Why is it so hard to change? Why is it even harder to help other people change? I want to share with you some rather personal thoughts about why it is difficult to change the curricula to focus on diversity and inclusion, how I went about doing it, and what I learned in the process. I like to think of myself as a risk taker, an open person. I like to think that I am not just intellectually but viscerally willing to change when adequate need is shown. Still, change is difficult for me.

Several years ago, I decided in the spirit of enlightened self-interest to shift from one principal teaching focus to another. This led to creating two new courses—"Women in International Development" for Women Studies and "Ethnic Notions," a first-year seminar on unlearning racism and sexism funded by the Council on Academic Programs in the Residence Halls for the Hallet Hall Diversity Program taught through the Center for Studies of Ethnicity and Race in America. It also meant taking a long, hard look at my traditional media courses in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

"Why would you want to do that?" I was asked by a colleague. "Isn't that extra work?" "Your research will undoubtedly suffer," another remarked. As I listened to the comments, I began to have self-doubts. It reminded me of the time I decided to change the sequence of my morning routine. It turned out to be a difficult and energy-expending adjustment for me. I eventually gave up.

Recently a friend suggested that I get an answering machine at my home. My immediate reaction was, "I don't want to do that. . . . If it's important, the caller will call back!" I still don't have an answering machine. So as I began to think about creating new courses and reformulating old courses to incorporate diversity in an informed and constructive way, I became the subject of my own change. Here is what I learned.

Simply being interested in such issues as race, class disparities, disabilities, and sexual orientation was not sufficient. To work on correcting past inequities, I had to be willing to make both an intellectual and pedagogical shift. This was a scary thought, especially when I had to admit to my pedagogical shortcomings. For example, I found students eager to talk about race relations, but those discussions were at times volatile. I did not learn teaching skills in my graduate education to prepare me for any classroom situation, far less one in which students' voices would be heard above mine. I also discovered that students of color, who were less assimilated, brought much of their culture into the classroom which my social class and cultural background did not prepare me for. As one African American student recently remarked, "I have a real difficult time when the discussion is interesting to follow classroom procedures of raising my hand to be acknowledged by the professor. I just want to jump into the discussion at any time. It frustrates me to follow turn-taking behaviors of White people."

I also thought that I could easily remedy the monoperspectiveness of my courses by adding into my syllabus works about people of color, women, the aged, the differently abled, homosexuals and other traditionally excluded groups. However, what I ended up with were courses that relegated these groups to the "other" category, permanent victims of mainstream culture, deprived and incomplete. Without realizing it, I had designed my courses based on the victimization approach, the same victimization approach that governs much of society's attempts to solve many of its social problems. How many interventions are targeted for students of color to adjust to, feel comfortable in, fit into predominantly White campuses? Yet study after study suggests that the difficulties students of color encounter lie with the uncomfortable environment created by members of the dominant group. Still, so many of our interventions are designed to produce changes in the victims, not the victimizers.

Both in and out of the classroom we continue to use formulas that interpret the lives of people traditionally excluded from the canon based upon a universal norm that has little to do with the reality of history and people's experiences. How different, for example, a
course describing the experiences of Chicanos and the media would be had I begun with El Semanario and La Voz (two Colorado bilingual newspapers) rather than The Denver Post.

How differently students might read African American identity if they were to use Zora Neale Hurston's definition: “But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are hurt about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.”

As I moved away from interpreting these groups from the eyes and experiences of the dominant group, I became more conscious of recreating courses based on studying people on their own terms. When I began to study people on their own terms, I found out that I had to discard many of the theories and concepts that never took into consideration the people they seek to embrace today. For the first time, I was taking a critical look at the realities of power and oppression that are embedded in the history and development of my field. This meant often beginning from ground zero, building from the bottom up.

I also found out that in spite of my years of education, I did not escape learning and believing stereotypes and biases that undergird people with different sexual preferences, people who are differently abled, and people whose color is different from my own. For me, challenging these stereotypes became the first step in the embrace of diversity.

