Increasing Ethnic Diversity: Getting the Word Out

Notes from Cory Gann

Upon learning that the “Increasing Ethnic Diversity” proposal had been awarded a grant from Verizon Foundation, Central Washington University/Des Moines Center has spread the word far and wide about the goals and initiatives built into this program. An informational letter was sent to over 200 educators and school personnel, appealing for support and ideas. During the months of May and June, I met with Career Counselors at Tukwila High School, The Tyee High School Educational Complex, and The Renton Teaching Academy. The message of all of these meetings was that The Elementary and Early Childhood Education Programs at the Des Moines Center is committed to attracting cohorts that reflect the exciting diversity of this region.

Teaching Equity Conference Inspires the Crowd

It was an enthusiastic and high-spirited audience that congregated for the first ever Teaching Equity Conference put on by the collaborative of Highline Community College and Central Washington University/Des Moines Center. A warm May Saturday morning bathed attendees in rays of sunshine, which was matched by the inspirational stories of so many educators of color who served as speakers, mentors and facilitators. This conference brought students interested in teaching careers together with educators who are steeped in the day to day work of teaching young children. The overall theme of the conference was that equity in teaching demands the breaking down of racial and ethnic barriers to educational careers.

The opening session was treated to the keynotes of Rolita Ezeonu, HCC’s Interim Dean for Transfer & Pre-College Education, and Rashad Norris who is the Outreach Director, also at Highline Community College. Dr. Ezeonu chronicled her navigation of her own K-12 experience and the times that she herself had felt marginalized. Mr. Norris made it clear that outreach doesn’t have any impact when it’s all a matter of sitting at an information table: “You have to sit down with students, get to know them, develop a relationship, and tell the truth.”

The keynoters sparked their audience with an atmosphere of anticipation leading right into breakout sessions which focused on: early childhood education, the K-12 system, para-educators, men in early childhood careers, and math and science. In each workshop,
teachers narrated their stories and led discussions about the challenges, joys, and accomplishments in the work of teaching, learning, deconstructing racism, and maintaining the vision of equity.

All of this intense and invigorating discussion culminated in a group gathering back in the student union building for a pasta and salad lunch accompanied by the uplifting music, poetry, and a media show of the Wilderness Project, a local group that conveys the message of social agency and change through the mediums of song, spoken word, and video imagery. It was a harmonic end to an empowering morning - leaving the attendees with a sense of the common alliance to achieve equity in school practices. Conference organizers are resolved to establish the Teaching Equity Conference as an annual event.

Sarah's Corner

Hello! My name is Sarah Lockett and I am the student worker at CWU-Des Moines working on this grant with Cory Gann. I am majoring in Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education. I am very excited to be involved with this grant. I think it is so important for students to feel comfortable in the classroom and what better way than to start with their teacher. This grant will help guide us in bridging the gap of diversity.

Look for next month's feature:

Renton High School Teaching Academy

Calendar of Events

August 10 & 11:
Tribal Sovereignty Curriculum Training
Everett School District or Olympia
360-725-6160

August 14:
The One Voice Institute of Elementary Ethics Education
www.elementalethics.com/

Spotlight

Rashad Norris was born in Florida and has lived in the Netherlands and in Tacoma, Washington. He attended the University of Puget Sound and received his BA in Communication and Minor in English, while playing basketball for UPS.

He received his Masters in Public Administration from Evergreen State College. Rashad is currently working towards his Doctorate from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa.

Rashad Norris is the director of Highline Community College’s outreach program. He speaks to schools, churches, libraries, and other facilities to emphasize the importance of youth furthering their education. Rashad says, “This is not a job for me, it is a requirement.” He feels very passionately about effectively guiding the youth of color today in furthering their education.

One of Rashad’s main ambitions is to help transition young black males from high school to community college. He believes that outreach needs to change how it reaches out to kids of color right now. Rashad is “intentious for reaching youth, especially young, black males.”

Community involvement is an essential part of Rashad’s life. He mentors local middle school and high school boys. He also mentors at Heritage Leadership Camp.

Rashad’s key advice is “continue to ask why.” With the desire to keep learning, he encourages youth to ask questions and to seek knowledge.