UMDLI

University of Maine
Diversity Leadership Institute

Opening Doors, Minds, and Hearts

Diversity Reflections

2006
Reflections 2006 by Jose L. Cordero III

A year has passed. I have matured. The world has turned and progress has been made. As I reflect on the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute experience, I cannot help but to think of it as a complicated task. There are so many variables in my life that have been enhanced as a direct result of my involvement in UMDLI. My employment, my home, my friends all now reflect a purpose that is the celebration of difference and the erasing of my fear of the unknown.

As I began this journey I told myself I didn’t need to do it. I wasn’t required to participate, and I just plain didn’t have the time. I have never forgotten that I was scared. Why? Because this institute embodied leadership among people who not only valued diversity but were experts in the field. Mind you, these were my thoughts then. I value diversity now as I always have. I was most definitely not an expert in anything diversity related and was not capable of voicing my reasoning for why I thought the way I did regarding diversity. UMDLI has changed the ways in which I actively support diversity.

One of the greatest fears I encountered in my time with UMDLI was the well-intentioned question and occasional statement that I knew I would have to defend with equally thoughtful responses. I had seen statements like, “I’m not a racist” and “I appreciate everyone regardless of color” as bullets that I needed protection from. How would I respond and not offend people or kill my own reputation? What I have come to realize now, and because of UMDLI, that I was unwilling to give up my privilege and power.

Now I see these statements as food for my mind. They are fuel for the fire that burns inside me. I have been ignited by the countless conversations, deep relationships, and thought provoking experiences that shape the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute. My white privilege has become fuel as well. It is an inexhaustible resource that I now use to have conversations with complete strangers, to build relationships with people whom I had distrust for, and to effect change in the system that oppresses all of us.

I have grown to appreciate the real and urgent need for this work among people at the University of Maine. My own awareness has given way to the need for campus awareness. I have only just begun to have conversations with colleges, departments, and classes on the topic of White Privilege. Common phrases I have heard are, “we don’t see color” or “there is plenty of diversity here” and “why are we focusing so much on racism when there are no racial problems in Maine?” There is so much lack of awareness and unrecognized white privilege that problems are being overlooked and/or simply ignored. Because of UMDLI, I now see solutions to the challenges that Maine has in recruitment and retention of students, faculty, and staff of color at UMaine. We must educate the fish about the water they are swimming in. We must give up our own power and privileges to bring education and awareness to those in power.

Let the graduating class be considered among people who will educate this university on how to practice what it preaches. You can say you’re committed to diversity, and say you support difference. You can say many things as we have done in
UMDLI. That’s not where diversity work ends. That’s where it begins. At UMaine, we’ve only just begun to talk. We have so much work left to do.

**Reflections 2006 by Chris Finemore**

Why me? I do not speak their language. I do not understand their culture. I am not the same color. These were the first thoughts that came into my head when asked to work with migrant farm workers and their families several years ago. At the time I did not realize why I was having those thoughts. Over the past year my personal growth and understanding of diversity issues have helped me understand why I was having those thoughts.

I was not prepared to work with this population. Not only was I not prepared to work with this population but Cooperative Extension was not fully prepared to support me in my work with them. There was no support system then nor is there one now. I realize through my educational journey over the past year that support and racial understanding is essential to offering quality programming to immigrants and migrant farm workers.

Who are we to impress our “white” values on other races? The information and materials that I use to educate my clients and youth did not seem right for this population. We need to learn and fully understand their needs before we can begin our programming efforts with them. The lessons important to my local clients very likely are not what I should be teaching my clients of color.

With more and more immigrants moving into Maine the need to understand their cultures and how we can support them is essential. Cooperative Extension is in the forefront of community education. Educating ourselves on issues of diversity should be a priority for all staff. With that in mind I would like to see a yearly training on working with diverse populations and a support system set up for staff who are working with them. I feel that all of the staff could benefit from much of the educational information and opportunities that I have participated in this year.

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in UMDLI over the past year and I am truly looking forward to another moving and educational year. This has been truly an incredible experience!

**Reflections 2006 by Tammy Light**

My experience with the UMDLI started last May on a beautiful warm evening in the state of Maine and even more beautiful to me, I was at the University of Maine. I gathered with other university colleagues for dinner and drink to celebrate diversity. I was being inducted into to the UMDLI group. It’s meaning to me was still vague and it would be a short time before I was to begin to understand what my contribution would be to this newly developed group.
I’ve always had a kind heart and have always had a sense of fairness and justice and I thought that would be enough for me to make a difference. I listened to the current members reflect, as their words reverberated the room, the feeling was overwhelming, the passion and conviction in their voices was powerful. I wondered if I had enough emotion to invest in this group. I was nervous yet excited about the year to come.

