Introduction
America’s children are becoming increasingly culturally diverse. As shown in Figure 1, the United States population is much more diverse than is reflected in the field of School Psychology; therefore, it is important for future School Psychologists to be prepared during their higher education to properly address and provide services for all students, keeping in mind each student’s unique cultural background. School Psychologists must become culturally competent and address their own issues of bias as well. The Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute (MCTRI) at Texas State University equips professors to transform curriculum in order to address cultural concerns within their classrooms. The purpose of this poster is to inform other preparers of School Psychology professionals on the MCTRI, to advise professionals regarding changing a course to become more culturally oriented, and to convey the benefits associated with such actions.

MCTRI
The Multicultural Curriculum Transformation and Research Institute (MCTRI) is designed to align with University and Department multicultural goals. The MCTRI helps professors transform courses to reflect multicultural content, perspectives, teaching strategies, and assessment methods. The week-long training for professors includes group speakers, self-reflections, group collaboration, and independent research centered on developing cultural competence in the classroom. At the end of the training, professors not only have a greater understanding of multicultural teaching styles but also have developed a transformed syllabus for at least one course.

Methods
The Multicultural Transformation process was piloted by Dr. Jon Lasser, who founded the MCTRI during the summer of 2013. He implemented multicultural changes to his first semester school psychology course, SPSY 5300 – Interviewing, Counseling and Consulting in School Psychology – in the fall of 2013. The syllabus was revised to reflect a more multicultural viewpoint. A section entitled NASP and Diversity was added to the first page of the syllabus and was discussed with the cohort on the first day of class. Multicultural factors were discussed and considered in the class, as students conducted parent and student interviews. Students were asked to journal on a number of multicultural topics throughout the semester. To test the effectiveness of the transformation process, students were asked to take a Multicultural Awareness, Knowledge-Skills Survey, Teacher Edition (MAKSS-T) anonymously at the beginning and end of the semester to measure their knowledge and awareness of multicultural factors gained over the course of the semester.

The multicultural transformation of the course went beyond mere changes to the content, as alterations to instructional and assessment components were also made. With respect to instruction, a multicultural teaching paradigm acknowledges that learners have diverse needs. Consequently, one mode of instruction may fail to reach all students. To address this concern, a wide range of instructional methods were used (e.g., lecture, role play, discussion, group work, etc.). Similarly, a variety of assessment methods were used so that students had different ways of demonstrating their mastery of knowledge and skills. Students submitted papers, interview video recordings, artistic representations of eco-systemic models, etc.

Results
The MAKSS-T survey was completed by 11 students enrolled in SPSY 5300 in the fall of 2013 to assess their cultural competencies gained in the areas of Cultural Awareness, Knowledge and Skills. The Multicultural Awareness Scale measured the students’ ability to recognize cultural values, beliefs and perceptions, understanding of how cultural background influences thoughts and actions. The Knowledge Scale assessed the students’ understanding of cultural terms. Lastly, the Skills Scale evaluated the students’ ability to effectively work with persons from culturally diverse backgrounds.

A paired t-test yielded significant results on the pre and post MAKSS surveys at the p < .005 level on all three scales. The biggest gains were observed in the area of multicultural skills, suggesting these students will be better equipped to work with individuals from differing backgrounds as a result of completing the transformed course. The results are graphically represented in Figures 2 and 3. One student’s results were dropped from the analysis because the pre-survey came in late and the post-survey was misplaced.

Conclusion
The results of this study indicate that Dr. Lasser’s participation in the MCTRI helped to significantly increase the cultural competence of students in the SPSY 5300 course during the fall semester of 2013. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that instructor participation in professional development activities focused on incorporating multicultural perspectives into courses has the potential to positively impact graduate students in school psychology programs as well as the diverse children whom these students will serve in their future careers.

While course transformation seems to be a promising means of increasing multicultural competence among graduate students of school psychology, limitations of the practice exist. Culture is a very broad term that can be defined in myriad ways and encompass almost infinite classifications of people. It is impossible for any one instructor to be knowledgeable enough or have sufficient time to fully prepare their graduate students for every culturally relevant situation they may encounter in their careers. Additionally, it is difficult to know whether the gains made in competence level during the timespan of a semester-long course truly transfer to the future professional practices of the graduate students in that course.

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that trainers of school psychology graduate students consider making changes to course curriculum that allow for a more multicultural perspective in all areas. This can be accomplished through instructor participation in workshops, such as the MCTRI at Texas State University, that allow for the examination and transformation of current course practices. Trainers who do not have access to such programs may wish to advocate for them on their campuses and would likely benefit from reaching out to colleagues who are knowledgeable in the area of multicultural course transformation.

Bibliography