

Pan African Center

NEWSLETTER

The
University
of Akron



*Fedearia A. Nicholson, Director,
Office of Multicultural
Development*

New Directions

As professionals in the Office of Multicultural Development, we understand that to encourage continued growth and development some things must end, some things must change and new things must be created. We have chosen "New Directions" as our theme for the academic year for various reasons.

First of all, as of June 1, 2007, I have assumed the role of director.

Next, several of our other professionals have gone in pursuit of their own new directions at Ohio University, Roanoke College in Virginia and John Carroll University. But, most importantly, we will be directing our focus and attention to providing opportunities for the campus and community to explore critical issues impacting black males in higher education.

In fact, let me take this time to personally invite you to join us on April 11-12, 2008, for the Black Male Summit. Our featured speakers will be Hill Harper, star of "CSI: NY" and author of the New York Times bestseller, "Letters to a Young Brother," and Dr. Joseph White, psychologist and author of "African American Male Psychology: Challenges and Conflicts in the Journey of Living."

With the start of anything new, it is always a great time to reflect on the legacy of the past. This year, the Office of Multicultural

Development celebrates its 21st anniversary. Over that period of time, departmental titles and staffing changes have never affected the unwavering commitment to student success that has been the hallmark of our work here. I consider it an honor and a privilege to lead an office, at my alma mater, that directly impacts the lives of students of color. I am aware of the inevitable stumbling blocks associated with negotiating the higher education process, but my tenure as both an undergraduate and a graduate student here give me insight to help students in developing strategies for success. Students come to The University of Akron with the hope of leaving with a degree in hand. It is our responsibility to assure that along the way they receive the personal support and advocacy needed to reach their academic goals. In addition, we must prepare our students to be the global leaders needed for an increasingly diverse workforce.

I am excited about the addition to our staff of Aiesha Miller, interim associate director, and Henrique DeGodoy Alvim, coordinator for academic support services. We welcome them as partners in preparing students for academic success. There are so many wonderful opportunities available on campus. On behalf of the Office of Multicultural Development, I accept the charge to connect and/or reconnect students of color to the numerous resources The University of Akron has to offer.

As we move in "New Directions," I encourage you to support us as we continue to create new opportunities to aid in the retention and graduation rate of students of color.

Legacy, Leadership and Excellence

Most often, people do not recognize that Teddy Roosevelt borrowed from an African proverb when he said, "Speak softly but carry a big stick, you will go far." When I think of Leona Farris, invariably those words come to mind.

Not much more than 5 feet tall, if that, she is always so polite and soft-spoken. However, her "big stick" is a sharp mind, unwavering faith in her own capability to get a job done and her passion for people. Proudly a senior citizen, she is more dependable than any committee member I have ever met and has given 100 percent of herself to this community. Farris is so deserving of this award and those of us who have worked beside her join The Office of Multicultural Development in taking our hats off to salute her.

In 1969, Farris became the first African American female hired at the rank of assistant professor at The University of Akron, where she served in what is now the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences. During her tenure, she was the director of

community involvement. Currently a member of the board of directors of the Dr. Shirla R. McClain Gallery of Akron's Black History and Culture, Farris also has served on the board of the United Fund of Summit County, the Ohio Consumers Association and on the Foster Grandparents Association Advisory Board.

Farris' legacy of leadership and personal excellence has been recognized throughout this community. A proud and active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. for 70 years, she also has more than 60 years of dedicated service to her credit as a member of Second Baptist Church. She has received awards from the Summit County Extension Hall of Fame as well as the United Way Distinguished Service Award, and is a life member and Golden Heritage member of the NAACP.

Her commitment to education is evident in the scholarships established in her honor: The Leona W. Farris Scholarship for Minorities in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences,

Distinguished Alumni

Each year, while reviewing the names of literally thousands of people of color who are alumni of The University of Akron, we are deeply moved by the depth of continuing commitment to support students, the community and the University.

The selection process for choosing our Distinguished Alumni Award recipients is rigorous — requiring on-campus involvement as a student, continued involvement in the Akron community after graduation and the support of contemporary University students. Some alumni contribute to scholarship funds, some give employment opportunities to students and graduates, and others support University events and programs so faithfully that one would think that they were UA employees.

