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[Full Issue]

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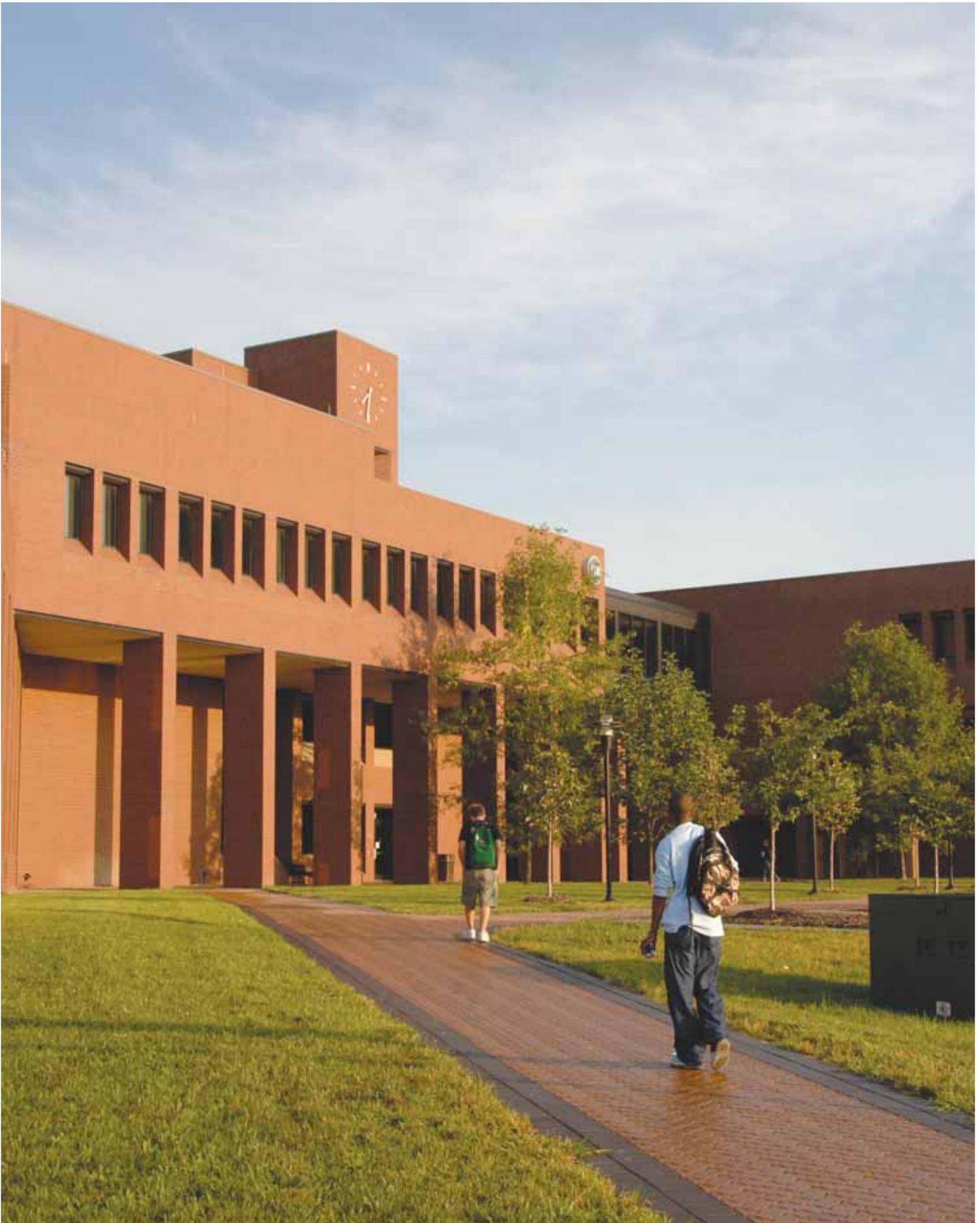
# Many VOICES— One Community

Journal of Diversity Equity and Inclusion



TERRY CALAWAY, JCCC, President  
CARMALETTA WILLIAMS,  
Executive Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion  
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On the cover:(seated left) Amber Smith, Danny Alexander, (standing) Susan McGarvey, Samira Hussein, Lisa Cole, Kami Day, (seated right) Carmeletta Williams, Shaun Harris

As I move into my second year as JCCC's president, one of the achievements I'm most proud of is the development of the new office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Much has been spoken and written about the flattening of the world, of the need for us to work and interact with people around the globe. "Local" no longer means Johnson County – it now means Earth. For us to function in this new world, we must understand, appreciate and respect our diversity and our similarity.

Improving diversity at the college was one of the objectives the trustees set for me when I was hired, one with which I wholeheartedly agreed and was eager to undertake. They asked that we further enmesh diversity into college processes, policies, procedures, services, curriculum and populations so that the college climate is one that respects and celebrates a multicultural educational and work environment. With your help, we're making significant strides toward this goal.

However, we need to do much more than talk about diversity. We have to be willing to commit to the changes needed to achieve our diversity goals. These changes go beyond college organization and structure. We have to be willing to expand our ways of thinking and learn more about, not just race and ethnicity, but gender, religion, physical ability, sexual orientation, age and socio-economic status as well.

