UMDLI

University of Maine
Diversity Leadership Institute

Opening Doors, Minds, and Hearts

Diversity Reflections

2005
Message to the Privileged

The privileged ones
And we know who we are
can walk away
can look the other way
can pretend

So we walk...

The privileged ones have a responsibility
To stay
To react
To educate

Privilege
does not guarantee responsibility
Responsibility
does not guarantee privilege

The privileged walk away
Nothing is gained
The privileged walk away
The future is lost

Devon Storman
UMDLI History and Reflection

Devon Storman

It was in June 2003 that the idea for the University of Maine Diversity Institute (UMDLI) appeared. Catherine Johnson had just returned from the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity. As was the case with her predecessors who attended NCORE, she returned with a wealth of knowledge and excitement. Having been in that state before after returning from NCORE, I was happy for her enthusiasm and sympathetic to the lack of a venue for sharing and building on this experience that had “changed her life.”

As we sat and brainstormed about how the Division of Lifelong Learning might honor its assignment from the UMaine Diversity Plan to develop diversity learning opportunities, all our more traditional ideas fell short of meeting our primary goal—the training must make a difference. In order to make a difference, we believed the training effort needed to encompass something bold. The concept for the UMaine Diversity Leadership Institute took shape that summer day, and with the help and devotion of many individuals from the Division of Lifelong Learning and beyond, the first UMDLI group met less than one year later.

What makes the UMDLI different from other diversity efforts or leadership institutes? Why/how will it make a difference? The most significant difference is in the power structure. When most people think of leadership institutes, they think of powerful people being invited to powerful circles to ultimately do powerful things better. Our Institute fits this mold. However, the difference is in the definition of power. Our definition for power does not require that the individual be of a particular gender, dress a particular way, or hold a position with a specific title. The power that you see surrounding the Institute members comes from inner commitment and strength—commitment to their belief in the need for diversity efforts and their strength to be the ones to carry-on that work within their circles. These are very important and even powerful circles. Each one of us brings our circle with us to each Institute gathering and that circle leaves with us. Sometimes the circles intertwine and sometimes they cause ripples.

So how much power and energy is there in 10 circles, 15 circles, 20 circles? The Institute is changing lives and the participants of the Institute are using the power of knowledge to make sure that they are not the sole beneficiaries. Just as stones dropped in water create overlapping concentric circles changing the pattern of the water, so will the Institute members change the culture of the campus. Not a big splash. Just many, many splatters with the ripples felt by search committees, task forces, departmental meetings, and face-to-face encounters.
University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute (UMDLI)  
2004-2005 “State of Diversity”  
Shezwae Fleming

Personal Reflection
It has been an honor and a privilege to be a part of the UMDLI. I found the experience to be challenging and rewarding. Instead of listing a variety of ways in which the institute has helped me grow as a person and a professional, I would like to illustrate one specific growth that has taken place.

In addition to providing support to students of color, I am also responsible for engaging the campus community in conversations concerning diversity, multiculturalism, difference, inequality, and social justice. Much of this work, unfortunately, does little more than perpetuate “whiteness” and the system of privilege. It took a visit from author/speaker Tim Wise for me to realize that for years I had been providing workshops and trainings about white privilege to –more often than not—a predominately white audience and was reinforcing whiteness as the norm— the default. I would train in such a way that would ask audience members to consider the definition and institution of diversity (defining “otherness”) but rarely (if ever) talked about the constructed establishment of whiteness as something believed to be inherent. I was amazed at my own complicity (of perpetuating this) and stupidity (of not having realized this sooner). I remember walking Tim to his lunch meeting and sharing this with him. He remarked that this kind of active presence (always being aware) takes time and to not “berate” myself for not having discovered this sooner rather than later. He stated that we all have been conditioned (and provided daily reminders) to see whiteness as the norm and oftentimes, forget that this is just that: a conditioning. He went on to further illuminate some examples from his own experiences of having gone through a similar experience throughout his own learning/growing. I walked away from the conversation feeling relieved and inspired. I know that unraveling the constant reinforcement of privilege exist, but it was at this moment I realized just how pervasive the social construction of privilege is.

Professional Reflection
I am very concerned that the university does not have a measurable, sustainable plan for diversity. I am left to conclude that the only reason we don’t have one is that we either don’t know how to go about devising one or we simply want to remain as is. Either way, we are in a time of reflection and change and our institution needs to respond accordingly. We cannot be a place of growth and training for those (students) who will become future leaders (change agents) if we are not activity role modeling the kind of change we wish to see.

