

# A NERVOUS SYSTEM APPROACH TO DIVERSITY WORK

USING A NERVOUS SYSTEM APPROACH  
FOR INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS  
AND DECREASING POLARIZATION

25TH MULTICULTURAL CONFERENCE  
**FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2025**

[gvsu.edu/counsel/mconference](https://gvsu.edu/counsel/mconference)

(616)331-3266  
206 Student Services Building  
[gvcounsel@gvsu.edu](mailto:gvcounsel@gvsu.edu)



# THE SEMINAR

Studying our nervous system as an access point for change can increase our ability to be effective during challenging life circumstances. According to Deb Dana (2020), the nervous system is key because when the brain and the nervous system do not agree, the nervous system will win every time. One influential framework for understanding the nervous system is Polyvagal Theory by Stephen Porges. Polyvagal Theory is often referred to as the neuroscience of safety and connection, and seen as a core component of trauma work. Neuroscience in trauma therapy has exploded in the past twenty-five years. It has helped us understand our experiences, emotions, relationships, stories, communication, and ability to cope in more nuanced ways. What if we applied the concepts of Polyvagal Theory to intercultural work? Could it help us with key intercultural skills? Could it help decrease the “us versus them” attitudes of polarization? Could it help us embrace more nuance and complexity in difficult conversations? Learning a nervous system approach can support our ability to connect across differences, which is essential for diversity work. Throughout this workshop, it will be established that it is hard to do effective intercultural and social justice work without a more embodied approach.

## ITINERARY JANUARY 10, 2025

GVSU ALLENDALE CAMPUS  
KIRKHOF CENTER ROOM 2250

- 8:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. ● Check-in
- 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. ● Polyvagal Concepts and Coping Strategies, Intercultural Concepts, and Intercultural Interactions
- 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. ● Lunch
- 1:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m. ● Application to Intercultural Interactions
- 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. ● Application to Decreasing Polarization, Increasing Complexity, Cancel Culture, Activism, and Building Culture

# THE SPEAKER

As a psychologist and an Asian-American woman, Dr. Cheryl Forster brings a strong and unique set of skills to her work as an intercultural trainer. Her subject matter expertise, love of learning, and warmth come across in her workshops. Dr. Forster’s continuing education and organizational workshops focus on incorporating and integrating the intercultural approach to diversity, which is complementary to and can enhance more traditional perspectives like social justice, liberation psychology, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some of her postgraduate study highlights include an Intercultural Practitioner Certificate from the highly respected Intercultural Communication Institute, completing the Brain, Mind & Culture Masterclass Certification from the Japan Intercultural Institute, being a Qualified Administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory, earning an Intercultural Development Diploma from the Intercultural Development Research Institute, and becoming a Certified CQ Facilitator (all-in-all, she has completed over 800 hours of training in intercultural communication with many of the leaders in the field). She has also completed specialized training in trauma, EMDR, interpersonal neurobiology, Polyvagal Theory (including two extensive trainings with Deb Dana), integrative somatic trauma therapy, embodied activism, and asylum immigration assessments. Since 2005, she has worked at Portland State University’s (PSU) Center for Student Health and Counseling, where she is the Coordinator of Diversity and Psychology Programs. She is a former Association of Counseling Center Training Agencies’ (ACCTA) Diversity Scholar, and served on the ACCTA Board of Directors (2017 to 2019). Moreover, she taught a class at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey in 2018, and is a contributing author in The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence (2015). Her commitment to the learning process led her to establish her professional intercultural training business (in 2012), called [Bookmark Connections](#).



## CONTINUING EDUCATION

This program is approved by NASW-Michigan for 6 CEs.

## QUESTIONS

If you have any questions or require any accommodations to participate in this conference, please contact Maha Baalbaki at [baalbkm@gvsu.edu](mailto:baalbkm@gvsu.edu).

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