There are several initiatives that are moving along this spring that are a result of our collective work this past fall semester. The Difficult Discussions planning committee has developed a pilot program which will be offered for thirteen staff members beginning February 3rd, the Diversity Coordinating Committee will continue to meet this spring, the three diversity councils will meet with me monthly, the Langston Hughes Visiting Professor, Adam Banks, from Syracuse University begins his appointment with the English Department, and the KU Alumni Association will be holding the first meeting of the Executive Committee which has recently formed an Hispanic Alumni Chapter for KU.

In this issue, Dr. John Derby offers an insightful perspective on Disability as Diversity, we highlight Shawn Alexander, assistant professor and director of the Langston Hughes Center, the research synopsis highlights a recent study—“With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them”—and highlight creating a respectful workplace.

DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS: A PILOT PROGRAM
How can we address “controversial topics/issues, hot topics” in a civil, respectful and productive way in our classrooms, labs, studios or in the workplace?

The faculty and staff planning committee has developed a plan that begins with a pilot program. Beginning February 3rd and concluding on March 10th, 6 modules will be offered (2 hrs. each) and be facilitated by Professor Steve Hillmer (School of Business) and Kathleen Ames-Oliver (HR/EO).

While the model does have implications for all faculty and staff at KU, the initial intent is to offer this for staff only with an opportunity for faculty to be offered later in the spring semester. We will be seeking the participant’s feedback to determine the content of the final model to be used across campus.

Schedule for the program is as follows:
Class 1: Introduction to Difficult Discussions and Basic Listening for Understanding
Class 2: Advanced Listening Skills: Reflective Listening, Questioning and Probing Techniques
Class 3: Inquiry and Advocacy Skills and Techniques
Class 4: Managing Conflict through Deliberative Dialogue
Class 5: Facilitating Difficult Discussions
Class 6: Interactive Theater Forum and Positive Intervention

The following staff members have agreed to participate in this pilot program: Claudia Bode, Maritza Machado-Williams, Amanda Schwegler, Mary McGuinness, Greg Valdovino, Steve Ramirez, Carol DiVibiss, Susan Mercer, Allyson Flaster, Jason O’Connor, Jennifer Wamelink, Mike Broadwell, and Juan Izaguirre.

Center in the Spotlight:
THE LANGSTON HUGHES CENTER
The Langston Hughes Center (formerly the Langston Hughes Resource Center, founded in 1998) is an academic research and educational center that is building upon the legacy and creative and intellectual insight of African American author, poet, playwright, folklorist and social critic, Langston Hughes. The Center coordinates, strengthens and develops teaching, research and outreach activities in African American Studies, and the study of race and culture in American society. The Langston Hughes Center regularly sponsors conferences, lectures, seminars and forums on a wide variety of topics; coordinating activities with, among other groups, the Kansas African Studies Center and the Center of Latin American Studies at KU.

Langston Hughes Center
Room 9 Bailey Hall
Phone: (785)864-5044
http://www2.ku.edu/~lhcaas

Upcoming Events:
Langston Hughes Visiting Professorship Lecture
Adam Banks
Title: “Rememory, Remixed: Reimagining African-American Rhetoric for a Digital Age”
February 25 – 3:30-5:00
Alderson Auditorium, KS Union
Reception to follow in Malott Room

Conference: Thurgood Marshall Law Day
Date: February 26, 2010 / Time: 8:45am-12:30pm
Location: Green Hall 106
Cost: Free
Contact: 785.864.9251, jpearson@ku.edu

“Why Do Humans Migrate”,
An International conference
March 1st and 2nd.
Free and open to the public.
Access program at: http://www2.ku.edu/~lba/Human%20Migration/index.shtml
Contact: Prof. Michael H. Crawford, Anthropology & Genetics
THE SCHOLARSHIP OF DIVERSITY: A SYNOPSIS

“With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them” is a recent public agenda report for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that was recently released. Four Myths and Realities were highlighted:

Myth #1: Most students go to college full-time. If they leave without a degree, it’s because they’re bored with their classes and don’t want to work hard.

Reality #1: Most students leave college because they are working to support themselves and going to school at the same time. At some point, the stress of work and study just becomes too difficult.

Myth #2: Most college students are supported by their parents and take advantage of a multitude of available loans, scholarships, and savings plans.

