

# Problems of multiculturalism viewed

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Staff Writer

"A multi-cultural society is much more resilient than a mono-cultural society," said Professor Walter Capps while addressing students in the Forum last Wednesday.

Capps a professor of religious studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) was asked by the social sciences department to speak on multi-culturalism.

The professor began by emphasizing the importance of communication between people. He quoted from the writings of a monk, Thomas Murton, on the cold war. Murton wrote that often countries are, "talking past each other," and consequently are not hearing what the other is saying. According to Capps, this is often the case between different cultural groups.

Stereotypes are also a problem in multicultural societies. Drawing again from his religious studies, Capps quoted a Danish bishop who said, "people are human first. Everything else is secondary." The professor built on this statement by identifying secondary characteristics as a person's job, skin color, sex, etc. "All secondary characteristics are

essential," he stated. "But if we put them first we start to stereotype."

Capps also addressed cultural diversity in education. "A demographic scholastic approach in which all groups views are represented is very important," he said. The problem he noted is the "tendency to fear or distrust people who are different than ourselves."

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In his classes, Capps attempts to broaden his students' cultural awareness by requiring reading from different cultures. In addition, the professor has people from all walks of life come to his classes to speak about their experiences.

Capps related some of these experiences. One involved a teacher's aide in a wheelchair who experienced stereotypical treatment. In his forties and an educated man, the teacher's aide explained that often he is treated like a child by people who ignorantly believe his physical handicap affects him mentally.

A second speaker in Capps' class was a professional basketball player. He told stories of discrimination by Oakland police officers who pulled him over because they could not believe an African American would be driving an expensive car. He also told of being refused service in certain businesses. It's ironic, the athlete said, that this discrimination comes from the same people who might root for him on the basketball court.

Capps has been featured on "60 Minutes" for the class he teaches on the Vietnam War titled "Voice of a

Stranger." He has also been a visiting scholar at Harvard, University of Moscow, Oxford, and others.

The philosophy in Capps' "Voice of a Stranger" class relies on "the wisdom of ordinary people." He believes that often people learn most from those they would not expect to learn from. According to Capps, people often learn they are strangers to themselves, and begin to treat each other as human beings.

Capps summarized by saying, "The multi-cultural society is here. Anyone who does not believe it, better get with it."

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