An understanding of diversity isn't the only objective we're pursuing here. We are also seeking equity and inclusion. We need to see – and respect – differences among us and treat each person on our campus as equals so they feel they do indeed have a place and a way to contribute to our society. We must also give them the respect they deserve. If we can do this at the college, then we can do so elsewhere. Learning comes first at JCCC, and if our students learn to respect all peoples here, they will do so in the community. In this way we enrich the lives and potential livelihoods of our students. In the process, we help to flatten the world.

To achieve diversity, equity and inclusion on campus, we have to be willing to ask hard questions, discuss difficult topics, and hear answers that may make us uncomfortable. Doing so will enrich us as a community where individuals are welcome, included and respected. I look forward to learning more this year and to working with you to achieve our goals.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry A. Calaway". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Terry Calaway  
President  
Johnson County Community College

# CARMALETTA WILLIAMS

Executive Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



Welcome to a new day, time and era at Johnson County Community College. There is much that is new at this institution. Our president has only been on the job a little over one year. We have a new division of Learner Engagement. We are in the middle of a massive campus-

wide reorganization plan. The board of trustees has added several committees to enhance student learning because "Learning Still Comes First" at JCCC. And, in addition to all that, there is a very active Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

There have long been "diversity committees" on this campus. Each has looked and functioned a bit differently from the other. We have had committees with almost a hundred people and some with only five. We have had committees that facilitated workshops and training and programming and others that were more theoretical and informing. We even had a "diversity committee" with no people of color on it. I'm still shaking my head at that one. Who in the world thought that was a good idea? Through all these configurations one constant remained – a strong commitment to diversity issues.

Now the work, ideology, energy and goals of those earlier

diversity committees have been acknowledged, respected and formalized with the establishment of this new office – the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI). The good news (there is no bad news) is that there is a very active, campus-wide diversity committee. The open, active, and informing communications of this group through the Diversity Discussion listserv have been instrumental in framing the office and advising the ODEI of the needs, interests and desires of the campus. Much of the programming in place for the next two years has come from this group. We are a working team.

Also integral to the work of the ODEI are the Strategic Initiative committees which address campus diversity. We are building an infrastructure to collaborate, in particular, with the two committees addressing diversity issues – the Diversity Student Recruitment and Retention Committee and the Diversity Faculty and Staff Recruitment and Retention Committee. Together we are focused on the implementation of the goals set and the work accomplished by those committees. The Strategic Initiative for Diversity – Student Recruitment and Retention has been transferred to the ODEI, while the committee working on the Strategic Initiative for Diversity – Faculty Recruitment and Retention remains under Dr. Dana Grove. Two of the ODEI Diversity Fellows have primary responsibilities to create alliances with the Strategic Initiative committees, so that we won't be

replicating efforts. They will also work closely with Student Services in their efforts to expand and retain the diversity of our student population.

Diversity Fellows are imperative to the success of the mission and goals of JCCC (see the JCCC Web site for specifics) as well as the ones of the ODEI (see the Diversity Web site for specifics). Kami Day, Shaun Harris and Samira Hussein set the bar high as the first three to serve the campus in this capacity. They were instrumental in setting the tone for this office, as well as developing the mission, goal, and objectives of the ODEI. Our vision of what diversity means on this campus and in this community is clear and strong. As we prepared to define diversity in ways to explain the exciting goals and objectives for JCCC, we began with an understanding that the concept had a long and varied history. From this history we extracted a process for leading our campus to greater understanding, respect, and acceptance of all people. This means that to ensure the survival and very growth of our campus, we had to acknowledge first our many differences, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, political ideology, personal interests, cultural practices, and world views. Then we agreed that instead of homogenization, we should embrace and find the beauty in our differences. Easily, then, we came to see our mission as to create and