Although I could very easily point to overt oppressive and discriminatory behaviors from members of my own group, I failed to see the overriding covert behaviors that had become so much a part of me. Once I became conscious of my covert oppressive behaviors, I had to be prepared to deal with my denial, frustration, anger, guilt, and guilt. Thus, heightening my sensitivity to my unconscious and inadvertent behaviors was an essential second step in the embrace of diversity.

Needless to say, change was not easy. I went through a period of hanging on to the old and familiar. I was defensive, rigid and, at times, visibly angry. But as I went through this process, I learned several valuable lessons. To change the pedagogy and curricula to reflect diversity and inclusion, I had to begin with me. I had to be willing to be open, receptive and ready to unlearn whatever residual oppressive attitudes I held that would prevent me from helping students to be less racist, more open to difference, and generally less oppressive to others. Diversity is not just teaching anti-oppressiveness, appreciation and tolerance of other cultures, it is intellectual rigor that stands the assumptions inherent in the social and behavioral science disciplines on their head. I also learned that I had to place equal value on changing content and pedagogy to reflect diversity and inclusion. To do this, I had to abandon the solitary pursuit of teaching, come out of the closet and acknowledge my pedagogical shortcomings, and ask my colleagues for critical and honest feedback.

What implications did this transformation have on my teaching and on student learning in general? Fundamentally, I learned to have a greater appreciation for and legitimization of the unlearning process. Since I was aware of my change, I was able to better understand what students go through to change. When students begin to look at old things in a different light (as I did), their old world often becomes shattered. For some, the transition is easy. For others, it is painful and difficult. This made me build into my courses flexibility and support by facilitating, through classroom work, student-to-student contact, enabling group building and at times including the Cross-cultural Consultation Team (CCT) from Counseling and Career Services: A Multicultural Center.

The transformation also changed my philosophy of teaching. I moved from a teacher- to a student-centered classroom. This change had a profound effect on my students. Essentially they became more responsible for their learning, more creative and productive. Students question, debate, interact and disagree more than in the traditional teacher-centered classroom. They also learned how to listen. However, the most difficult adjustment is the unpredictability of classroom dynamics and the fact that I became more vulnerable. Giving students power means that they will use it. I never know when they will use it, or how they
will use it. Especially when they will challenge me or each other.

Although I had devised clear ways of measuring learning, I discovered that students experienced significant personal learnings. I wanted to understand these learnings as well as to help students assess their own learnings. I found that using a journal was decisively helpful in tracking these serendipitous learnings. The following are a few additional examples that can work in any classroom that deals with the issues of change and unlearning.

1. **Openness and Confidentiality**
   Students learn in relationship. The classroom atmosphere, the mode of instruction, the relationship between students in the class, and between the teacher and the students all impact learning. After introductions, I discuss my philosophy of teaching and learning and why the course they are taking is important. The next step is working with the students on the classroom atmosphere by setting the ground rules. We usually acknowledge that in a classroom where diversity is celebrated, self-disclosure is often a part of the unlearning process. In such a classroom, listening and respecting each other’s position become critical. Students then agree to respect and keep confidential personal materials that are shared. I also make it clear that at no time will their grades be affected by their disclosure. For instance, in my "Ethnic Notions" and "Mass Communication and Public Opinion" classes, many White students are often vehemently opposed to Affirmative Action, and their opposition can be quite passionate. Students in an unlearning environment must feel totally comfortable to raise issues such as Affirmative Action without fear of punitive measures from the teacher.

2. **Teacher Candidness**
   In a classroom community that supports the acceptance of diversity the teacher is not a bystander. Just as students are asked to self-disclose, teachers also must recognize that they need to operate from a high degree of candidness. For example, when I ask students to talk about the stereotypes they hold about people different from themselves, I also talk about my own stereotypes and how they were developed.

