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Understanding the Construction of Difference: Cultural Competency as a Tool of Consciousness and Social Justice

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Recommended Citation

Pajaro, Kevin, "Understanding the Construction of Difference: Cultural Competency as a Tool of Consciousness and Social Justice" (2015). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 412.
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For my honors project, I explored the significance of what it meant to be culturally competent and to understand the construction of difference. Through student and faculty interviews, research, and my own experience, I discovered that there is a critical need for people to be better equipped to engage in difficult conversations regarding human differences. I chose to use the University of Rhode Island's cornerstones and the new general education requirements as a rationale for this work. Both of these elements have embedded in them a belief that understanding those who are different from you is important to create an atmosphere of innovation, receptiveness, and inclusion of all people.

As a result of this work, a minor in cultural competence was derived. I constructed this minor with the possibility of its implementation here at the university. It is designed to specifically give someone a deeper understanding of culture through the critical lens of difference. No matter one's identity, this foundational knowledge prepares students to be more empowered advocates of social change, which will be applicable through the experiential learning component of the minor. Once the theoretical and the experiential aspects are fulfilled, the student is to demonstrate their proficiency through an all-encompassing capstone project, which can consist of a variety of final products.

My purpose for the creation of this minor is to give students an in-depth, foundational understanding of what culture means in a broader context. Thereafter, allowing students to have the academic flexibility to deconstruct any tenet of culture they wish to do meaningful work in. Consequently, the minor provides a platform for students to contribute towards issues that pertain to social justice, while promoting the values of engaging in difficult matters with those who identify different from one another.