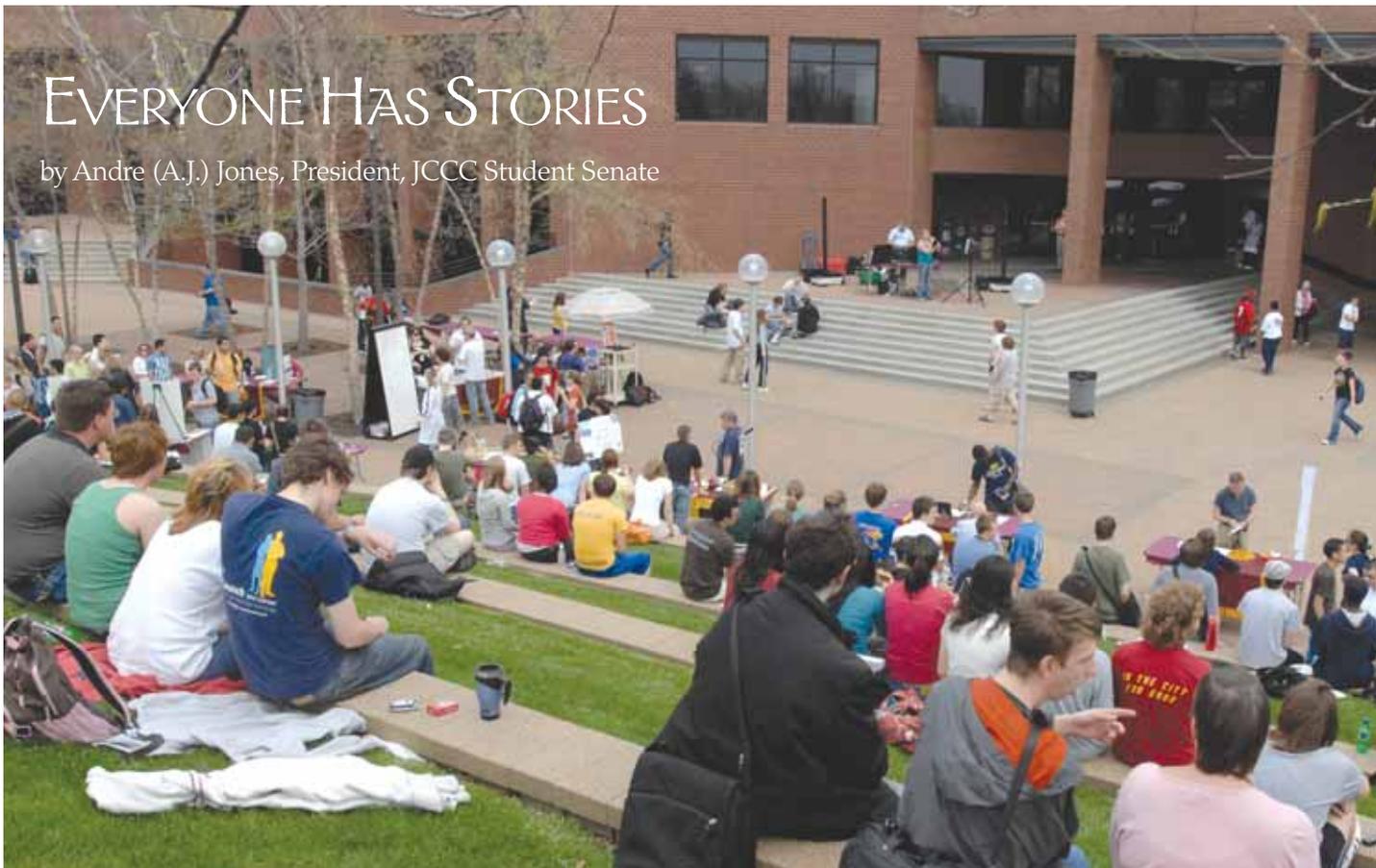
nurture a campus climate where all feel safe and welcome, where difference is valued and respected, and where students, staff, faculty, community members, and guests experience the richness of all aspects of campus life. The pursuit of equity, we agreed, was separate from but not unrelated to diversity. It lives more in the realm of justice. As a goal, equity intends to ensure fairness and impartiality. An essential function of ODEI is to advocate for those who feel they have been maligned or suffered the stings of differential treatment. By being an advocate for them, we work to eliminate the underlying causes of factors that diminish our ability to feel justly treated and respected. An outgrowth of diversity and equity, then, is inclusion. To be included is to be made to feel a legitimate part of the whole. The sense of being integrated into the institution, its *raison d'être*, is the heart of inclusion. It is this tripartite purpose, we agree, that undergirds and motivates this office.

A bright, new day surrounds JCCC and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. We are excited about our part in helping to create a new era on this campus. All of us, particularly our students, will benefit from the changes that abound. We invite all of you to join us and be part of this magnificent journey to assure that ours is a safe, inclusive, and respectful community.



# EVERYONE HAS STORIES

by Andre (A.J.) Jones, President, JCCC Student Senate



As a good friend once told me, everyone has stories. Some are good, and some are bad. My story fits somewhere in the middle. I consider myself the poster child of diversity. I am a nontraditional, older, Black, gay student. I was pretty worried about returning to college after my battle with kidney

failure and having a stroke and being paralyzed. After returning home after four months of physical therapy in the hospital, I decided to return to school and finish my degree after a 20-year break. I was a little worried returning to school because I had been out for so long. I wanted to get a fresh start and JCCC was my first choice. Once I got here, I discovered that Johnson County Community College is one of the most diverse institutions I have attended.

When I first started at JCCC, I noticed right away that here was a very diverse group of students. Most students here were very friendly as were most of my instructors. I wanted to be more involved in school, so I decided to check into some of the clubs on campus. One club I wanted to check out was the gay organization here on campus. The other was the Black organization. One of the first things the GLBTSU wanted to do was to change the name to Queers and Allies, so we had to go to the Student Senate to present our

request. Another member of Queers and Allies and I went to the Senate meeting. We presented our request for a name change and they asked us why we wanted to do that. During this session, I saw how this group of students was making policies that affected all students on campus. So I decided to become a senator.

I got really involved right away. I sat on a few committees and got involved in some other groups on campus. I had only been there for a half semester when it was announced that the vice president of the Senate had to resign for the spring semester. I took over his position and became the Student Senate Vice President for the spring 2008 semester. I learned that there was a lot of responsibility that went along with the Senate seat. But, there were many advantages, too. I met some very important people on campus and I found that many of the teachers were just as diverse as the students. The very next semester, my second semester here, I was elected Student Senate President.

It's great that this school would accept a gay, Black, older student to be its student body president. Johnson County Community College, to me, is one of the most diverse colleges a person could attend. I recommend this school to anyone who is planning to go to college for the first time or planning to return to school. It's true. Here at JCCC learning comes first.