3. **Dispelling Myths**
   Students arrive in my classroom with elaborate maps about the nature of reality, themselves, and others. In my "Ethnic Notions" and "Mass Communication and Public Opinion" classes, I ask students what issues they feel are important to African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Native peoples. I then ask how they arrived at these issues. Most of the time, it is through the mainstream press. I then give them an assignment to find out from people of these particular groups what issues concern them and how they view those issues. Students use a number of strategies to identify members of these groups ranging from student groups on campus to local Boulder and Denver community organizations. I also assign them to read various ethnic newspapers produced by members of these groups. For example, I distribute copies of the New York Amsterdam News (an African American newspaper) of which I periodically collect back issues from Norlin. Students are asked to read the entire issue and report on how African Americans from New York City define their local and national concerns and to compare the views in the press with those arrived at in class. This is probably one of the most shocking and eye-opening assignments for many White students. They begin to see African Americans for the first time as complex, multidimensional human beings. Typical responses are: "I never thought sports would get such low coverage in a Black newspaper." "There is much more emphasis on political empowerment and education than in the regular newspapers." "Until I read this paper I thought Jesse Jackson was the only Black leader in the country." "I felt good about reading a paper that had a clear position and ideology." "I noticed more ads for hair and hair salons than other products." The last comment has almost become predictable. I frequently follow this up with the video "Hairpiece: A Film for Nappy Headed People," and a discussion on Black hair as culture, the historical context associated with
developing Black female personhood, the concept of Europeanized beauty, and how this has affected both Black and White female self-identity.

4. **The Awareness Assessment**
DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF CLASS, I GIVE STUDENTS AN AWARENESS ASSIGNMENT. IN THIS ASSIGNMENT, STUDENTS ARE ASKED:

1. What is your ethnic background and gender?
2. What has it meant to belong to your ethnic/gender group?
3. Where did you grow up and what other ethnic groups resided there?
4. What was your first experience of feeling different?
5. What are your earliest images of race or color/people with different abilities/people of different sexual orientations?
6. What advantages/disadvantages may be associated with belonging to your ethnic group/particular gender/sexual orientation?
7. What were your concerns and feelings while answering these questions?

I use this assignment in a number of ways. First, it helps to flesh out some of the course by allowing me to personalize the content each semester. This gives me the option of adding or deleting some readings. Second, this assignment aided in stimulating discussions and is a meaningful tool for me in evaluating the individual student's reality. The latter helps me to initiate discussion during my office hours among students who may be too apprehensive to be open in class. Finally, I have also used the assignment to call on the CCT for advice when I identify a problem beyond my expertise.

5. **Defining Terminology**
Hispanic, Latino, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Black, African American, queer, underdeveloped, Third World—what we call ourselves and what others call us and the gap between the two are critical issues. Language is culture and beyond what some may mistakenly label as political correctness, there is debate in many communities regarding terms that particular groups had no say in creating about themselves or in defining their experiences. It should be no surprise to any of us that if Indians wrote the history of Columbus in the Americas, the word "discover" would never have made it in. Since language, like culture, is continually evolving, it is important to raise these issues in class because language tells us a lot about ourselves and people we seek to know.

I handle the terminology issue in three ways. First, I begin by clarifying or establishing semantic parameters so as not to impose judgments. For example, the term "minority" is variously interpreted as a euphemism referring specifically to Asians, African Americans, Latinos, and Native peoples. I discuss why it is currently seen by many as an oppressive term that connotes disempoweredness and poverty. Since the term "minority" imposes a hierarchical standard and value judgment, such usage is best reserved for quantifiable and verifiable statistics. Terminology such as "people of color" on the other hand, acknowledges racial or ethnic heritage independent of value-laden language. A similar argument could be used for the term "Third World," a value-laden ranking that relegates most societies of Africa, Latin America, and Asia to a lower status than the more economically advanced societies. Likewise, the term "handicap," historically connected with a cap-in-hand begging image, refers to the consequences of society's prejudices and barriers and not to a person's disABILITY.

Second, I discuss language that oppressed groups have reclaimed and redefined (the word "queer" is a good example here). Language can also be reclaimed and redefined by members of the dominant culture. When the Kappa Sigma fraternity at Colorado College (CC) wanted to pledge their first African American student in 1968, the national body was in an uproar. So much so that former Senator John Tower and Vice President of the National Chapter paid the CC chapter a visit. In an effort to demean the action of the CC
chapter, they were subsequently labeled the "Negroid" chapter. In response, the members of the chapter reclaimed the word and some twenty-five years later still call themselves the "Groids."