Reality #2: Young people who fail to finish college are often going it alone financially. They’re essentially putting themselves through school.

Myth #3: Most students go through a meticulous process of choosing their college from an array of alternatives.

Reality #3: Among students who don’t graduate, the college selection process is far more limited and often seems happenstance and uninformed.

Myth #4: Students who don’t graduate understand fully the value of a college degree and the consequences and trade-offs of leaving school without one.

Reality #4: Students who leave college realize that a diploma is an asset, but they may not fully recognize the impact dropping out of school will have on their future.

You can access the full report at: http://www.publicagenda.org/TheirWholeLivesAheadOfThem

DISABILITY AS DIVERSITY BY JOHN DERBY, PH.D., ART EDUCATION

Disability is an unusual brand of diversity in that its scope is broad and far reaching. Although disability is perennially overlooked in discussions about diversity, about 15% of all people are disabled, making it one of the largest per capita diversity groups. Disability includes physical, cognitive, mental, and other impairments. Because anyone from any background is susceptible to becoming disabled, disability overlaps all imaginable categories of diversity.

Like other diverse groups, disabled people have been widely oppressed. Disabled people were exterminated in WWII, and in the US, disabled children were denied basic education until the mid-1970s. Today, too often it remains socially acceptable, even in progressive circles, to make fun of disability and to use negative disability terms and literature and visual culture routinely portray disability as totalizing and as lacking.

In reality, most disabled people are not inherently helpless. Many of the obstacles disabled people encounter stem from inaccessible human design, not biological impairment. Fortunately, architects and designers have been making products increasingly accessible, resulting in conveniences that all people appreciate, including curb cuts, user-friendly signs, ramps, better tools, and input devices, and elevators.

CREATING A RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

A respectful workplace is one where all employees can feel safe and where they are treated fairly, creating the freedom to focus on performing their assigned tasks. In order to create a respectful workplace, it is important to first understand the differences between healthy workplaces and unhealthy workplaces.

Healthy Workplace
• Highly Productive
• People enjoy working together and spending time with their co-workers
• Changes can be made with full cooperation of employees
• Employees enjoy responsibility and seek more responsibility
• Clientele report high marks for service
• When something doesn’t work, the focus is on identifying the issues not on blaming people; tough on issues, soft on people
• Employees feel empowered to do their job and to suggest changes for improvement

Unhealthy Workplace
• Hard to get things done
• People are not friendly with co-workers and may gossip about them
• Employees resist change or undermine efforts to make change
• Employees refuse to take on additional responsibility, directly or indirectly.
• Complaints about service
• When something doesn’t work, the focus is on blaming people; tough on people, soft on issues
• Employees feel they do not have the power to change the way things are

Adapted from Respectful Workplaces, itstime.com, 2003.

A COLLEAGUE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Shawn Alexander is an Assistant Professor of African and African American Studies and the interim director of the Langston Hughes Center. His area of concentration is African American social and intellectual history of the 19th and 20th Centuries. Professor Alexander recently published an anthology of Thomas Fortune’s writings. He has also published work on early African American civil rights activity in the Great Plains Quarterly and in Radicalism in the South Since Reconstruction (Palgrave, 2006). He is completing a monograph on civil rights activity in the post-Reconstruction era (University of Pennsylvania Press).

Prior to joining KU, Professor Alexander taught at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst College, Gettysburg College, and Yale University, where he was the first Cassius Marcellus Clay Fellow (2005-2007) in the Department of History.

The most important aspect of disability, regarding diversity, is that it constitutes identity and culture. The interdisciplinary field of disability studies has critically addressed history, policy, theory, advocacy, and more recently creative expressions of disability through the arts and literature. It increasingly examines the intersection of disability with other diversity, contributing to a better understanding of an increasingly diverse, global culture.

I realize KU benefits greatly from having outstanding scholars who care and research extensively about such matters. Are these researchers, students, and others who care about disability connecting? I believe we should.

A resource: Guidelines for writing about people with disabilities – http://www.rtcil.org/products

AN EVENING WITH GEORGE FOREMAN

Former Olympic champion, 2-time world champion, entrepreneur, and minister will be at KU to share his remarkable story.

February 4th
7:00-8:30pm Presentation & Panel Discussion
8:30-9:30pm Book signing
Kansas Union Ballroom
Free and Open to the Public