

# What Is the Significance of Our Diversity?

Why is it important to consider the diversity of our neighborhoods? Political change and human migration have altered the demographic fabric of many of our local communities. This is a reality that puts new demands on young people that may not be addressed adequately in our educational systems. It behooves all of us to become more knowledgeable about the diversity of our neighborhoods, our cities, our states, and our country. Why is this important? A few reasons are listed below:

- Our economy is connected on a global scale. Today, one in five U.S. manufacturing jobs is tied to exports, and most of the estimated growth potential for U.S. businesses lies in overseas markets (U.S. Census Bureau, "Exports from Manufacturing...").
- Many of our U.S. corporations make most of their profits outside the U.S. For example, over seventy percent of Coca-Cola's profits come from outside the United States. It is impossible to maintain this kind of market without having globally competent employees.
- Across all employment sectors (public, for-profit, not-for-profit), cross cultural competence was rated as the fifth most important attribute (out of nineteen) of a successful professional in an organization with a global mission (Bickson). Considering our economic reach outside the country, and the diversity in our backyard, it would appear that ALL employment sectors are operating as an organization with a global mission.
- Our national security is affected by what happens outside of our country. We cannot respond to potential situations such as 9/11 without greater understanding of culture, language and religion in other parts of the world. Effectively communicating our message to the world will play a critical role in encouraging countries throughout the Middle East and South Asia to embrace democratic pluralism and reject violent extremism (Committee for Economic Development). We cannot convey this message appropriately if there is a serious deficit in our understanding of the culture we are attempting to reach.
- Our deficit in skilled foreign language speakers has proven to be dangerous to our national security in the past. For example, the 9/11 Commission found that "the FBI did not dedicate sufficient resources to the surveillance and translation needs of counterterrorism agents. It lacked sufficient translators proficient in Arabic and other key languages..." (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States).
- Factors affecting the global population - famine, civil wars in mineral rich countries, diseases such as HIV/AIDS - can all become issues of global security and need to be



considered beyond borders (Zhao). These are global problems, and their solutions will require global competence and collaboration.

How prepared are our students? A survey conducted by the Asia Society in 2001 and the National Geographic Society in 2002 found a dearth of knowledge about the world amongst U.S. students (Committee for Economic Development):

- 83% of respondents could not locate Afghanistan on a map.
- 25% of college-bound high school students could not name the ocean between California and Asia.
- 80% did not know that India is the world's largest democracy.
- 37% could not locate China on a map of Asia and the Middle East.
- 56% could not find India, despite the fact that China and India are the world's most populous countries, and major emerging markets.

Clearly, there is a need for all of us to support global literacy!