The learning actually started the next day. Some members of the group were bothered by some of the comments made the previous evening by an administrator. What were they talking about? I thought it was a wonderful evening? It was then I realized that what some members heard as disrespect for a famous black leader I heard as praise. How could that be? We heard the same speech, and in my case from the same table. Here on my first full day of the UMDLI we were meeting to discuss these feelings and perceptions with people I barely knew. The point wasn’t what was “right or wrong”; it was how the words were perceived. We came into that dinner with very different backgrounds and experiences and because of that, we left with very different feelings about the evening.

The next experience came about 3 weeks later when the six new members of the group met in New York City to attend NCORE. Some of us knew each other but for the most part we were strangers, ready to bond as a new group. We were excited to be in the Big Apple so shortly after we got settled, we set out to explore the city together. We did all of the expected tourist activities and at least some part of the group ate every meal together. We walked down 5th Avenue and took pictures, visited the Donald at Trump Towers and were in awe of what the city had to offer. We also were quick to hit Broadway and pick up tickets for a show for later in the week.

The first day of NCORE we started our day and a half Pre-conference Workshops. Mine was on White Privilege. This is the moment my learning started. The emotions stirred the guilt was there, the “wanting to save the world” attitude became fierce. I once had a Graduate Advisor that had the belief that as long as you were comfortable you were not able to learn to your fullest. He would say “Create Cognitive Dissonance”; I now know exactly what he was talking about. I should drop him a line and state that “I finally got it!” We should be uncomfortable, people who are advantaged by any privilege don’t see the things we take for granted until you choose to peel the layers of the onion back and that’s when the AH HA moment occurs. I was able to take off my rose-colored glasses and look at life through a new lens. All of a sudden 5th Avenue didn’t have the same glamour as it did on day 1. In fact was a bit grotesque.

What have I learned during my first year being a part of UMDLI? I’ve learned:

- That the more you understand, the more complex things become;
- That 3 people can be in the same room and see, hear and perceive things in a markedly different way and they are all correct;
- That perception is reality;
That privilege can be used to accomplish good;

That the more work you do in diversity the more you challenge what you heard and saw as a child;

That a few good, dedicated people can make a difference;

That when you share beliefs, you connect and respect people deeply;

That you cannot learn and be comfortable at the same time;

That it takes more than being a nice person to create fairness and justice;

That I am committed to this cause and I know I can be an ally and I know that I have allies;

That understanding is key;

That listening skills can be the most important tool you can use;

And for those who have listened to my journey along the way, I have learned that no one needs a $30,000 giraffe from FAO Swartz!

**Reflections 2006 by Carl G. Mitchell**

As I reflect on the past year I have been both rewarded and frustrated as a member of the university of Maine diversity leadership institute.

The reward is to be a part of a group of individuals who are genuinely concerned and committed to the inclusion of diversity within the university community. I was filled with encouragement for the future with my experiences at NCORE. I thought to myself, “eyes that want to see and ears that want to hear” as this conference was embraced by the university leadership.

I am frustrated because I wonder why there is even a need for the university of Maine diversity leadership institute. With the brightest, educated minds in the state located within this community it just doesn’t make sense the university of Maine would need to ask for individuals to advocate equality among and for other humans beings.

The university needs to develop a strategic diversity management program to utilize talents and viewpoints of the entire workforce for innovation, and competitive advantage. Diversity can lead to good working relationships in an inclusive workplace environment to opportunities to learn, grow and contribute. The university leadership can be instrumental in bringing forth this level of sophistication in diversity management. The leadership must provide a path that promotes strategies and programs toward effective workplace diversity. These practices must foster the goal of long-term culture
change, valuing diversity as a business strategy, emphasizing mutual respect, cooperation and mutual inclusion, and encourage empowerment and innovation.

I live with the hope that people will understand and demand diversity in its broadest sense to be a part of the university culture. Diversity needs to be pervasive within the university and not evasive. Diversity has to be a core value and a key resource. There is an educational and societal value to diversity. We need to use our gift of communication so eyes that want to see and ears that want to hear can experience the richness of diversity.