Most importantly, all can tell you a story of one or more people who are employed by the University and who have made a difference in their academic and/or personal success.

Our 2007 Distinguished Alumni honorees — Norell Hodges and Dr. Rodney R. Yates Smith — were chosen specifically to help us with our theme for this academic year of “New Directions.” Many efforts are in progress across campus to impact the success and retention of all students. However, nationally there is a crisis in education for males in general. The African American male represents the “canary in the coalmine” in education. The toxins in the system are affecting this population more severely than any other. The Office of Multicultural Development has taken on the charge to bring this critical issue to light and to offer concrete strategies to address it.

As UA students, Hodges and Smith found administrators, faculty, staff, other students and campus activities that provided them with opportunities to acquire and exercise their leadership skills, evolve into productive contributors to their communities and the nation, and to develop an understanding of their responsibility to give back in some way. We are so proud of their accomplishments.

Hodges, an Akron native, graduated from Buchtel High School in 1979 and from UA in 1983 with a B.S. in Industrial Management. As a student, Hodges pledged Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and served as president from 1981-1982 and treasurer from 1980-1981. He also was involved in Toastmaster International and a member of Omicron Delta Kappa and the National Leadership Honor Society.

As a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps, Hodges was the highest-ranking cadet during his senior year. He received the Distinguished Military Graduate Designation and was commissioned at the rank of second lieutenant. He has been employed by United Airlines for 17 years.



2007 Distinguished Alumni Dr. Rodney R. Yates Smith, left, and Norell Hodges, right, with Leona Harris.

Hodges and his wife of 24 years, Debra, share a strong desire to serve the community where they grew up, and have opened Handel’s Ice Cream on Copley Road. Today, the proud parents of three daughters and one grandchild continue to inspire and encourage young people to pursue their dreams.

Smith also is an Akron native. Pursuing a personal dream, he worked several part-time jobs to pay tuition and fees to attend Walsh Jesuit High School. He graduated in 1981.

While attending The University of Akron, Smith earned four degrees: an A.A.B. in Data Processing (1983), a B.S. in Accounting (1986), an Associate of Arts (1986) and an MBA in Accounting (1993). He attributes his academic

Continued on back cover

Pan AfricanCenter NEWSLETTER

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

Fedearia A. Nicholson
Director, Office of Multicultural Development

Editor

Coleen Curry, M.A.ED.
Director, Academic Achievement Programs

Contributors

Coleen Curry, M.A.ED.
Director, Academic Achievement Programs

Photo credits

Scott Hortsman

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

BLACK MALE SUMMIT

An article by Phillip Jackson, available on the Internet, begins, “There is no longer a need for dire predictions, hand-wringing, or apprehension about losing a generation of black boys. It is too late. ... The question that remains is will we lose the next two or three generations, or possibly every generation of black boys hereafter to the streets, negative media, gangs, drugs, poor education, unemployment, father absence, crime, violence and death.”

I say, “The answer to that question lies within us — all of us.” The time for finger pointing has passed. Parents, educators, politicians, clergy, corporations, community leaders, the media and black boys themselves must own up to their corporate and separate responsibility to turn the tide and focus on the future. The tendency to illuminate the dark side has produced an accurate laundry list of ills; yet, has also served to rob many young black males, their mothers, fathers and young black females of simple faith and hope. Hope in a future where hard work is adequately and accurately rewarded, excellence is not measured in gold, silver or bronze, and education really does open the mind and the doors to opportunity. A book I have read and reread many times over the past 30 years has convinced me that, indeed, “faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.”

Therefore, as much as it lies within us — all of us, we must resist the dark side and find ways to accentuate the positive. To restore, renew, regenerate faith in our ability to find solutions to the prob-

lems that plague our communities in general and our black boys in particular. We must create environments that ignite, fan and feed the fires of hope again.

The much-anticipated Black Male Summit scheduled for spring semester will not shove under the carpet the dirty laundry of underachievement, educational apathy, negative role models and absentee fathers or increased suicide and other forms of violence against the community. But, along with speaking the truth, we will also call upon the strength of a people. The same strength that helped our foremothers and forefathers survive the middle passage and was then passed on to their progeny. The strength that gave reverence to the ancestors and respected the past while looking forward to a future filled with hope that the rising sun would bring a new day, a new possibility of freedom.