# FROM MAJORITY TO MINORITY

By Mackenzie Evan Smith

I can feel sweat saturating my clothes and dripping down my legs as I push past crowds of people and enter onto a busy roadway. It's 1 p.m. in Cairo, Egypt and I have just left my Arabic class at the Fajr Language School. I step into oncoming traffic and hail a taxi. I catch a driver's eye and after haggling for a fair price, I am off: racing through the streets of Cairo, life is teeming around me as the taxi speeds past donkeys, buses, and throngs of people.

As I exit the taxi, people stare, jaws agape, as I make my way home. I live in a part of Cairo that tourists do not frequent and I have come to learn that a fair-haired young woman walking alone is a rare sight that demands attention. I have traveled to more than 25 countries and I have never



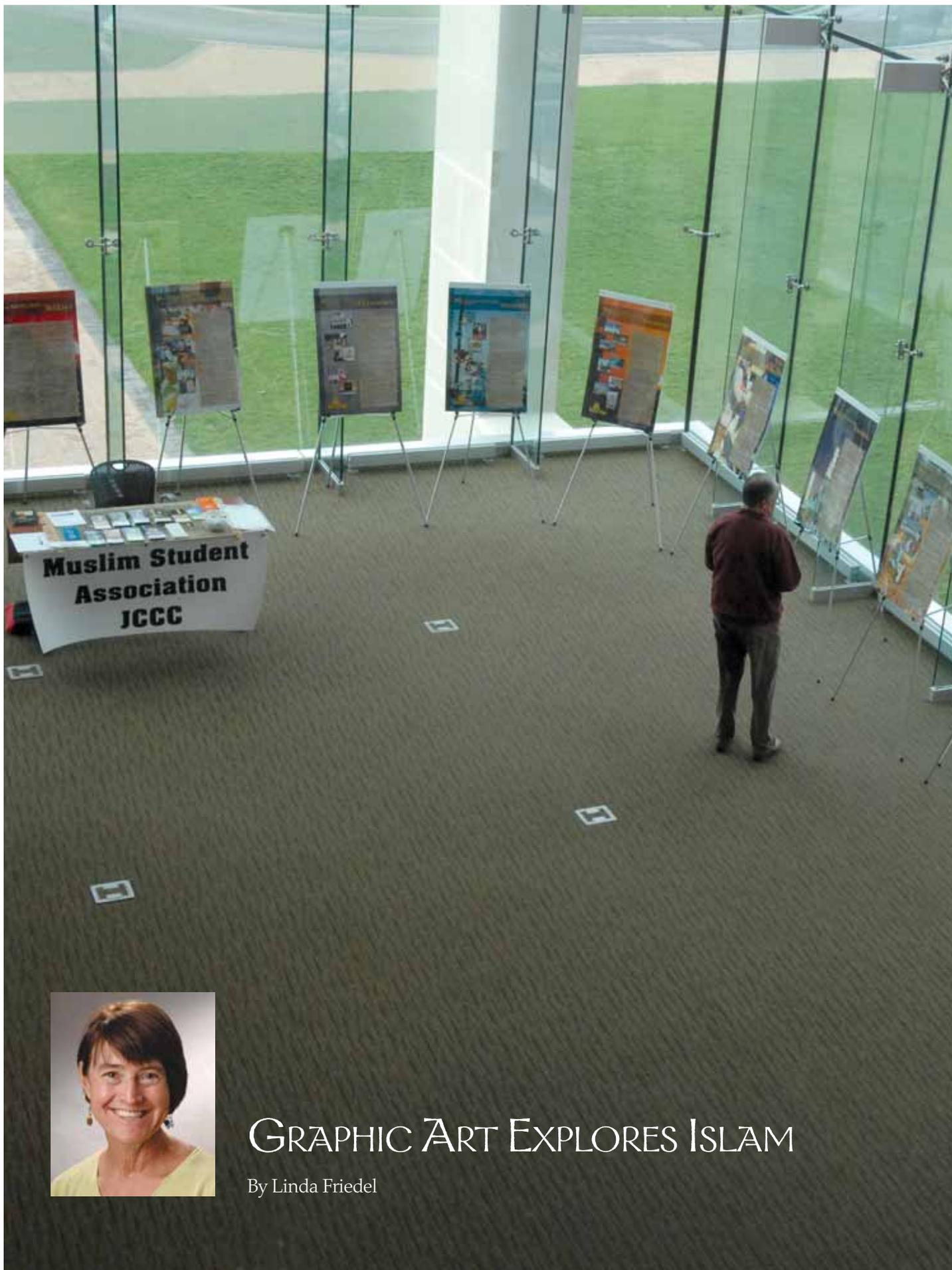
felt more out of place than here in Cairo. Being a minority is something I don't often experience in the United States and I value the opportunity to see the world from a different perspective. Everyone is a minority somewhere, and for me, that place is certainly Cairo, Egypt.

Cairo is an irresistible conglomeration of Middle Eastern and Western cultures coinciding in a sprawling city of 30 million people. I came here to study Arabic and I have grown fond of the strange dichotomy between new and old, Middle East and West, and conservative and just plain crazy. Contradictions are everywhere: on television, rappers star in music videos with scantily clad women while on the street women wear the hijab. At the beach, some vacationers swim fully clothed, while others parade around in string bikinis. I feel at times confused as to how a young American woman fits into this cultural melee.

