Letters to CC

Dear CC,

I was wearing my Black Lives Matter shirt the other day and someone driving by rolled down their car window and yelled a racial slur. I’m so angry, but I feel like there is nothing I can do about it. They sped away so I didn’t get the license plate and I don’t know who it was. We have a lot of students of color on campus and stuff like this just doesn’t make them feel welcome or safe. What can I do?

-BLM

Dear BLM,

I imagine that was a very hurtful experience and that feeling like you can’t do anything about it makes everything worse. There isn’t a simple solution to this incident, but there are some avenues that can work to change the climate of our campus. The college has a system in place so that students can report these incidents: BIRT- the Bias Incident Response Team has a form that can be filled in online to report and address these issues, talk to the perpetrators, if they are known, and advise the college on what sorts or training or programming should be done to help combat these hate-filled ideas. While we can’t stop those people in the car, we can inform and educate the campus through numerous arenas, such as Days of Reflection or inviting a speaker to share the importance of the BLM movement. In addition to the Campus Climate subcommittee, DIAC also has a community outreach subcommittee which deals with people outside of the campus community. We all have a responsibility to respond to an incident like this. It is up to individuals to live up the standards of this community, both on and off campus – which involve the active interruption of bias and racism.

Yours in solidarity,

~CC

Knots of Knowledge

By Rivka Rocchio

Engaging with other cultures and languages can leave you with a deeper understanding of the experience of being human. For example, there are often words that express emotions the English language hasn’t for the words for. Check out some of our favorite examples:

Waldeinsamkeit: This German word refers to the feeling of being alone in the woods, solitude, and a connectedness to nature.

Sobremesa: This Spanish word that refers to the time spent after lunch or dinner socializing with the people you shared the meal with.

Goya: This Urdu word is usually associated with good, powerful storytelling and refers to the transporting suspension of disbelief that happens when fantasy is so realistic that it temporarily becomes reality.

Jijivish: This Hindi word refers to the strong, eternal desire to live and to continue living. It is usually used to talk about a person who loves life and always has intense emotions and desires to live and thrive.

DIAC Subcommittee

Current Tasks

CAMPUS CLIMATE AND OUTREACH
• Hosted Exclusively Inclusive event for students
• Creating and distributing DIAC Newsletter
• Gathering audience data on socially-engaged arts projects

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:
• Delivering the “Most Welcoming Business in Potsdam” survey soon! Look for an email with a link to the survey.
• Looking at ways to make internships in the community more accessible.
• Finding new ways, the committee could get out into the community.

COMMUNICATION AND MEMBERSHIP
• Creating social media guidelines and presence
• Unifying DEI events with a calendar tag

CURRICULUM, POLICY, AND FACULTY/STAFF ADVOCACY
• Recently passed a proposal for a new Diversity Attribute
• Working with a newly appointed/elected Diversity Attribute syllabi review committee to prepare them for syllabi review in spring 2020 for the attribute to be in the fall 2020 schedule of classes

DIVERSITY PROGRAMMING AND STUDENT TRAINING
• Offering Addressing Bias Trainings, presenting at the Women, Gender, and Leadership Conference, organizing for the Days of Reflection and lecturing on racial identities.
• Planning for Spring 2020 Alumni Panel
• Co-sponsoring a Spring 2020 event Denouncing the Doctrine of Discovery with the Office of Native American Affairs and the NYS Poor People’s Campaign.
As an Environmental Studies professor, I suppose living in different environments comes with the job description… Could you describe your destinations so far?

That is a big question (laughs). I lived abroad for over 30 years, and my four children went to school in 12 different countries… I have literally been all over the place, Latin America, Asia, first lived in the Caribbean, then South-East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, working mostly in my first career as a midwife. Health of course is a huge common problem in this world, and very often health issues are connected to environmental issues: food security, land tenure, resources (and conflicts over them), minerals, water… at some level, the increasing pressure on the global environment is responsible for a lot of issues, and we see that in migration too, of course: at the top, you have some who enjoy the security, access to the resources, but then there are those who absolutely do not have this security. In a way, I realized while traveling how many of these environmental issues are global issues.

I believe the German author Stefan Zweig once said that, as an emigrant, we all are travelers, always moving forward, never coming back. Is this a true observation, in your opinion?

That is an interesting perspective… Perhaps the trick is to observe the world as we move, and always see a new perspective. Marcel Proust said, “The real voyage of discovery consists, not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.” Life is like a stream, we are jumping in at various points; but as travelers, we jump into the ocean, a lake, a river… we get to see different quality of waters. In a way, I would say I had the best times of my life when I felt ‘strange’ to a place, and did not know the language and culture yet…

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’?

This may seem funny, but the first thing I did when I moved was to join a community-supported agriculture: I found a farm online, and I got to meet the farmers, see the land. This is an important concept to me, CSA, I believe in sustainable agriculture, eating local food, and connecting with the land, with food that was grown here, with a lot of love and care – that really was special: and that really made me feel I belonged here.
Clifton Harcum:
If you were introducing yourself to a new community, how would you introduce yourself? What would you like the community to know about you? That is, beyond job title and your role at SUNY Potsdam, as we can find that on the directory, what would you say to a new community to give that community an idea of who you are?

I’m originally from Baltimore, Maryland. I earned my bachelor’s degree from the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (HBCU) and earned my master’s degree in Management with a specialization in Nonprofit and Association Management from the University of Maryland University College. I’ve worked in Higher ed for approximately 15 years.

I started my professional career in the Office of Residence Life, transition to the Office of Retention where I developed the University’s male initiative, Men Achieving Dreams Through Education (MADE), and finally served as the Director for the Office of University Engagement and Lifelong Learning. I have also worked at Jefferson Community College under the Division of Student Affairs.

I have a beautiful fiancé and two children. My interests involve personal and professional develop, collecting and watching movies, outdoor activities and traveling. I am passionate about serving those in need and supporting the holistic growth of college students.

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?

I believe it is essential to the overall wellness and success of students of color and other diverse groups. Traveling away from home where students are comfortable and have a support system is a challenge within itself. It is of the utmost importance that their new home is as welcoming and supportive as possible. Failure to implement an inclusive environment results in additional stress and feelings of isolation which may result in the student’s departure from their respective institution of higher education. It is beyond essential that practices and spaces are developed for diverse populations of students. Doing so provides them a sense of community and home that they may miss otherwise. It also provides additional benefits to the entire student population. Benefits include: enhancing students’ social development, preparing students for the global workforce, improving communication skills, challenging stereotypes, and overall enriches the educational experience provided by the institution.

SUNY Potsdam has done a phenomenal job in laying the groundwork by implementing best practices and providing spaces to address the needs and voices of the student body.

What are your concerns in your area, specifically as they relate to DEI?

I don’t have any concerns regarding the CFD or our approach to DEI but, I would like to see students utilizing the CFD more frequently on a social, cultural and intellectual level. The CFD provides an array of support services for students such as a computer lab where students can print for free, office space for student organizations, lounges for meetings/activities and a support staff to address their needs and concerns, but we can do so much more. I believe if we can allow students to be more involved in the design of the centers lounge and student-centered spaces, the CFD will garner even more student usage and generate a wellspring of cultural exchange.