Letters to CC

Dear CC,

I’m a First-Year student, so the most important letters to me are all of the F’s we learned about at orientation. FIG- First Year Interest Group, FYSS- First Year Success Seminar, etc. But what the heck does DIAC stand for? What do they even do aside from the Days of Reflection? Seriously, what’s with all the acronyms?

-Lost in the Alphabet Soup

Dear Alphabet Soup,

I’m sure it all gets confusing after a while. You have your academic ducks in a row, but let’s try to nail down what some of these other acronyms and events are really about.

DIAC, pronounced dye-ack, stands for the Diversity and Inclusion Action Coalition.

They are actually a whole group of committees of faculty and staff members that address everything from campus climate, community outreach, student training, course curriculum, and more. The main goal here is to assess and address the needs of the college community, and to provide a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where all students are valued and any issues that arise are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

Potsdam’s Days of Reflection did not start with or by DIAC. It started with the grant in 2015 that organized campus-wide workshops for faculty and staff in 2015-2016, and emerged out of that group. It since turned into a multi-day event for education and conversation around themes of racial equity and justice. Days of Reflection will be held from April 1st-4th this semester, stop by to learn something new or talk about what social justice means to you!

-CC

Knots of Knowledge

By Marc Ernesti

Other cultures certainly are inspirational and an enrichment to our lives; but they also do hold incredibly useful knowledge that in a global age, we really have no excuse for not tapping into. One admittedly small but really useful piece of information comes from my housemate Jialong. The other day, he was shaking an egg before breaking it. I clearly looked puzzled enough for him to enlighten me: as every kid in China knows, gently shaking an egg before helps it come out more easily… there you have it – try it!

Talking the weather, cross-culturally

Inevitably, weather in the North Country is a talking point. For Maths majors, do the formula and convert Fahrenheit to Celsius; everyone else, here are some important points to know: it is freezing at 32°F or 0°C. Water will feel boiling hot at 212°F or 100°C; but even a warm spring day (68°F or 20°C) or a really hot summer’s day (86°F or 30°C) would be nice… unless you are from Southern Italy – there really hot would be 40°C… a sweaty 104°F! Either way, you would certainly forget the coldest winter night here at around -22°F (or -30°C).
Many musicians travel or tour a lot in order to perform. Do you suppose you have an advantage settling in somewhere, adjusting, acclimatizing, so to speak? Yes, very much. I have travelled a lot with my previous group, the Rawlins Trio, and I believe travel breaks the boundaries, makes you more tolerant. For example, when I was flying over to Taiwan, that was not easy [laughs] – I missed a connection in Japan, and suddenly you have to trust the system that someone will still pick you up! But yes, I also do like to travel for fun and I agree, it is easier to find roots and settle if you do.

Looking back over your first year in Potsdam as international faculty, what has surprised you most? In other words, what is more different than you thought? The seriousness of the program here in Crane has quite surprised me… the students are really here to learn, not only for an experience. And that has made quite a big difference, also in how I teach: I feel I can really push my students. When I came for my interview, I immediately felt a very different atmosphere, a kind of relaxed intellectual atmosphere… which is why, initially, I went into academic music teaching: I was keen on these wonderful discussions on campus, the room to bring yourself in as an artist – and when I came here, I was really impressed and discovered that it was not just a dream but something that would really exist…

You not only operate between two countries, Canada and the USA, but also across languages, French and English. Would you say it is indeed different cultures or, over the years, do you see more commonalities between nations and people? I think it is more about differences. Also, I am a special Canadian – there is an identity issue right there [laughs] … as a French-Canadian, I am already a minority in my country, Canada, and things are very different: the way we eat, what we eat, the religion, the manners, the behavior, it all is very different. Nowadays, I feel more as a Canadian, and I am really proud of how Canada positions itself on the global scene, so I am very proud of my passport but also, still, the French-Canadian background.

Finally, what is the one thing that made you feel welcome in Potsdam – or the one thing that even made you think: ‘This is my home’? I would say two things, the region, the beautiful region, the mountains: this somewhat reminds me of home, the St Lawrence River is not too far – this all feels like home, and Canada is actually shockingly close! [laughs] It all felt a little surreal at first – I had never done that before, crossing a border – when driving over to Ottawa. The second thing, the students here were so incredibly welcoming, and they did make my work so much easier… in fact, they still do!

To find out more about Marie-Élaine Gagnon’s upcoming concerts, visit www.marieelainegagnon.com

Interviewed by Prof. Marc Ernesti, Crane Institute for Music Business and Entrepreneurship.
Kadiatou Balde
President of the Student Government Association, BIRT member, Potsdam Diversity Ambassador and Mentor (PDAM), University Police Dispatcher, SUNYSA Delegate

What are some of your favorite things about studying at Potsdam? My favorite things about studying at Potsdam is the practical and non-traditional learning experience I am provided with. I also LOVE the support I receive from all of the faculty and staff I’ve come across.

How would you describe your experience being on campus in relation to diversity and inclusion? As a senior, I’ve been here during some of our campus’ worst moments and I myself have personally experienced a multitude of microaggressions and pure prejudice against my race and religion. I can also proudly tell you that our campus has seen a lot of progressive change on diversity and inclusion over these last few years. Because of student of color’s advocacy for change, we now have some systems in place to deal with bias incidents and several committees like DIAC. Students even before my year were voicing concerns related to DEI, and before there were was no strategic plans to deconstruct bias incidents on our campus - but now there are, thanks to student voices and our phenomenal Chief Diversity Officer, Dr. Bernadette Tiapo.

What are your hopes for SUNY Potsdam in the future? My hope for SUNY Potsdam has remained the same over these years. I hope that our institution can increase their efforts in retaining diverse students and hiring more staff that can represent their voices and truly serve their needs. Also, I feel that activism has somehow always been a part of every student of color’s curriculum, but I really hope for that to be a choice next time. I’d love to come back and see students be students, without worries about any attacks on their identity.

Interviewed by Assistant Professor of Theatre and Dance, Rivka Rocchio

Susan Godreau: Director of Financial Aid
Susan grew up in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and came to the U.S. to attend college in Massachusetts. While pursuing her Master’s degree at Babson College, she married her husband Charles and joined his extended, open-hearted Puerto Rican family with a genuine appreciation of food and fellowship. The Godreaus moved to Potsdam about 20 years ago.

What are your thoughts on the importance of work related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? Do you believe this work is absolutely necessary and what more could we be doing at SUNY Potsdam? My interest in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion on the Potsdam campus and community relates closely and directly to our work in the Financial Aid office. Most students at Potsdam use federal and/or state aid to help fund their education. The process of applying for and confirming their aid is an opportunity for us to work closely with individual families and students to help them manage their financial aid challenges and find solutions when available. It is our mission to provide financial assistance that is both respectful of and sensitive to confidentiality and diversity.

What would you like to see answered in the DIAC Newsletter? Write to Rivka Rocchio, Chair of the Campus Climate and Outreach Subcommittee with your ideas!” rocchisr@potsdam.edu