As I walk towards home, children are screaming and playing in the street, and women are selling Pita bread and sugarcane juice. The air is thick with heat, sweat and life. A man in a passing car sees me and yells, "Marry me," before peeling off in a cloud of dust. I ignore his behavior and smile to myself. At times the constant heckling gets on my nerves, but I never feel threatened since men's comments here are usually jovial.

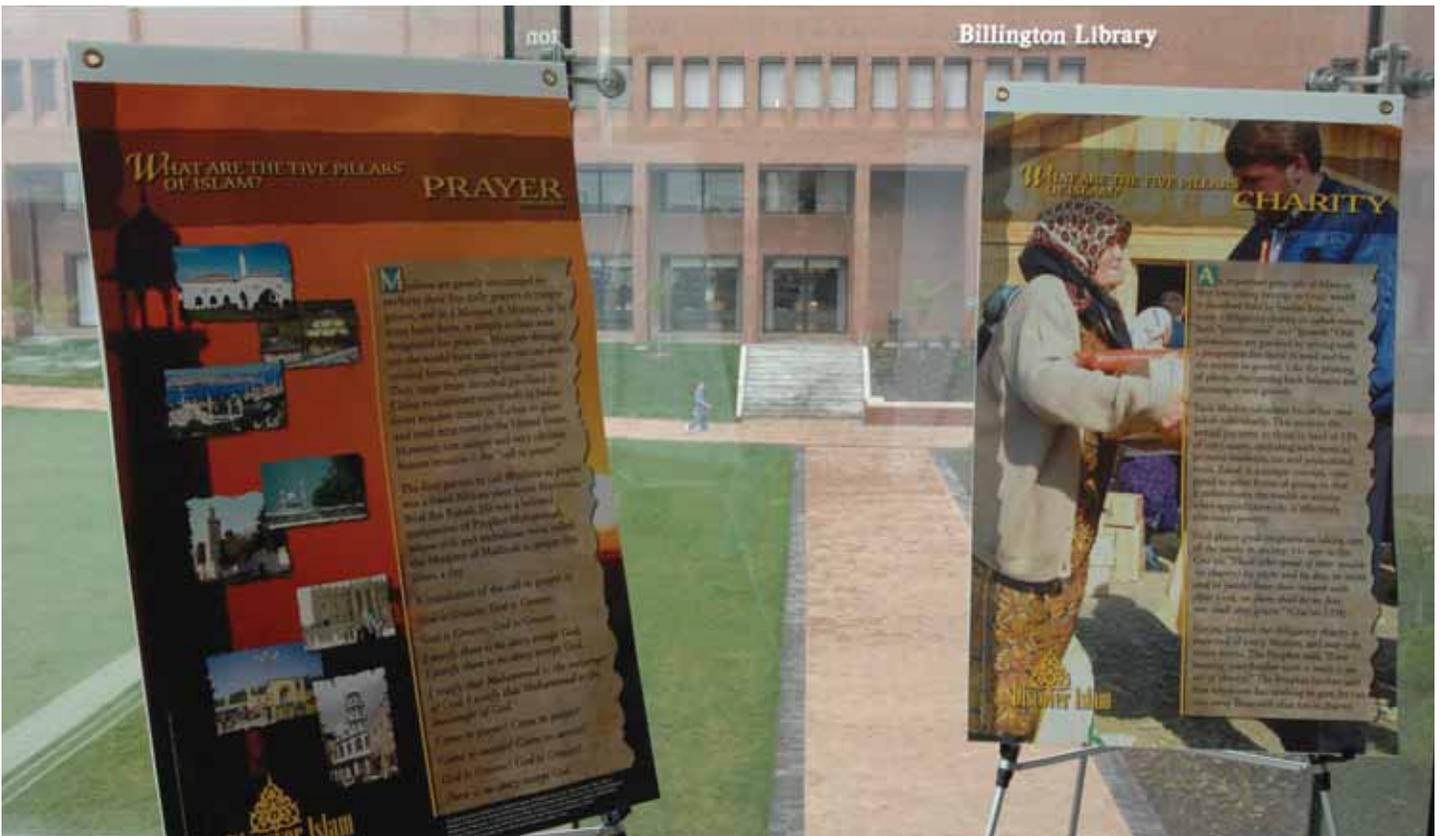
I finally enter my building and climb five flights of stairs to my apartment. As my front door swings open, I hear a muezzin calling the Islamic faithful to afternoon salat. The sound radiates from the Mosque across the street as I stand in my doorway, transfixed, listening to the muezzin's peaceful call. Once again I am reminded that I am in a different world, far from home, and I wouldn't want it any other way.





# GRAPHIC ART EXPLORES ISLAM

By Linda Friedel



Something colorful in the Cube caught a professor's eye. She noticed it from her office window in the library.

"It looked like some kind of poster presentation," said Kathryn Byrne, assistant professor in the Writing Center. "I had no idea."

Curiosity motivated Byrne and student Bethany Weida, Shawnee, to visit the mysterious display one afternoon in April.

What Byrne and Weida found in 270 RC brought them closer to an understanding of another faith and culture.

From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 22 through 24, 2008, the Muslim Student Association sponsored a gallery of Islamic graphic art. Scores of colorful posters with text answering questions about Islam filled the glass room.

Weida said she was born and raised Catholic.

"It's a lot more similar to my faith than I ever thought," Weida said. "It was a lot of background and a lot of faith."