My hope is, the Black Male Summit will enlighten, encourage and empower us — all of us. My faith assures me that we can open the storehouse of our collective genius and begin the journey to wellness for our communities in general, and black males in particular.



Legacy, Leadership and Excellence

Continued from cover

the Dr. Melvin and Mrs. Leona Farris Scholarship for Minority Students at Northeastern Ohio College of Medicine, the Leona Farris Fund for Foster Grandparents Program of Summit County and the Leona W. Farris Caring Awards sponsored by Caring Communities of Summit County.

The Office of Multicultural Development Awards and Scholarship Dinner was established to benefit students and would not be possible without the dedicated commitment of numerous departments, colleges and programs across campus along with our co-sponsors from the Akron community. They are:

- Akron Summit Community Action Agency
- Alpha Phi Alpha Foundation of Akron
- FirstMerit Bank
- The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company
- OMNOVA Solutions Foundation.

An added feature to our celebration this year was a silent auction with donations from:

- UA's Student Recreation and Wellness Center and Department of Athletics
- Flemings Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar
- Acme Fresh Markets
- Piatto Novo Romano's Macaroni Grill
- Akron General Health & Wellness Center-West
- Heather Jalbert of E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall



UA President Luis Proenza, left, with student awardees Benjamin McDonald, Cortney Allen, Lauren Missik, Ja'Nique Blocker, Rodney Wright and Jelani Nattey.

- Buckeye Baskets (United Disability Services)
- Akron Art Museum
- Macy's at Summit Mall
- Sheraton Suites Cuyahoga Falls
- Candace Campbell Jackson, UA vice president and chief of staff
- Coleen Curry, director, UA Academic Achievement Programs
- Fedearia Nicholson, director, Office of Multicultural Development

Student Awardees:

- Cortney Allen and Lauren Missik - Freshman Rising Stars
- Ja'Nique Blocker - Outstanding Sophomore
- Rodney Wright - Outstanding Junior
- Benjamin McDonald and Jelani Nattey - Outstanding Seniors

EXCELLENCE IN ACTION

King Holiday Activities Fair, Community Forum and Student Leadership Conference

The time has come for us as a community to recommit ourselves to the ideals of personal excellence as exemplified by the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

For many years, the Office of Multicultural Development has hosted an Activities Fair on Martin Luther King Jr. Day with numerous cultural displays, organization-sponsored MLK trivia contests and coloring competitions. Hundreds of parents bring their children in an effort to help them find ways to keep alive the memory of the sacrifices made by King.

However, our 2008 observance will be different. In marking the 40th anniversary of the assassination of one of this country's most brilliant leaders, the Office of Multicultural Development, YEPAW 365, campus and community leaders will join together in presenting a day of activities we believe will help to remember and share the dream, and encourage future dreamers.

A plenary at 9:30 a.m. in the Student Union's Gardner Theatre will feature The Rev. Marvin A. McMickle of Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland, and Obie Shelton, violinist and reporter at television station WKYC, also in Cleveland.

The activities fair will begin at 11 a.m. in the Student Union, Ballroom A.

Also at 11 a.m., concurrent small group sessions will be held for students and community members. With the common theme, "Excellence—It's Everybody's Issue," the groups will focus on the areas of education, community and personal as catalysts for creating a better understanding and crafting solutions for greater achievement.

The conference is free, but reservations are required. For more information, contact the Office of Multicultural Development at 330-972-7030.

Distinguished Alumni

Continued from page 2

success to faculty and administrators who provided support and encouragement, including former UA president, William Muse. Smith's involvement in student organizations included Associated Student Government, Black United Students, Phi Sigma Kappa, The Buchtelite and the Accounting Association. Smith was the first African American to be elected, or to serve, as business manager and editor of The Buchtelite. He was vice president of ASG and senior class president. He also was awarded the Outstanding Senior Man Award in 1985.

Smith has had a distinguished 25-year career guiding sizable, global teams in the design and implementation of large-scale, innovative technology and business solutions that optimally support business operations. Currently a professor at Walsh University, he is also a member of the Arlington Church of God, where he serves as the director of the ministry to deaf members of the congregation.

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