

Series sparks inclusivity dialogue

Brandi Peters
Staff Writer

The University of La Verne's Center for Multicultural Services discussed ableism and classism on Friday in the Quay Davis Executive Board Room.

The discussion is a seven-part Community Building for Belongingness series that strives to bring people together and help students learn how to address difficult topics within the community, such as justice, equity, diversity and inclusion.

In an interesting take, the participating students listened to lectures and participated in activities hosted by the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion faculty and staff.

The students were then asked a series of questions at which they responded to in an effort for self-discovery.

In one of the sessions, students were asked to close their eyes while a guided imagery was read aloud.

The students were then tasked with imagining a life without certain abilities.

Once the reading was complete, participants were then asked to share the inner mind experience they had with the abilities they had chosen to live without and the revelations that they came to.

"I think this has impacted me, because I feel like a different person when I walk out of here every time, and I learn more every time through my observation," Matilde Garcia, freshman criminology major, said.

The hope with these sessions is to help with dismantling the bias, prejudice and stereotypes that society has poured into the world.

The students really seemed to take on the task of trying to understand what it would be like for those that are not able, and gain an understanding of their own lack of awareness of those with disabilities that are around them.

"This is a privilege in itself, being able to talk through something like this and have that component of imagining, when there are people living like this every day," Alexandra Burrel, associate vice president and chief diversity equity and inclusion officer, said.

"This allows us to open our minds, thoughts and ideas and show grace to others as we learn to operate differently in love and patience," she said.

Prior to having the conference offered as a seven-part series at the University of La Verne, it was given as a residential retreat in the mountains that was hosted Friday through Sunday.

But due to COVID-19 and budget issues, that series is now conducted at ULV on Fridays at the Howell Meeting Room in the Landis Academic Center.

"This is creating a safe space for us to have an open and honest conversation of what we truly believe, think and feel in an



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Alexandra Burrel, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, leads a discussion on ableism and classism in the Quay Davis Board Room on March 17. The discussion was part of a seven-part series

atmosphere of mutual trust and respect," Daniel Loera, director of multicultural affairs, said.

The second part of the conference was dedicated to classism and how the students saw themselves within society.

They were asked questions that had them sharing their beliefs and decisions based on their perception of themselves as it relates to the social class they are currently in, would like to be part of in the future, and other hypothetical situations that include their outlook on how society and the social class connect and relate.

"I think this is the most enriching experience for anyone because it absolutely humanizes us to ourselves and with each other, because I am sharing with you what I think, feel and believe, I'm sharing with you what is most true and present for me, and you are doing the same with me," Loera said. "And there is no better connection at the basic human level."

The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion believes that the efforts from these events will promote a better environment and give strength to our community.

These events will also prepare students for a more diverse life in society.

"I really love this event because it is something that we needed," Garcia said. "I feel like it brings us all closer together because we get a different understanding, and we open our minds to more stuff on the outside world."

The Community Building for Belongingness series has four topics remaining.

Gender identity and sexism will be discussed Friday; sexual

identity, homophobia and heterosexism will be covered April 7; and race identity and racism will be discussed April 14.

To complete the series, religion, spirituality, worldview, self-care and next steps will be discussed in the Hanawalt House on April 21.

All are welcome to attend as a series or individual sessions. Refreshments are served prior to

the events.

For more information and registration, contact Loera at dloera@laverne.edu.

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