

Pan African Center

NEWSLETTER

The
University
of Akron



Fedearia A. Nicholson

SOMETHING NEW

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Something new is definitely on the horizon. With the election of the first African American, Barack Obama, as president of the United States, our country is definitely experiencing unprecedented change.

We see that change on our campus as well. The University of Akron continues to embark on new and exciting firsts — such as the hiring of a chief diversity officer and the creation of both the BioInnovation and Confucius institutes.

A transformation also is taking place in the Office of Multicultural Development (OMD) through new staffing, revamping of academic support programs such as the PASSAGE and the Four Phase Advising System, and the development and expansion of new learning communities. We're also reinvigorating sociocultural programs, such as Sistah Friends, and this fall introduced the Student African American Brotherhood, a nationally recognized organization promoting retention and graduation among African American males.

To support the success and retention of first year students of color, OMD began the semester with 20 peer mentors. They serve as paraprofessionals, assisting nearly 200 first year students with their transition to The University of Akron.

In addition, over the past six years, OMD has hosted the annual Awards and Scholarship Dinner to raise funds for a scholarship endowment created to support students of color. This year, we are excited to report the awarding of the department's first scholarship.

Moreover, last February, to commemorate President Bill Clinton's 1997 Town Hall Meeting on Race Relations here at UA, the University hosted a campus-wide celebration, "Revisiting Race: Black, White and Beyond," which attracted nearly 3,000 participants.

The overwhelming success of this event has inspired an annual tradition, with the 2009 celebration of "Rethinking Race" planned for Feb. 2-13. Among the 11 featured speakers scheduled is Democratic strategist, Donna Brazile. Also on the agenda will be a series of face-to-face discussions, the viewing and discussion of the film, "Crash," an online museum and the Color Line Project.

For more information, please visit <http://www2.uakron.edu/race>.

FEDEARIA NICHOLSON

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Peer Mentoring as Defined by the Verb 'To Be'

The new academic year welcomed an almost brand new paraprofessional staff for Peer Mentoring Services in the Office of Multicultural Development. Joining five "veterans" were 15 new student-leaders for the 2008-09 academic year.

It was our group of eight peer mentors from spring 2008 that took the lead on a creative and comprehensive plan to recruit other students to apply to this important position within our office. The bold plan drafted and carried out by our own peer mentors yielded, in less than a month, a record number of 49 applications.

The selection process was deliberately rigorous to give applicants the chance to have a transparent, competitive and inclusive experience — similar to what they will encounter in the job market while in or after college. Forms and references were turned in. Students who met the stipulated criteria (i.e., 2.75 cumulative GPA with at least one year of classes at UA) were selected for one-on-one interviews with two contract professionals.

Before the beginning of fall classes, the new staff came together for a long day of training focused on enhancing their interpersonal and leadership abilities. More than just "on-the-job training," this was a time for students to reflect on their roles as student-leaders, the strengths of their group and the countless possibilities ahead of them.

These students have realized that the process of becoming a peer mentor requires a great deal of self-awareness and discipline. They have learned that mentoring is not simply advice *Continued on Page 6*



New 2008-2009 Peer Mentoring staff with adviser Henrique G. Akim.

Black Pioneers of Akron

On a recent Sunday in November, the afternoon was spent remembering, learning and celebrating the lives of Akronites who overcame racial barriers and made a difference for themselves and in the lives of others.

The occasion was the opening of the newest exhibit at The University of Akron's Dr. Shirla R. McClain Gallery of Black History and Culture — "Black Pioneers of Akron." It is an elegant tribute to so many who helped create the vibrant history of Akron.

Before reading the first word or enjoying the first photo, the simple, artistic arrangement sets the tone of the exhibit. It is hard not to feel the care and love of the people who created this. There looks to be no attempt to over-glorify or dazzle anyone. Just a caring and direct display of the lives lived, and still being lived, that have helped carry us further away from the dark days of open hate, racial prejudice and hurtful ignorance. To conjure the courage and heart-felt strength it would take to try and move forward in an environment intent on convincing you there is nothing here for you, with lawmakers that think you are not worthy of the same rights as your fellow countrymen and protectors that think you to be less worthy of equal protection, is a feat worthy of tribute and ceremony. "Black Pioneers of Akron" does well to honor these people, their struggle and their lives.