Finally, I raise terms that many of the undergraduates are exposed to from the popular culture of particular groups. For example, one cannot view a Spike Lee film or listen to a particular genre of rap music without hearing the word "nigger." I find students' understanding of the word is based on two concepts: "White people don't call Black people nigger" or "Blacks like calling each other that." In this case, it is important to point out to students the historical development of words. I discuss the word from the original corruption of negra (Spanish for black), to its usage as a racial slur and means of demeaning people without human status, to its contemporary redefinition among many African Americans. To understand the word "nigger" from a contemporary African American viewpoint, I discuss how the situation, tone, gender, class and age play into the definition. In this way, the word can be used selectively as a term of endearment, in humor, a greeting, identifying a close buddy, to illustrate a point, stopping in-group stereotypic behaviors, as fighting words, to move Black people to "Blackness" (as the liberation poets did in the 60's and 70's), or as some female students in a Denver high school recently explained to me, "a nigger could also be a male ho." Although the word has various definitions among many members of the African American community, it still symbolizes hundreds of years of anti-African racism and cultural repression.

6. Assumption of Homogeneity
Letting go of ethnocentrism is hard; fighting against negative stereotypes is even harder. But embedded in these preconceptions of individuals and groups, is a deeper and more subtle problem: the view that people with different sexual orientations, the differently abled, African Americans, Latinos, Asians and Native peoples are homogeneous. For example, gays and lesbians are often depicted as united in a common culture with sexual practice being the only defining characteristic. Despite same-sex attractiveness, there are many sexual orientations. To get students to move from a one-dimensional, homogeneous approach, we begin to discuss diversity among White heterosexuals, since this is the dominant group in my class. Particular attention is paid to class differences among Whites. Once students begin to see their differences, they can then begin to focus on other people. I also use the videos "Lifetime Companions" and 'Paris Is Burning' to talk about heterogeneity among gays. After viewing the videos, I devise several themes on difference (e.g., the concept of the nuclear family vis-à-vis the family structure depicted in 'Paris Is Burning') and ask students to write on one of the themes.

Along the same lines, it is important to dispel the homogeneity myths that are embedded in students' heads or not to foster further homogenization when using a guest speaker who is different from the dominant group. For example, I often find my students believing that their one Indian friend means that they know all Indians and can speak on behalf of the group, or because they went to school in El Paso, they know all Latinos, or their one trip to Jamaica means they know all Caribbean people. I point out clearly that our Puerto Rican lesbian writer guest speaker simply means that they know her experiences and not all Latina lesbian writers.

7. Service Learning
Students' relationships with people both in and outside of the classroom impact learning. Getting students involved with organizations and groups they have had little contact with is critical to diversity and inclusion. I built into my "Ethnic Notions" class a three-hour weekly service learning component that is worth 15 percent of the final grade. I selected the site(s), met with the staff, discussed their needs, the students' needs, the evaluation form that will be used by the staff to assess student learning, and the organization's
operating procedures. The staff conducts an orientation for the entire class on-site. I monitor their work through monthly phone calls to their supervisors and by spending the first 10 minutes of each class discussing their previous week's service. This helps to illuminate the positive learning experience, the links back to the classroom, to identify problems, and to offer alternative solutions. Service has also helped me to get students involved with other units on campus. For example, I have referred students to the Bueno Center when they are assigned to help tutor a bilingual child. The impact of service learning on the students' development has been tremendous. Students have changed their majors, they have been able to better connect the theoretical foundations in the classroom with first-hand experience, and they have also begun to understand their role as Whites in a pluralistic nation. By mid-semester, they come to understand that winning loyalty is a matter of commitment and their willingness to listen.