Bilal Alnahass, president of the Muslim Student Association, helped to create the exhibit, saying he first saw the posters in the New York subway in 2003.

"I was very impressed," he said. "It's the amount of work put into them."

Each poster featured collages of Islam life and culture, posing questions and answers about Islam. The texts explained Islamic dress codes, women's rights, family values, history, educational influences in sciences and math, virtues and much more.

"You would hope to educate people about what Islam is," said Alnahass. "It's very well presented. It's not offensive to any religion."

The Muslim Student Association hosted an informational table in the Commons building weekly last year, educating students, faculty and staff on Islam. The Islamic graphic art display was another effort in a series of speakers and programs the organization sponsored.

"We wanted to try a new thing," said Mudassar Muhammad, vice president of the association. "We just want to remove the misconceptions about Islam."

Muhammad said Islam is not portrayed fairly in the media.

"That's not who we are," he said.

He said the organization wants to educate the public about Islam. The posters fused art with educational text.

"Most people don't know that algebra came from the Muslim world," Muhammad said.

Byrne said most anyone would benefit from experiencing the graphic exhibit.

"It breaks down barriers," she said. "It erases some of the social myths that are propagated through the press and around the halls."

With 8.5 million Muslims in the United States today, Alnahass said Americans need to understand not only Islam, but many cultures.

"We [Muslims] are part of it, the American culture, whether people like it or not," Alnahass said. "We're here to stay."



# MOVING FROM DIVERSITY PROGRAMMING TOWARD CAMPUS CLIMATE CHANGE

By Shaun Harris

The Office for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI) has been on campus for six months. So let's see what it has accomplished so far.

Dr. Carmaletta Williams, a 20-year veteran of the English faculty and a published Langston Hughes scholar, was installed as the college's chief Diversity Officer by Dr. Calaway; five Diversity Fellows have been installed (Dr. Kami Day, Professor Samira Hussein, Lisa Cole, Amber Smith, and myself) with several more to come this fall; a Multicultural Center Director has been approved by the Board and will soon be hired and installed in our new Multicultural Center (Danny Alexander will be the interim Multicultural Center Director this year.); the Diversity Fellows and Dr. Williams have drafted a mission statement and goals and objectives, which will soon be featured on the new diversity Web site and diversity newsletter (You're reading it.); and, for the 2008-2009 academic year, speakers and "monthly diversity conferences" are being planned and organized around a broad spectrum of diversity, including: autism, Latino culture, Native American cultures, religious diversity, the sustainability movement, Black history month, LGBT culture, etc.

## ***So why is this only a beginning, or potentially, no progress at all?***

Let's start with this year's exciting new diversity programming. How many students, faculty, staff, board members, and administrators will attend a session at the autism conference on October 17? Two hundred people? As many as 400? If a speaker was hosted in the Craig Community Auditorium (233 GEB) and every seat was filled, would the event be a success?

On one level, the answer would be yes. However, if one considers that there are more than 1,500 faculty and staff at JCCC, more than 17,000 students every semester, and hundreds of administrators all around campus, 400 attendees would not even be sufficient to say that a sizable percentage of the campus community attended the event.

One goal of the autism conference, besides helping us understand better the issues that people with autism face on a daily basis, is to bring autism within the spectrum of diversity that is valued at JCCC and help people

with autism feel welcome and safe everywhere on campus. The conference, this diversity programming, cannot achieve this goal, however, if the participation rate is only a small percentage of the entire campus community.

Those of us who do diversity work know that, too often, it is those who are already supportive and informed who attend diversity programming and those who are not as supportive or informed that decide not to attend. Of course there are plenty of good reasons why it is difficult to attend diversity programming at JCCC. For students, this is a commuter campus: they have jobs, families, and homework waiting for them when they finish class; staff and administrators have important work to do and already over-burdened schedules; faculty may not see how diversity (or this type of diversity) fits into their curriculum or class goals. Given these very real constraints and obstacles, it is a wonder that any of us has time to do any additional tasks, let alone tasks with a diversity focus.

However, if the goal (as the new mission statement for the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion states), is to "create and nurture a campus climate where all feel safe and welcome, where difference is valued and respected, where students, faculty, staff, community members, and guests experience diversity in all aspects of campus life," then everyone must participate. Everyone affects campus climate. To really make a change to campus climate, ideally, everyone would need to attend the autism conference, do follow-up reading and research, and devote some work time to plan and implement ways to make JCCC more accessible and welcoming to autistic people.

But here's the rub: education and awareness about autism is not enough. There is the Latino community to learn more about, the Black community, the LGBTQIA community – the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and ally community – the Muslim community, Native American communities, the disability community. And the list goes on, each community needing a long-term educational commitment and a personal transformation from each of us. It is only here that we begin to understand the enormity of the task of transforming JCCC to a place where diversity is a lived reality, a functional part of how the college operates.

There are a couple of important side notes here. First, as I heard a speaker say at NCORE 2008 (the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity), the institution's leaders need to ensure that its strategic goals and objectives related to diversity are implemented on the operational level. In other words, if administrators don't give release time and financial support for staff to pursue diversity education at work (It is unreasonable to expect employees to do this education without pay or away from the workplace.), or if administrators and faculty do not make diversity education part of their job descriptions and performance evaluation, then any institutional goal related to diversity will, in practice, fall short [replacing: "fail"].