Reflections 2006 by William C. Murphy

Webster’s Dictionary defines classism as “prejudice or discrimination based on class.” Unfortunately, for a nation that espouses democracy, equality and the virtues of a classless society, classism has existed throughout U.S. history, and has intensified greatly in recent years. For example, the decreased empowerment of the working class is both a symptom and a result of classism in America. Interwoven within this classism is the discrimination that occurs against women and people of color. The following interrelated conditions reflect some of the outcomes of this discrimination and classism in the U.S.:

1. Each year, increased numbers of women, children, and people of color are living in poverty.

2. All too often, elected officials on the state and federal levels of government fail to enact adequate and consistent increases in the minimum wage. As a result, the majority of workers receiving this level of pay, working adults who are women and people of color, are unable to earn a “living wage” sufficient to support themselves and their families.

3. Deliberate violations of the National Labor Relations Act by large numbers of employers, has served to undermine the attempts of workers to exercise their right to unionize in order to improve their lives, and those of their families.

4. With the steady decline in the level of unionization in the private sector, millions of workers have lost the right and opportunity to improve their wages, hours, and working conditions on the job, through the bilateral decision making process involving collective bargaining.

5. Based on the previously cited realities, there is a steady increase in the number of workers classified as “working poor,” because their jobs do not provide sufficient wages to lift them above the poverty level.

While these problems and conditions are national in scope, much can be done to address and study the issues of classism through institutions of higher education, where this prejudice also clearly exists. One only has to look at this campus to find classism. For example, a university employee’s compensation, benefits, privileges, status, and opportunities, are determined largely by whether that individual is a member of the
administration, faculty, professional, or classified staff. Furthermore, while classism is acknowledged, all too often it is ignored because of the fundamental questions it raises regarding human equality versus privilege, status, and power. And yet these issues need to be confronted. Through future diversity forums, the UMDLI can play an important and constructive role in addressing the issues and problems of classism on all levels, as well as discussing strategies for abating it. While this is a very challenging task, what better group to begin this important process than the UMDLI!

Reflections 2006 by Susan Russell

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to participate in the UMDLI this year. It has been another exciting year and I have enjoyed our monthly meetings as well as the other opportunities that have been available to us.

As I reflect on the UMDLI and diversity at the University of Maine, I am struck by the richness of our campus diversity. So often, we hear about the lack of diversity at UMaine rather than opening our eyes to the understanding that diversity is not only about race. Issues of diversity include race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, privilege, sexuality and religion. During this academic year, we have had the opportunity to have meaningful discussions and learn more about many of these diversity issues. We still have a great deal to talk and learn about but at least in many cases the difficult conversations have started. As one of next year’s active alums, I will work with the planning committee to schedule a session looking at disability as diversity. Disability is often forgotten in discussions of diversity.

All of the UMDLI sessions have been important, meaningful, and very relevant to our diversity work at UMaine. I am amazed by the campus resources and expertise available to the UMDLI and the campus community by our colleagues. I have been on this campus for 18 years. I have been introduced to many, served on committees with some, been in classes with a few, and worked directly with others. However, it is only through the UMDLI that I have been able to have time to talk with and learn about their passion, their history, and their culture while at the same time have very candid and difficult conversations about the issues.

I really enjoyed the March 24 session on “Leadership in Dealing With Difficult Multicultural Discussion” facilitated by Karen Pace and Dionardo Pizana from Michigan State University. The facilitators provided us with wonderful information and tools to deal with difficult discussions. I was intrigued about the Authentic Relationship Model they are developing. This model looks at diversity through three different lenses: self, authentic relationships across differences, and authentic relationships within our privilege group. For me, this model validates the importance of personal healing, personal growth, and recognition of privilege to bring about positive change for social justice. This piece often gets forgotten and is seen as unimportant in diversity work. I don’t have to tell you that diversity work is hard work. Diversity work has to be about more than having a committee or a group or a token representative. We need to include rather than exclude, accept and understand rather than deny or attempt to change or fix, and most importantly we need to have the difficult conversations.
I am looking forward to attending the NCORE conference again this year. I had the opportunity to attend my first NCORE conference two years ago when I joined the UMDLI. This conference was life changing. Now that I have two years of UMDLI participation, I am anxious and excited to attend again.

**Reflections 2006 by Francine Sulinski**

I am privileged. Not only am I much more aware of my privileges as a white, able-bodied professional person, I realize my privilege as a “ground floor” member, planning committee member and partner with the Division of Lifelong Learning to bring Cooperative Extension support to this innovative grassroots diversity effort.

