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## Research Focus: Affability in Africa

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Darrick Tovar-Murray (far right, front) advises staff and community members at South Africa's Good Work Foundation.

# Affability in Africa

## A counseling professor builds a social-emotional framework at a rural community service center

**A**s charity is the virtue which unites us as members of the one body, affability is the virtue which perfects that union," wrote St. Vincent de Paul.

The research of Darrick Tovar-Murray, associate professor of counseling, is centered on that Vincentian ideal. The result was his book "Basic Therapeutic Counseling Skills: Interventions for Working with Clients' Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors."

The text centers on such affability-promoting ideas as counselors understanding the client's private world, developing therapeutic listening and responding skills, and working with the client's thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

He fulfilled the charitable portion of St. Vincent's advice by volunteering for two weeks last February in South Africa's Mpumalanga Province at the Good Work Foundation, which offers educational and career-related programs using digital technology to community members and rural primary schools.

His trip's purpose was threefold. First, Tovar-Murray wanted to help advance the foundation's educational and counseling offerings by putting his research into action through a facilitative training program he based on his book.

Tovar-Murray says he wanted to help the staff develop "empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness to support the educational and social-emotional needs" of clients.

Second, Tovar-Murray provided professional career consultation to community members and staff involved with the educational programs Good Work Foundation offers at its main campus in Hazyview, and at its satellite campuses throughout the province.

The final aim of Tovar-Murray's work "was to provide emotional support for the staff," who met with him to "discuss daily life considerations," he says. "I developed a successful Black male support group for the staff," which "focused on Afrocentric world view and Black racial identity development." He used "an Afrocentric counseling framework to help the staff at Good Work Foundation understand their identity formation and development."

Donna Kiel, director of the Office of Innovative Professional Learning (OIPL), helped facilitate Tovar-Murray's trip. She notes that the mission of her office "is to extend the expertise of the faculty to all those in need. My research interest in innovative educational models introduced me to Kate Groch, the founder of the Good Work Foundation." When Kiel learned of the foundation's "need for support of their school facilitators, I brought together Dr. Tovar-Murray and Kate," she says.

Besides assisting the foundation, Tovar-Murray's trip positively affected both him and the college.

"This experience broadened my understanding of multiculturalism and offered me practical experience for addressing international and global affairs," he says. "It also advanced my theoretical framework on diversity and provided me with important multicultural knowledge, awareness and skills that I will incorporate in my professional work. It is my hope that I will be able to develop courses in multiculturalism that will allow counseling students to gain international experiences."

Kiel notes that OIPL will continue to work with the foundation "to extend the connection to COE to include our graduate and undergraduate students. We are working on a virtual program to provide the faculty and Good Work teachers with the opportunity for exchange of professional learning."