As an institution we need to invest in what I call “straight talk.” We need to ask ourselves what is the benefits and costs of achieving diversity and if “diversity” can (or should) mean anything more than increasing the number and proportion of targeted minorities who are recruited and retained, and if so, what qualitative goals do we wish to set for ourselves? And how will this be measured? How does this help the institution succeed
in “realizing” or rather “actualizing” the goals of the University of Maine? It is through “straight talk” that we will (a) allow the campus community to fully engage in the conversation as it relates to diversity, (b) discuss, understand and decided on how best to define and promote diversity instead of pushing forward on a set of basic assumptions shared by all, (d) learn how to deal with and learn from conflict; accept that conflict will occur and from this will come talk, debate and hopefully, group process towards a resolution.

The commitment to diversity is easy to invoke but hard to actually implement. A commitment to diversity without action means very little. Institutional commitment means that there is an action plan; it is incorporated into the core values, mission statement AND includes measurable goals and outcomes. Furthermore, unlike what Allan Johnson (author of Power, Privies and Difference) believes, I do think you can change individuals in the attempt to educate them of the social construction of privilege AND challenge them to do something with this information. We can redesign curriculum to reflect multiple perspectives and talk about new initiatives and best practices, but without self-reflective work this seems almost futile. Even if you had a curriculum transformation, prompted by the representation of a racially diverse population (a temporary interruption of inequity), you still run the risk of teaching from one tradition and perpetuating a specific ideology. It is through “reflective internal work” that we allow people the opportunity to discover their own true selves. I truly believe that grassroots initiatives like the UMDLI allow for this to happen. I look forward to my second year of being my authentic self.

**Reflections on the Diversity Leadership Institute**

Susan Russell

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in The University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute. In addition to my own professional growth, the institute has provided an opportunity to get to know other campus colleagues committed to diversity work. Through our monthly sessions, I was introduced to many facets of diversity work. We explored privilege, engaged in ally building, and began having difficult conversations. We shared, learned, listened, read, and questioned. The monthly sessions were valuable and worth attending. Most often, I started the session with some apprehension and anxiety, but left feeling energized and excited about continuing with the diversity work.

The Tim Wise visit was a great way to end my first year as an institute member. My Institute participation began at the NCORE conference just about a year ago. It was at NCORE that I first became aware of privilege, particularly white privilege, and its impact and relationship on the ism’s (racism, ableism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism, to name a few). This was my first opportunity to hear Tim Wise speak. And then less than a year later, I not only had the opportunity to hear him speak again, but the institute members had a four-hour morning session with him as our guest. At the end of the four
hours, I was energized and ready for more. I attended the afternoon session as well as his talk that evening. I enjoyed it all.

For me, one of the most salient points of Tim’s visit came during our institute session. We asked Tim to share with us the names of some institutions of higher education that were doing a good job with their diversity efforts. He told us there were many who were doing good things and were on the right track, but rather than share their names, he would share some common mistakes. The four most common mistakes institutions make in their diversity efforts include: 1) focus on “other” rather than examining the dominant group; 2) getting stuck in the numbers game; 3) sticking with the tourism model by celebrating differences through a focus on food, fabric and festival rather than on power; and 4) the assumption that diversity, or a lack thereof, is the result of coincidence rather than the three p’s – policy, practices, and procedures. This list really stuck with me, particularly as I reflected on diversity at the University of Maine. It seems to me that these mistakes are currently being made at our institution. We don’t examine the dominant group. We expect others to assimilate to the dominant group, whether the dominant group is white, male, able-bodied, Christian, or heterosexual. Even the dominant group loses something to privilege. At times, we are members of the dominant or privilege group and at times we are not. I have privilege because I am white but at the same time I am female and therefore not a member of the male privilege group. I may be heterosexual and disabled. The dominant group experiences privilege and power and the non-dominant group experiences oppression.

Our institution plays the numbers game. We set recruitment goals and put a great deal of emphasis on getting the numbers up. But we can do everything and anything to increase our numbers but if we don’t have mentoring and support systems in place, they won’t stay. Whether we are attempting to recruit female or racial minorities to our faculty or trying to diversify our student population, we need to do more than play the numbers game. We need to look at retention and recruitment and set realistic goals for increasing diversity.

Why is the University of Maine a predominantly white campus and the state of Maine a predominantly white state? Is it a coincidence? Are our policies, practices, and procedures open to diversity? Do we truly welcome and celebrate diversity on our campus and in our state? These are intriguing questions and ones that I will continue to explore.