As visitors walk through the door, they are greeted by a wall-sized picture of some of the men and women featured in the gallery. To the left, a tribute to Sylvester Small "Honoring a Lifetime of Service to the Children of Akron." Starting as a substitute teacher in the Akron Public School System, Mr. Small eventually became Superintendent. The display shows a number of photos and newspaper articles that testify to his affect on his community.

Next, the exhibit honors African-American Akronites who have made an impact in "Medicine and Research." The wall details the contributions of many. Among them is Jean Felton. After her father passed away and her mother became too ill to care for her and her five sisters, she spent most of her childhood in the care of others. Being poor and in a racially biased environment, she felt she had no hope of higher education or a better life. It was the heartless and cold words of one and the caring action of another that lead Jean Felton to pursue a medical career and a life of service to others.

MIKE GLASS
AKRONNEWSNOW.COM

Received permission for reprint



This painting by local artist Woodrow Nash hangs in the community room at the Odom Boulevard Branch of the Akron-Summit County Public Library. It features important local African Americans who have contributed to the community.

Pan AfricanCenter

NEWSLETTER

Published by the Office of Multicultural Development,
The University of Akron

Fedearia A. Nicholson
Director, Office of Multicultural Development

Editor

Ronda Williams
Coordinator, Career Planning and Marketing

Contributors

Coleen Curry
Director, Academic Achievement Programs

Antonio Samuel
Junior
Major: Electrical Engineering

John Queener, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Education

Jasmine Redd
Freshman
Major: English

Henrique G. Alvim, M.S.Ed.
Coordinator, Academic Support Services

Photo credits

Scott Horstmann
John Ashley

Pan African Center for Community Studies
Buckingham Center 101
Akron, OH 44325-1801
330-972-7030

<http://www.uakron.edu/panafrican/>

We welcome articles. Submit to:

Pan African Center Newsletter
Buckingham Center 101
Akron, OH 44325-1801

All comments, information, instruction or opinions are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions or official positions of The University of Akron or any of its departments or divisions. The accuracy, completeness and interpretation of any information contained herein are not guaranteed. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the ideas presented. Should you have any questions or comments on any information provided in this publication, please contact Fedearia A. Nicholson at fn@uakron.edu

OMD Honors Excellence

In following its theme of “New Directions,” the Office of Multicultural Development celebrated its sixth annual Awards and Scholarship Dinner on Sept. 27, 2008, by honoring a wide range of recipients for our prestigious awards.

In a departure from tradition, the office honored not one but two very deserving individuals with Legacy, Leadership and Excellence awards. They are **Dr. Daisy L. Alford-Smith** and **Malcolm Costa**.

These recipients have played a key role in the establishment and continued existence of diversity and multicultural initiatives throughout Northeast Ohio and around the world. They have recognized the need for leadership and community and have answered with vigorous determination and dedication.

Dr. Daisy L. Alford-Smith, chief executive officer of the Girl Scouts of Northeast Ohio, has previously served as the chief operating officer with the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools and the International Commission on Health Care Professions in Philadelphia, Pa. Prior to that, she was the director of the Summit County Department of Jobs and Family Services, where she has been lauded for her distinguished accomplishments in the complete reorganization and implementation of a replicable welfare reform plan and the development of the first countywide health and human services agenda.

Her commitment to education is evident as a lecturer and author of numerous minority health issues. She taught Leadership and Administration at the University of Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, Africa, and was a health consultant to the South African government.

As a consultant to the country of Slovakia, Alford-Smith assisted two major cities in developing citywide community health plans. She has presented health care workshops in Bangkok, Thailand, and was a keynote speaker in Korea at an International Nursing Conference. Additionally, she has spoken before the Democratic National Convention’s Black Caucus Delegation.

