

Preparing to work with a diverse population

By Dr. Nabil Hassan El-Ghoroury
Associate Executive Director, APAGS
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The Arizona Legislature has been much in the news, due to a new law that allows police to ask anyone for proof of legal residency, as well as debates over dismantling ethnic-studies departments. Regardless of one's personal opinions about these issues, it's clear that they stem from an undisputable national trend: Ethnic-minority, immigrant and non-English-speaking populations are growing much faster than the white, English-speaking population. California has already become a non-majority state, in which no ethnic group comprises a majority of the population. Several other states, including Arizona, may soon follow suit.

Regardless of how these debates shake out, they underscore the fact that future psychologists need to be prepared to work with diverse groups. Future researchers will need to recruit more diverse participants. Future teachers will be instructing an increasingly heterogeneous student body that will want to hear about research that reflects their experiences. And for those who wish to work as practitioners, many of psychology's future career openings may involve working with low-income and ethnically diverse populations. A case in point: Some states, such as Massachusetts, already require coursework in diversity for psychology licensure candidates. How can you prepare to work with diverse populations, not just ethnic diversity, but also diverse by age, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or any other important demographic variable? Here's some advice:

- **Seek out diversity training.** Your graduate program may provide coursework on diversity, multiculturalism, gender, socioeconomic status or other variables. Take a class in this area. If you are engaging in clinical work, consider seeking an internship or practicum where you work with diverse populations. For researchers, consider examining constructs such as ethnicity within your research and study diverse populations if you can.
- **Read the literature.** Peruse articles and books that consider diversity issues within in your interest area. You may find some critical differences among groups, or perhaps there's a meaningful absence of information that you can fill through a study of your own. You can also expand your reading to areas that are outside your field but important to diversity research, such as microaggressions.
- **Engage in self-reflection.** Everyone has biases and prejudices. Take stock of yours, and consider their impact on your research, clinical work and teaching. Also, consider the concept of "[privilege](#)" — how you may have benefited from your class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or education.
- **Check out APA's diversity resources.** On [APA's website](#), you can read guidelines for providing clinical services with multicultural populations, tips for recruiting diverse participants for your studies and handbooks for working with particular subgroups. In my own career, considering issues of diversity has greatly deepened my understanding of my research and clients as well as myself. In addition to preparing you for a changing America, studying diversity issues will also make you a better psychologist.