A Perspective on the State of Diversity at the University of Maine
William C. Murphy

In its Diversity Action Plan of 2003-2005, the University of Maine states clearly that it “is committed to developing and sustaining a multicultural and pluralistic educational community that encourages the full participation of its members.” The University is to be commended for its policies, actions, and allocation of resources to support this diversity commitment. However, while there have been a significant number of
organizational and institutional activities involving diversity on this campus, there are certain realities that still need to be addressed. Implementing the following action steps will help to address these realities, as well as enable the University to continue meeting its ongoing commitment to diversity more effectively. These recommended action steps are based on: the dialogue and findings gained through my participation at meetings sponsored by the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute, selected workshops and general session presentations I attended at the 2004 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity, and the discussion sessions and public lecture given by Tim Wise during his visit to the UM campus.

**Step One:** The active support and involvement of the University of Maine’s top-level administration needs to be achieved and continued. In order for any University diversity program to be successful and have a lasting impact, it must have the strong continual support and involvement of these top-level administrators. In addition, diversity policies and programs adopted by the University need to focus on impacting and changing both the institutional and organizational factors fostering the lack of diversity on campus.

**Step Two:** The University should organize and implement ongoing diversity training designed to meet the evolving needs of its students, faculty, and staff. Of particular importance, this training should be focused on identifying and dealing with the institutional structures and systems that cause as well as perpetuate discrimination within the campus.

**Step Three:** In order for the University of Maine’s diversity goals to be maximized, there needs to be greater coordination and planning among all the campus “committees, councils [and Institute] concerned with diversity.” While implementing this step will be particularly challenging, it must be attained in order for the University’s diversity goals to be realized.

In closing, I wish to reiterate that the University of Maine has made progress in its commitment “to developing and sustaining a multicultural and pluralistic educational community.” However, this commitment and the program and activism that support it, must be nurtured and continued. Because, as Dr. Mary Frances Berry has stated so eloquently:

> “Each generation must make a dent in the wall of injustice.”

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2 Ibid., p. 5.
3 Comments made by Dr. Mary Frances Berry, Ph.D., in a keynote address at the 2004 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (on June 3, 2004, Miami Beach, Florida).
My Reflection on the “State of Diversity” on the Campus
Francine Sulinski

I must begin by declaring that I feel unequipped to render an appraisal of the “State of Diversity” on the UM campus. Although I have been engaged in diversity work in prior positions and on this campus, my campus diversity work (until now) has been focused on the department that I work for (Cooperative Extension). What I do hope to provide in this document is a reflection on the work accomplished in the first year (2004 – 2005) of the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute (UMDLI), and to project how more can be accomplished on the campus level given these accomplishments.

Reflecting on this past year as a member of UMDLI, I consider the Institute to be a “bright spot” on the “State of Diversity” on this campus. The format and content of the program provides an intensive high quality exposure to the state of diversity nationally, via attendance at the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE). The NCORE “experience” also provides the foundation to build relationships that, once developed, allows for the climate necessary to fully examine the issues that need to be addressed by those who are serious about making a difference with regard to this hard and sensitive work. UMDLI also provides a consistent, in-depth educational experience. The monthly half-day workshops keep diversity work on the “front burner” for each participant.

Beyond the format and the content of the Institute, I will provide evidence of the accomplishments of UMDLI from a mid-year facilitated reflection session. The following is a section of the notes from that meeting:

1. What has been of value to you from UMDLI, and why?
   - The entire commitment of the institute
   - Creating a learning community
   - Sharing with folks in group/developing trust – new people on campus I don’t get to meet
   - Readings and facilitated meetings because they provide structure and framework
   - Getting reading ahead of time and building discussions around it – (help to understand diversity in context, learning from each other – not needing to rely on external experts)
   - Gained something from sessions
   - Even though we’re mostly white I love having this institute and I like what we’ve explored. It is worthy – investment of time and energy

2. What of your experiences have provided the most potential for growth and change?
   - NCORE Conference
   - Learning from each other in institute sessions and facilitators from the group shows we can learn from each other
   - NCORE experience jumping off piece – catalyst
• Sharing items in a bag connection with people – centering of what’s important
• Facilitation of the institution on privilege
• “Working out diversity issues with a group of people working together.”
• “The whole broad process and experience of UMDLI.”
• “Having the opportunity to facilitate a couple of different sessions.”
• “As a member of the planning committee, it has built my confidence in my understanding of diversity.”