Alford-Smith’s outstanding dedication has been recognized by numerous organizations with awards that include Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing; Outstanding Achievement in Health Care, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity; Professional Woman of the Year, Summit County; Distinguished Achievement, Ohio House of Representatives and Ohio Senate; and Outstanding Community Service, the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority.

Malcolm J. Costa, has devoted his life to community service by developing programs and creating opportunities to benefit workers in Akron and Northeast Ohio.

Since 1977, Costa has served as president and CEO of Akron Summit Community Action, Inc. where he manages 400 employees operating Head Start, the Foster Grandparent Program, Emergency Services, Child Assault Prevention, Emergency Home Energy Assistance and other community programs.

In addition to his community service, Costa serves as president of Ohio Urban Resources; vice president of Downtown Akron Partnership; and vice president of Great Trail Council, Boy Scouts of American. He is a trustee for the Akron Community Health Resources,



Legacy, Leadership and Excellence, Distinguished Alumnus and Student Award recipients at the 2008 OMD Awards and Scholarship Dinner.

Akron General Medical Center and Akron City Club.

Costa has received numerous awards for his service and dedication to the community, including The University of Akron Outstanding Alumni Award, Community Support Award from NAACP, Alpha Phi Alpha Community Service Award, Frontier’s International Community Service Award and St. John CME Church Leadership Award.

This year OMD recognized one distinguished alumnus, **Dr. Willis L. Lonzer III**, whose work truly serves as a model of excellence for students at UA.

Lonzer, who holds a Ph.D. in Chemistry with an emphasis in biochemistry from UA, is currently employed by Abbott Laboratories, Inc., where he is a clinical science manager for immunology development in the Global Research and Development Department.

His research has included analyzing the enzyme systems that are involved in cell growth and linked to the series of events that signal or “turn-on” cancer cells. Lonzer’s research in the structure and function of proteins and enzymes has provided insight into the pathophysiology of diseases such as cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer’s Disease and Mad Cow’s Disease, as well as the development of targets for new therapies.

A life member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Lonzer serves as chairman of rituals and ceremonies for the Midwestern Region, and is the area director of Northeast Ohio II. He is a past president of the Eta Tau Lambda chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. in Akron, Ohio.

Lonzer is the author of several articles in both scientific/biomedical refereed journals and nonscientific journals. He is a contributing author of the book, “Brothers of the Academy: Up and Coming Black Scholars Earning Our Way in Higher Education.”

The OMD Awards and Scholarship Dinner was established to recognize deserving community leaders, alumni and students and, most importantly, to raise funds for a scholarship endowment created to aid students in financially paying for college.

OMD was proud to present its first scholarship award in the amount of \$1,000 to Antonio Samuel, a junior in the College of Engineering and a member of the Honors College. He is an electrical engineering major who is a tutor and mentor for Increasing Diversity in Engineering Academics and is president of the National Society of Black Engineers. In addition to being very involved with academics and volunteering, he still maintains a cumulative grade point average of 3.51. He is truly an outstanding student and extraordinary individual.

STUDENT AWARD RECIPIENTS

Freshman Rising Stars

Aaron Gober-Sims and
Ariana Young

Outstanding Sophomore

Marcus Phelps

Outstanding Junior

Antonio Samuel

Outstanding Seniors

Sarah Vue and
Charlotte Cannon

The University of Akron's Black Male Summit



OMD staff registering participants for the 2008 Black Male Summit.

The University of Akron hosted the inaugural Black Male Summit April 11-12, 2008, to focus the campus and community's attention on issues affecting African American males and to promote the retention and graduation rate of this population.

Nearly a year in the making, with a steering committee that included members from campus and the community, the summit

“Empowering black men to reach their full potential is the most serious economic and civil rights challenge we face today.”

— Marc H. Morial, president, National Urban League

was the first event of its kind to take place in Northeast Ohio. The more than 800 registrants were drawn from higher education institutions, public school systems, private foundations and the business community.