Second, because the needs of many diversity groups are not verbalized for various and complex reasons, it is possible, perhaps even likely, that some people believe the campus is already welcoming and safe for members of various diversity communities, or that they personally behave in ways that are welcoming. However, the only way to know this for sure is to ask for feedback from those within that particular community.

This lead to the importance of assessment to determine the

relative success of any diversity initiative. For assessment related to diversity, it is critical that 1) those within the various diversity communities actively participate in shaping the assessment apparatus and interpreting the data created, and 2) the assessment needs to be continuous and ongoing, ideally established with the assistance of a campus climate professional fluent in the functional needs of many diversity communities.

### *So what conclusions do I draw from this analysis?*

I conclude that diversity programming is only the starting point for diversity education. Diversity programming, though important, is only as successful as the percentage of the entire campus community who attends. I conclude that diversity education is hard work that requires a long-term commitment from us and long-term support from the institution. Finally, I conclude that a transformed campus climate around diversity needs the participation and assistance of everyone at the institution to be successful.

For more information, contact Shaun Harris, assistant professor of English and co-advisor for the Queers and Allies Student Club.





# BEYOND PROGRAMMING: CULTURE CHANGE IN THE CLASSROOM

By Kami Day

By creating The Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ODEI), JCCC has embraced a vision of an institution that welcomes and includes all members of the JCCC community. In the words of Myles Horton, we have our “eyes ‘on the ought to be.’”<sup>1</sup> Horton founded and directed the Highlander Folk School, which opened in Tennessee in 1931 as a labor education center and later became the educational center of the Civil Rights Movement. According to Kirk Branch, author of *Eyes on the Ought to Be*, “to work toward something that seems impossible to realize is not a mark of futile activity, but a sign that you might have chosen the right goal ... Horton invokes a vision of a world that is continually shaped and reshaped by us, a world that will never be right, that will never be good enough, that will always need more.”<sup>2</sup> JCCC’s vision of an inclusive and welcoming institution will, in spite of its worthiness and importance, challenge us continually. There will always be new faculty, new students, new staff, new issues. Our institution will “never be good enough, ... will always need more.” We welcome the challenge, but we must think carefully and deeply about how we will realize our goal of culture change.

For one thing, we must create opportunities for traditionally silenced or muted voices of individuals and groups to be heard. To this end, the ODEI is developing an impressive lineup of programming for 2008-2009 including speakers, workshops, panels, book discussions, and films. A number of faculty and staff are involved in the planning, and it is generating a great deal of excitement. This programming is necessary for increasing visibility of and awareness about JCCC’s diverse population, but programming alone is not enough to nurture a culture that welcomes and values all members of our student body, faculty, and staff. So, what must we do at JCCC, beyond excellent programming, to transform our culture – to change behaviors, and even hearts and minds? How do we meet the challenge of shaping and reshaping our culture?

When I posted this question on the diversity listserv, I received several thoughtful responses. Sally Gordon expressed a desire that people would be more aware of the language they use, and Maureen Fitzpatrick suggested a series of articles to raise awareness about nonverbal communication. These

messages convey a hope that behavior will change, but how do people come to realize their behavior must change? Two other responses to my query proposed that part of the answer lies in human interaction. Kevin Mimms feels we can do more to mentor students from marginalized populations because students from such groups may lack the schema for college that would lead them to seek out help. Sean Daley wrote that he tries to get his “students and community members to interact more ... one of the biggest obstacles around here is getting people past their preconceived notions and ideas about people.” Daley makes space for such interaction by encouraging (and requiring) his students to work together, and such collaboration is an example of embracing a pedagogy that gives students the opportunity to interact with others whose cultures, races, ethnicities, classes, abilities, religions, genders, sexual orientations, and life experiences are different from their own. Like Daley, I believe creating opportunities for interaction is key to changing our culture in a substantive way.

Along with several other faculty and staff members, I recently attended the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity, and over and over again I heard that we educators must infuse our curricula and pedagogy with materials and activities that make our students more culturally competent. Listening to speakers and reading the work of authors from diverse cultures make our students more culturally aware, but we must also create spaces in which they (and we) experience diversity. In sessions about curricular transformation, facilitators emphasized that changing the curriculum is a waste of time if we do not change our pedagogy. JCCC’s Educational Affairs Committee labored long and hard to develop criteria for courses that can fill JCCC’s new diversity requirement. These courses must, among other things, “encourage students to experience a perspective that is different from their own.” Examples of ways to experience different perspectives include providing “students with an insider’s view of diversity,” and “enhancing student’s ability to consider the perspective, history, experience, and worldview of others.” If we believe that knowledge – disciplinary and personal – is constructed, then these goals are best accomplished by asking students to work together. However, the most common scenario involves students sitting in rows,

facing the front of the class and seldom speaking to each other. My students work collaboratively almost every class period of every semester. One recent group was made up of two Sudanese students, a Hispanic student, and two white students, one of whom was identified as having a hearing impairment. Their writing engendered conversations about U. S. culture as compared to Sudanese culture, about poverty and privilege, about living with disabilities, etc. One semester, I overheard a nontraditional Iranian student explaining to a young white American student that all people in Iran are not poor. In another group that semester, an Iraq war veteran provided an important perspective for his group, most of whom opposed the war but did not know much about it. In several of my classes, queer students have come out in their writing and therefore to their groups. If the JCCC culture is to change, faculty must lead the way, with curricular and pedagogical transformation, in creating opportunities for these kinds of interactions. For that to happen, every faculty member in every discipline must have diversity, or

cultural competence, in mind when they plan every course they teach, even if that course does not officially meet the criteria for the diversity requirement. How that can be accomplished is beyond the scope of this article, but it will be one of the ODEI's primary foci.

