



Williams Directs Diversity Initiatives

E.J. Scott-Palmer, program director, Community Services, and Williams visit before taking members of the Black Collegians to the Big 12 Conference on Black Student Government at Oklahoma State University.

Administration

Cover: Dr. Carmaletta Williams is shown presenting *Overcoming Obstacles*, a Black History Month event sponsored by JCCC's Organization of Black Collegians.

Dr. Carmaletta Williams was named the first executive assistant to the president, diversity initiatives, at Johnson County

Community College on Jan. 18.

With her appointment, Williams resigned her previous position as JCCC English professor.

“It was extremely hard to resign my academic position,” said Williams, who has a bachelor’s and master’s degree in English from the University of Missouri-Kansas City and a doctorate in English from the University of Kansas.

But Williams looks at it this way: she is redefining her classroom as the college and the community, and her subject as diversity. She is also redefining “diversity” for this campus, giving it a broad and inclusive meaning.

“Embracing diversity allows us to be advocates for all people on our campus regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, geography, ethnicity, religion, culture, different abilities and challenges and even differing world views and perspectives,” Williams said.

To that end, Williams says her office will work

closely with counseling services, Access Services, the President’s office and college attorney.

“I will work with all the divisions and departments on campus to make sure people feel included,” she said.

One of Williams’ charges is to increase minority student enrollment and faculty/staff diversity. To her that means not just recruit, but also retain.

“We don’t have a tradition of hiring and retaining a diverse population at JCCC, and we need to change that,” Williams said.

While Williams perceives her office as a place where people can talk about problems and even register complaints, she also intends it to be a teaching center, where people bring ideas for programming and speakers, and faculty facilitators develop course modules about diversity subjects. In the future, she and the diversity committee foresee a multicultural center, maybe as part of a new library.

Williams, who was born and raised in Kansas City, Mo., has a strong commitment to the success of JCCC and diversity.

“I have been working on diversity programming and training at JCCC for the past 17 years,” Williams said. “I know this institution, am familiar with the community and have a vision for the future of the college. With the commitment of our president to diversity initiatives and the establishment of this office, JCCC will be a model for other institutes of higher education.”

As part of its diversity initiatives, the college is requiring all associate of arts and associate of science graduates to complete an approved course on diversity, effective fall 2008. Students can choose from a list of at least 36 courses ranging from *Introduction to International Business* to *Introduction to the Deaf Community*, as well as many classes on cultures, history, world religions and women’s studies.

“Almost all colleges and universities have a diversity requirement,” Williams said. “We want our students to leave educated and have insight into ‘others.’ We are a global society. We can’t stay in our little cocoons and expect to be successful.”

Williams herself is a successful teacher, writer and researcher.

A prolific writer, she has published on the subjects of racial identification and African-American migration; Langston Hughes, an early 20th century black poet and writer, and the Harlem Renaissance; and noted black writer, folklorist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. Since 1993, Williams has made more than 300 presentations before academic, professional and community groups.

At JCCC, Williams was awarded the college’s first-ever Diversity Award in 2005, five Distinguished Service Awards, the Burlington-Northern Santa Fe Faculty Teaching Award and the League for Innovations’ Innovation of the Year Award.

She has been the recipient of more than 20 awards and honors including *Who’s Who Among American College Professors*, 2004, 2005; Minority Opportunity Fellowship Grant, KU, 1999, 2000, 2001; KU Black Faculty and Staff Council’s Student Achievement Award, 1999, 2000, 2001; KU Black Faculty and Staff Council’s Alumni Award, 2000; Fulbright-Hays Fellowship for Study in Ghana, 1997; and the 1997 Kansas Professor of the Year Award, awarded by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Council for Advancement and Support of Education. 🌸



Williams talks with Dr. Kami Day, associate professor, English, a member of the Diversity Committee and co-adviser to Queers and Allies.