When you start to talk about it, people are told their feelings are invalid and they are being overly sensitive."

## IMPLICATIONS

- DII immersions are beneficial for many positions in the school system. Students are able to understand the importance of cultural competence and how racism continues to affect our society long after the years of Jim Crow through inherent prejudices and institutional biases. With this knowledge, they may be better prepared to work for a change.
- After research on pre-trip and post-trip data, faculty may find it beneficial to support DII programs by integrating course work with the Selma-Eau Claire Exchange to expand on existing research regarding DII programs.

"SCHULTZ SAID ONE OF THE BIGGEST THINGS STUDENTS ARE ABLE TO TAKE AWAY FROM THE TRIP IS THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE AND CLASS."  
(Tetzlaff, 2016)

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University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Students Posing on the Roof of Teppers Building, a Youth Center in the Making in Downtown Selma, Alabama