One faculty member responded to my question about reshaping JCCC's culture by emphasizing that such change requires courage, and it is true that addressing racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and all forms of oppression and prejudice can be risky. But our community must go beyond acknowledging and valuing difference in order to reshape our culture and create a model for other Kansas institutions.

1 Branch, Kirk. *Eyes on the Ought to Be: What We Teach When We Teach About Literacy*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2007.

2 ---. (2006). "Literacy, Nickleby, and the War on the Poor." *Kansas English* 90(1).





# WALKING THROUGH FEAR

By Miguel M. Morales

The first day I came to campus, I sat in my car trying to talk myself out of enrolling.

You don't have any money. You don't have any time.

You live too far. You're too old.

More reasons came as I walked across campus.

College isn't for people like you. You don't belong here. Look at them – they're all white.

They're never going to understand you and you're going to get into a lot of arguments.

I found myself at JCCC because my boss at the retail bookstore overheard me telling a co-worker I planned to go to school "next semester."

It's sort of a game young people play. We know society will forgive us for working dead-end jobs if we say we're going to school "next semester." Besides, we usually do have the intention of going to school. It's just never the right time.

Well, my boss did something unexpected. He begrudgingly gave me the next day off to register for class. He had to adjust all the students' work hours, and my class schedule was the last he needed. While terrified of enrolling in college, I was more afraid my boss would give me horrible hours or even fire me if I returned without my class schedule. He was not a pleasant guy.

So once again, my big mouth had gotten me into trouble. It jeopardized the job that put gas in my car, cheap food on my table and paid my rent. I had learned early that survival jobs were all that mattered. At 10 years old, I started working as a migrant farm worker with the rest of my family. We spent summers working 12-hour days six days a week for \$1.25 an hour. Work required my sisters and me to leave school early in May. We took no final exams nor said goodbye to classmates. Work also meant starting school in October instead of August.

For reasons I don't understand, my parents didn't encourage us to have friends, to go to school, or even to pursue our dreams. Maybe that's the way life was for them. When my sisters became teenagers, they lied about their ages in order to get jobs that took them out of the fields. Soon after, my father began working in a meatpacking plant and my mother and I started cleaning houses.

When I was able to attend school, I discovered a talent for telling peoples' stories. I hid my gift for years because I knew talents needed to be exploited into jobs. I also knew what work was. Work was laboring at something you don't like in order to pay bills. I feared my talent becoming labor. Writing is the only thing I've ever done right – I couldn't risk tainting it because then I'd have nothing.

Besides, who'd ever pay me to write? Yet there I sat with shaking hands filling out an enrollment application. I must have gone through five applications. I was so scared. After all these years of talking about going to college, what if I don't have what it takes? What if I fail? What if I get proof that I'm really not good enough?

I know this sounds crazy but trying meant failing and as long as I didn't try – I could do anything. I had infinite potential. Why in the world would I risk losing that? Because not trying also meant I had gained nothing.

There I stood with an application in my hand, a man with nothing to lose. With the simple act of handing my application to the woman at the desk, I set my universe into motion. Soon I spoke to a counselor, signed up for a class, and paid for it with my emergency credit card. I went back to my car and as I sat looking at my class schedule, I cried. I had walked through my fear. It wasn't the last time I'd have to do it on this campus and it never gets easier, but I did it.

Trust me, whatever your fear is, you can walk through it too.



# I AM

I am

Miguel M. Morales

I am from comals and microwaves,  
from manteca and Hamburger Helper.

I am from the hot, dry fields and air-conditioned classrooms of Texas,  
which made me both warm and cold blooded.

I am from crops of soybeans, corn, and cotton,  
from a backyard garden of okra, cucumbers, and roses,  
from saying the rosary with my arms extended like Jesus on the cross,  
and from my Puerto Rican grandmother's curly, kinky hair,  
which no one else in my family has.

I am from parents whose parents died when they were young  
and sisters who were forced to raise theirs.

I am from an amusement park of wit ranging from sarcastic bumper car jabs to rollercoaster-like tales  
and from depression so deep that only time can leach away its generational poison.

I am from "the devil is going to get you" to "you aren't a real Mexican because you don't speak Spanish,"  
from tattered brown scapulars promising first Saturday salvation,  
and from enduring suffering for the conversion of sinners.

I am from the forsaken plains of the Texas panhandle but no city there was ever my home.

I am from shiny-armored Conquistadores and bare-chested Mestizos and Boricuas.

I am the conqueror and the conquered.

I am from mastectomies, hysterectomies, bypasses, eyeglasses, heart disease, and diabetes,  
from emergency calls late at night that lead to cross-country trips  
and eating from hospital vending machines.

I am from chipped statues of la virgin,  
from photos with burning candles by them,  
and from calendars that mark the days for the living and the dead.

I am from a family that loves dogs but could never keep one,  
from moving at night in garbage bags before the rent was due,  
and from starting school in October instead of August because of work.

I am Luke Skywalker and Cesar Chavez.



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