In light of these accomplishments and in the context of reflecting on the Institute as a whole and the University’s progress with regard to diversity, I respectfully propose that a similar format and similar content be offered at the upper management and administrative levels. As the Institute plan is created there could be a dual effort to have a “shortened” program available on a monthly basis to the administrative group. A few administrators could also attend NCORE each year. At the mid-point and end of the year both groups (members and administrators) could join with the planning committee to ask what has been learned and how that learning can be integrated in to the campus. At the end of each individual session, we would ask ourselves what is one change that could be made on this campus in light of what we have just learned or experienced. By the end of the year, both groups could work separately and together, to decide what one or two ideas could be adopted to make a “real” difference with regard to the “State of Diversity” on this campus. Thus a grass roots and “tree top” partnership would be forged.

Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on my experience, thank you for your support and for the opportunity to participate in this Institute.

UMDLI Reflection
Cindy Thomas

A year of Diversity training through the University of Maine’s Diversity Leadership Institute has been completed. Those of us who are members experienced radical change and awakenings unlikely to be equaled again in our lives. For me, it was a time of unfolding, a time of self-examination that meant pulling back the layers of ill-taught history lessons and societal systems designed to keep me, in my whiteness, a few rungs above others of color. It was a time for grieving as I moved off the path of least resistance and found myself in places where I had to confront hidden truths about my own white privilege and that, even though I may be passionate about equality, I can step aside now and then to take a break from the struggle. I found myself looking through Johari’s Window: I didn’t know what I didn’t know.

My way of approaching problems has been global. I thought more about what the world needed to do to solve environmental problems rather than what I alone could do. I could toss some coins in a collection cup for hunger and leave the real work to our government. I wanted to be an advocate for ending the war but felt I was too small and solitary and someone else could do it better. But somewhere in this exchange of “shoulds” and “should nots”, I knew I was supposed to change the U.S., no…change the world’s lens.
After returning from NCORE in Miami, I felt energized on the one hand and laden with the weight of the world on the other. Somehow I needed to expose the face of white privilege and inequality right here in Maine. The task before me was daunting and finally I was ready to turn in my robe and scepter and admit my shortcomings on changing the lens of racial, ethnic, gender, religious, sexual, and physical equality of every living human being and other systemic spiritual, political, and moral vices. As our good cartoon character, Ziggy, says, “I stepped back to try and see the big picture…and tripped over the frame.”

So I exchanged my royal apparel and staff for simplicity and the spirit of alliance. I began to see the character of strength and strength of character in those concentric ripples towards change, which is the vision of the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute. My voice carries to another, which carries to another, which carries to another and so on. Public speaking is not my forte. Regularly leading workshops isn’t either. But what I can do and am doing is speak up when the opportunity presents itself with more confidence and passion than ever before. And I can do it one person at a time. This is the mission of UMDLI; an approach when closely examined makes perfect sense. Each one of us ready to teach, guide, intervene when in the past we merely shook our heads and moved on.

What do I know so far? I have come to know that:

my voice, anyone’s voice, no matter how soft, can contribute and strengthen the cause of diversity.

…my voice has a ripple effect, touching lives of those I will never know. “If you can’t make waves, make ripples.” (as quoted by Barb Blazej)

…I have not and possibly never will see the bottom of my invisible knapsack, but that, nevertheless, I must continue to unpack the truth.

…as I talk about diversity I will at times blunder, stumble and even fall short in my success; but I have allies and resources that will bring me back and make me stronger.

…my white privilege robs me of true sensitivity, of connection to others, and of being ethically and spiritually responsible.

…the answer lies within us and that is where the initial work needs to be focused.

…the seeds of discrimination are deeply planted so the work for change can never stop.

…collective experience is precious and soul-building.
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead

anger can be directed into collaborative, ethical responsibility.

“The power of resistance is to set an example: not necessarily to change the person with whom you disagree, but to empower the one who is watching and whose growth is not yet complete, whose path is not all clear, whose direction is still very much up in the proverbial air.” Tim Wise

as a person with white skin, guilt is counter-productive. What matters is what we do with our white privilege.

complicity breeds ignorance. If we don’t have the dialogue, we collude.

in seven world religions – Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism – there is a Golden Rule. (Barb Blazej & Phyl Brazee)

“Every system is exquisitely designed to produce the results it gets. To change the results you have to change the system.” (Frances Kendall)

we can change how things happen – one person at a time – without even realizing what the outcome could be. (Allan Johnson)

”whatever you do, learn to be hopeful.” (Sulak Sivaraksa)

This is what I know after one year with UMDLI. It is called “exponential growth.”
UMDLI Reflection
Catherine Johnson

I heard Maya Angelou read this poem and it moved me...a sense of pride in one's color and gifts...

AND STILL I RISE
By: Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.