Over the course of two days, through three keynote addresses by nationally renowned speakers, 18 concurrent sessions, a film presentation and discussion, a roundtable with local religious leaders and a dialogue on Hip Hop, several themes were explored. They included: The Role of the Black Church, Hip Hop and its Cultural Effects, Black Male Identity Development, The Importance of Mentoring, Black Male Violence and Suicide.

The University of Akron's commitment to the success of African American males has been demonstrated beyond the summit — through curricular and co-curricular experiences and opportunities to engage and partner with the community. To positively address the retention and graduation rate of African American males, the University has launched several initiatives.

This fall, for example, the Student African American Brotherhood was introduced to campus. This nationally recognized organization with more than 170 chapters has a proven track record of helping

African American males excel academically, socially, culturally and in the community. Also, a committee has been formed to design a learning community for first year African American males with two separate cohorts — one that will focus on all majors and a cohort targeting males who are interested in teacher education.

In addition, Dr. Zachery Williams, assistant professor of history, developed and introduced a course last summer, African American Men's History. The first course in the United States to focus solely on African American men, this seminal course examines the experiences of African American men in the United States and the African Diaspora.

Due to the increase of suicides within the African American community over the past year, the Office of Multicultural Development and the Black Male Summit Steering Committee hosted a forum on Nov. 19, “African Americans and Suicide” as a follow up to the inaugural summit. Those attending addressed issues not only affecting males, but also the entire community. It is hoped The University of Akron and the Greater Akron community can collaborate to create sustainable solutions to community problems.

As a result of the overwhelming success of last year's summit, The Office of Multicultural Development will host a follow up summit, April 3-4, 2009, which will focus on a “Call to Action.” The focus of the two-day event will be to provide The University of Akron, other institutions of higher education, local school systems, the religious community and individuals with tools and strategies to address their challenges and advance ideas into action. We hope to see you there!



Black Male Summit participants during the closing dinner at the Akron Urban League.

It's the Message that Counts

In this age of e-mail, social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, blogging and text messaging, it is difficult for me, a baby boomer, to identify with what seems like an abbreviated mode of communicating that lacks serious and thoughtful consideration.

Therefore, when I became aware that actor Hill Harper had written a book, "Letters to a Young Brother: MANifest Your Destiny," I was thrilled — I thought it would encourage the hundreds of students who participate in our college access programs to value the lost art of letter writing. However, what I found was exactly that from which I had been running.

Harper used the tools of this generation, not mine. The format is a series of e-mails in which young men facing tough issues can find advice and get answers to their questions, posed their way. The approach is straightforward and practical without being "preachy."

He used the same approach during UA's inaugural Black Male Summit in spring 2008, when he spoke to an auditorium filled with more than 300 middle and high school students from all over Akron. Males and females alike were at first just excited to see the actor who plays a medical examiner on the popular CBS show, "CSI: NY."

Yet soon, they were blown away by the fact that he graduated magna cum laude from Brown University and earned graduate degrees with honors from Harvard Law School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Both his parents and grandparents were in the medical field as doctors, pharmacists, even a veterinarian. The value placed on higher education by his family, and shared by Harper, has given him the ability to pursue many career avenues.

When he passed around his black American Express card and talked about his passion for a vintage 1959 corvette he owns, it wasn't to boast but to bring home the message of what he calls the debt rule — "only buy what you can afford." After going to public schools all his life he had to pay for college and grad school, which left him \$75,000 in debt. However, he saw that debt as an investment.

The American Express black card is not a credit card, Harper told them, but a charge card based on your money — your real wealth.

Although you could tell by the expressions on the faces of those in the audience that they were still not exactly sure of the difference, they were all sure of one thing, it was special. And he made them feel special as each student held the card and turned it over — some even took a picture of it with their cell phones.

Harper helped me to accept that regardless of the mode, it's the message that truly counts.

COLEEN CURRY
DIRECTOR, ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAMS



"CSI: NY" actor and author, Hill Harper, and Black Male Summit participants during his book signing.

STUDENT VIEW:

Opportunity to meet role models important part of Black Male Summit

I looked forward to attending The University of Akron's first Black Male Summit in April 2008 — seeing it as an opportunity to network and make professional contacts. But the enthusiasm I felt in knowing there would be 500-plus successful African-American men from all over the country in attendance quickly waned when I saw the lack of participation by UA students.