8. Individualized Change
Once students' awareness has been raised and they begin to recognize how power, privilege and oppression in American society impacts upon them and others, they become inundated by this new knowledge. When this happens, students either feel the need to use their new knowledge constructively or they feel powerless. During the last two classes, students work towards change by developing an individualized anti-oppressive plan. To assist them in developing their plan, we begin by discussing the kind of world they would like to live in. This is followed by situations they have previously encountered in which oppressive attitudes and behaviors were exhibited. We list the kinds of statements they have heard and then discuss how they would now behave with their new knowledge, the kinds of responses they could possibly make and the risks they would face in becoming agents of social change.

I would not want you to think that success in diversity and inclusion depends only on a certain "kind of faculty" or only in "certain kinds of courses." Similarly, I would not want you to feel guilty for not shaping your courses to become more inclusive and diverse. When we concentrate on the guilt, we become immobile. In reality we are all for diversity and inclusion for some very straightforward and self-interested reasons. Yet only with a vision of what this could mean to students, coupled with the courage of faculty to make intellectual and pedagogical changes, are we going to have a chance of making it happen.

References

Polly McLean
Biography
For Polly McLean diversity has always been a part of her life. Raised in a trilingual home in Trinidad and Tobago, in a community that included East Indians, Venezuelians, Lebanese, West Indians, Chinese, and a hodgepodge of mixed ethnic groups, there was never a question that life was not a rainbow to appreciate and absorb. She moved to the United States when she was 14 years of age and settled in Brooklyn, New York, in a neighborhood that included African Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Panamanians, Hassids, and people from both English and French speaking Caribbean islands.

After graduating from the High School for the Performing Arts, she entered City College in New York in hopes of pursuing a degree in Theatre Arts. But as a born change agent, she
dropped out after her first semester and joined VISTA, trading big city life for rural Illinois, as a community organizer. Dubbed a super-VISTA, she was one of two VISTA’s selected at completion of service to go to Detroit to train the first wave of community VISTA’s.

With a renewed vigor and some very different interests, she returned to college to pursue a major in African History, with a pre-colonial emphasis. It was here that she received a full scholarship to the University of Ghana, Legon, for intensive study on African political systems and religion. After graduating with highest honors, she immediately went to Columbia University where she completed her Masters with honors in Community Media. After five years of community activism work in New York City, she returned to the University of Texas, Austin, Department of Radio-TV-Film, where she completed her doctoral degree in media research and theory with an emphasis in development communication and social change.

Today, she is an internationally recognized specialist in family planning information, education and communication, and communication policy and planning. She has lived in West and Southern Africa and the Caribbean, where she has studied and conducted research. Between 1987 and 1989, she worked in Swaziland as the Senior Development Communication Specialist in rural development, agriculture, family planning, and human resource development. From 1990 to 1992, she served as the chief technical advisor to the Family Life Association of Swaziland in family planning research and education.

As a professional and a role model, she believes not only in giving back to her African home but she still takes time to return every year to her adopted community in Brooklyn, where she works as a political advisor and consultant to various African American elected officials. She also serves as a role model for young people not only in Brooklyn but in Colorado High Schools where she lectures widely on self-esteem, internalized racism and adolescent sexuality.

Stemming from a background where there was never a question of diversity, she sees the discourse based often on individual resistance to change and the way we have symbolically and culturally constructed "otherness." Because of this, she strongly believes that multicultural education is only valid when the racism that has denied non-White cultures is confronted and studied. She often says that to learn about the racism and sexism, for example, in one’s own culture is to approach other cultures and genders more objectively.

She is an assistant professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, where she teaches courses in media and culture, new media and development, media theory and public opinion. She is an affiliated faculty with Women Studies where she teaches "Women in International Development" and the Center for the Studies of Race and Ethnicity in America where she teaches "Ethnic Notions." She has published in the areas of population and communication, media policy, popular culture, and diversity.

In 1986, she was the winner of the Chancellor's Equity and Excellence award for faculty, and the School of Journalism and Mass Communication's faculty teaching award. She has also received recognition in 1991 and 1993 from CU’s Mortar Board Honor Society for excellence in teaching. In 1992, she received the Community Service Award from the Boulder County I Have a Dream Foundation.