Growing up in the inner city of Cleveland, Ohio, I always felt that I was at a disadvantage by having a lack of positive, successful role models in the community. This is a hindrance that sometimes makes it difficult for members of the community to realize their fullest potential, and sometimes causes us to shortstop ourselves in terms of our aspirations. Most of us coming from this background have only been exposed to entertainers or athletes as people for us to view as successful. Often times, we never come across African-American males who have Ph.D.s and have made their mark in an intellectual community. The Black Male Summit provided just such an opportunity and I wish more of my peers had shared in the experience.

While talking to students who did not attend the Black Male Summit, I quickly saw their disappointment at not being able to hear the powerful messages conveyed by individuals such as Hill Harper and Dr Na'im Akbar, or the other speakers in attendance. I think in seeing how passionate I was about the experience, I made them realize that they had just missed out on a special opportunity.

I would very strongly recommend that everyone, not just African-American males, attend the upcoming Black Male Summit if they are able to do so. I think that as a community these types of events are necessary and it is essential that we capitalize on them.

With that being said, I am ecstatic about the upcoming Black Male Summit and I can't wait to leave this one with just as much inspiration and motivation to positively impact the community as I did the last one.

ANTONIO SAMUEL
UA ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING MAJOR

The Election of Barack Obama and the Black Male Summit

Dr. Naim Akbar, the internationally known psychologist, delivered the opening keynote address at the Black Male Summit in April 2008.

Although he was not asked to do so, Akbar connected Barack Obama, who at the time was campaigning for the Democratic nomination for president, to the Black Male Summit. I do not know if Akbar knew then what a significant impact an Obama win would have on the psychology of the black community, and what a significant impact it could have on the plight of black males.

Those who understand the history of America recognize that the election of Barack Obama symbolizes how far African Americans have come in this country. Yet, in spite of his victory, African Americans have a way to go to achieve equality. This is surely evident by examining the statistics related to the plight of the African American male.

African Americans started off in this country as three fifths of a person under the Constitution of the United States. During the period of enslavement, which lasted for almost two and half centuries, African Americans were brutalized through subhuman working and living conditions. They experienced attempts to destroy their culture, suffered through raping, lynching and quartering (tying an enslaved African by his or her limbs to four horses and literally pulling the person into four pieces).

When the formalized period of enslavement ended, the oppression of African Americans did not. At the end of the reconstruction era, there was sharecropping, terrorism in the form of entire communities being burned and its residents killed, separate and unequal, and the Ku Klux Klan. There was Emmett Till, voting rights violations, violence against civil rights organizations, the assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the bombing of the Birmingham girls. It did not end there.

There was urban decay exacerbated by the loss of industrialized jobs, a decline in education, an increase in health disparities, and an increase in the availability of drugs and guns in the African American community.

Given this backdrop, it was not surprising to see so many African Americans exhibiting tears of joy over the election of Barack Obama. Many elders in the African American community said they never expected to see the day that an African American would be elected to the highest office in the land. Rightfully, African Americans are celebrating this historical event.

Even though Barack Obama will be the next president of the United States, African Americans continue to face some significant obstacles; none more significant than the plight of many African American males. They are disproportionately placed in special education classes, more likely to be suspended than their white counterparts, more likely to drop out of school, disproportionately imprisoned, and less likely than black females to attend and to graduate from college. In essence, African American males are at the top of most lists that represent a negative quality of life and at the bottom of lists that represent a positive quality of life.



Dr. Naim Akbar

If the election of Barack Obama and the development of programs like the Black Male Summit are to change the plight for many African Americans males, then African Americans must continue to do what has brought them from three fifths of a person to president.

First, they must continue to organize and fight against resistance to their progress. Second, they must continue to hold on to their faith and believe that no mountain is too high and no valley is too low to hold them back. Finally, they must continue to use their collective skills and talents to make this a better country for all.

JOHN QUEENER, Ph.D.
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, EDUCATION

Continued from cover

Peer mentoring

giving, but the ability to listen to others with genuine care. With the right balance of challenge and support, a healthy relationship is fostered between a mentor and a mentee, allowing both of them to learn more about themselves and, in the process, realize their common goal of succeeding in college and in life.

Through the program, peer mentors have reflected on what it really means “to be” a mentor and not simply learn about what a mentor does. Consequently, mentors and mentees can catch the vision that personal and academic success comes as a result of their values and actions being aligned. Students suddenly realize that success rooted in character and personal integrity inspires deep transformation, with benefits for themselves and those around them.

HENRIQUE G. ALVIM
COORDINATOR, ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES
OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Start of Something Big

In early November, Drs. Sampson Davis, Rameck Hunt and George Jenkins, known as “The Three Doctors” and authors of three books, including “The Pact,” were on campus to share their inspirational story. The bond they formed as youngsters got them out of the inner city and through college and medical school together.

Even though society is in the process of sparking a new hope, there are still individual struggles that prompt people to lose confidence in their potential to make a difference. There will always be that feeling inside that tells you to just give in to the weaknesses of society.

But what I learned from “The Three Doctors” during their talk here at The University of Akron inspired me to embrace struggles as opportunities to hurdle obstacles.

Being that I shared a household with a father who frequently distanced himself from the family, I felt his emotional being was absent, even though his physical being was present. With this knowledge, I felt a connection to the three doctors — we shared the longing for a father figure we could look up to.

For young men, the effects of this loss can be severe — they begin to turn to the streets for models of guidance. Over time, friends develop into a family. Their characteristics can rub off on each other, with positive or negative results.

“Friendships can lift you up, strengthen and empower you, or break you down, weaken and defeat you,” noted Dr. Sampson Davis during the talk.

I know from personal experience how true this is. If I had stayed with the same group of friends who didn’t want to work for anything, I would have never made it to college. It is a frightening thought that the power of friendship can push someone to direct his journey of life so differently.

Fear of the unknown also can hold a person back from pursuing dreams.

“Sometimes, you just have to step out there and believe in something you can’t quite see,” said Dr. George Jenkins, who had to do just that himself.

Jenkins had the passion to pursue dentistry, but he wasn’t sure how to reach that goal, or even how to overcome the struggles along



PASSAGE learning community students, OMD staff and The Three Doctors.

his path to becoming a doctor. But having friends to support him and faith in himself enabled him to push through the challenges and the unknown.

Perhaps one of the most memorable and inspiring moments of my life was when I met the three doctors. It is rare to find individuals so willing to give back to their community. As Dr. Rameck Hunt stated, “you don’t need money or status to enrich another person’s life. Anybody with passion and purpose can do so.”

At the lecture that night, Hunt shared a simple phrase that will not be soon to leave my mind: **preparedness+opportunity=success**. It is a tedious task to always be prepared and always keep your head in the books, but the effects of the hard work will always overshadow those few tempting hours of fun.

The strength of inspiration can empower you even in the darkest of times, for inspiration is the first step to evolution. This is our world to shape into what we wish to see. I believe “The Three Doctors” have contributed to the process. It is now up to us as a collection of youth to continue the plan for change.

JASMINE REDD
UA ENGLISH MAJOR

preparedness+opportunity=success

— Dr. Rameck Hunt

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution © 2009 By The University of Akron / 1208-SVP-6



Upcoming Events

Spring 2009 Semester Begins

Monday, Jan. 12

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday and Day of Service

Monday, Jan. 19

no classes

Presidential Inauguration

Tuesday, Jan. 20

Rethinking Race: Black, White & Beyond

Feb. 2-13

Find out more at www2.uakron.edu/race or 330-972-6446.

President's Day Observance

Tuesday, Feb. 17 - no classes

Women Trailblazers

Thursday, March 5

Spring 2009 Semester Recess

March 16 - 20

Black Male Summit

April 3 - 4

Spring 2009 Semester Final Exam Week

May 4 - 8

For more information about upcoming events visit our Web site.

<http://www.uakron.edu/multculdev/>