In UMDLI I learned valuable lessons about the challenge of being an ally, especially when reflecting on the occasions when I had missed a critical opportunity to live out that role. To quote Adrea Ayvazian (a source brought to the Institute by Elizabeth Allen, Suzanne Estler and Dianne Hoff); “An ally is a member of a dominant group in our society who works to dismantle any form of oppression from which she or he receives the benefit. Ally behavior means taking personal responsibility for the changes we know are needed in our society and so often leave to others to deal with.” I realized that I sometimes analyzed the need and weighed the possible ramifications of the ally role to the point that I rationalized doing nothing.

To be an effective ally one must operate on the principle that it doesn’t matter if you believe a member of a target group is being oppressed. Being an ally means supporting that person or group due to the impact upon them. We don’t need to know the intention of the action, nor could the intention ever really be known. We only need to know the effect on the individual or group and to be attuned to the potential effect. This is the understanding an ally needs and the level of commitment an ally must make. Ally behavior also means, not leaving the work to someone else who is charged with the ally role. Real change will occur when more and more non-target group members learn and adopt the ally role.

Through my participation in UMDLI I also feel privileged to be more frustrated, impatient and at times downright angry about the status quo in society and at the University. Around this topic the feeling that we are doing what we need to do or are doing enough given the budget and other demands will kill the progress that needs to be made. Many years ago I was told that organizations and individuals state their mission and priorities but you have to go to their calendar of activities to know what their true priorities are. What does your calendar tell us about your priorities? I can tell you that for the last two years I was privileged to have the participation in UMDLI and Cooperative Extension’s Diversity Group in my calendar and will continue to have those commitments in to the future. I have already grown greatly from having made this commitment and I challenge others of you to determine what can be put in your calendar to reflect that this work has a priority for you.
I want to thank DLL, EO and Extension, and anyone else who has supported the Institute to build and strengthen ally behavior and diversity education at UM.

And thank you for supporting me to do this work.

**Reflections 2006 by Cindy Thomas**

June 2006 will mark my second year as an active member of the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute. Whether I was ready for it or not, what I experienced with UMDLI propelled me into a myriad of emotions and awarenesses. I felt I knew the meaning of diversity, the steps necessary to combat the insidiousness of stereotypes and profiling, and considered myself a great listener to the crescendoing voices from those outside of my white privilege And it was that very thing - white privilege - that allowed me to think that way. UMDLI was responsible for manifesting my growth with a greater consciousness of my undeserved personal and societal domination, yet instilled hope for redirection and unprecedented change.

As a group gathered together in a common mission, we, the UMDLI members, came to know one another and created an atmosphere of challenge, support, and trust. We each grew at our own pace and witnessed individual transformation. Through watching films, engaging in discussions, and learning from expert facilitators, I adopted a greater perspective on the work that has been done in diversity and how far we need to go.

One of UMDLI’s missions is to acquire the tools to educate and redirect those who wear biases. Yet, caution shows us that if we fall into the self-defined white norms of superiority, our efforts exhibit pride and arrogance. It is a fine line, this division of teaching and condescending behaviors that white privilege has created. And it accompanies us daily in our perpetual unawareness. Frances Kendall said that “Because we are the systemic power holders in the U.S., we are able to frame everything (behaviors, history, news, international analysis, and so on) from our perspective. In so doing, we keep ourselves central so that we are able to avoid any other perspective.” What UMDLI has done is to demystify and expose this white privilege for the growth blocker that it is, and to work, in our new awareness, to relinquish the self-induced advantage and meet others on an equal playing field.

Diversity opens our doors on a daily basis whether we acknowledge it or not. In our learned white immunity, we have forgotten and desensitized ourselves to the unparalleled importance of community and equality. With the help of Tim Wise, Frances Kendall, and many others who do the work, we are recognizing that bridge building creates unity. Each year, UMDLI presents new faces, new opportunities to move beyond the previous year’s progress, and add to the stronghold of transformation.

Our new role is that of “change agents.” We credit our personal changes to having the “difficult” conversations and now are more equipped to dare to make challenges for the sake of progress. By confronting and educating biases, we dispel the myths and teachings that we, ourselves, experienced through years of conditioning.
Perpetual floundering in lies is changing, albeit one person at a time. UMDLI brought me there.

**Reflections 2006 by Frank S. Wertheim**

Issues of multiculturalism have always been important to me. As a child my parents were wonderful role models on issues of social justice and equal rights. Also growing up in a Jewish family I experienced being part of a target group that sensitized me to the plights of other isms in the world. Being a member of UMDLI this past year has been a powerful experience that I treasure dearly as I have been able to expand on my life long learning in living in a diverse world and the impacts of our societal actions on people in all walks of life.

I am so grateful for the experience in UMDLI of being part of this amazing group of people and for the collective impact they have made in my life. UMDLI monthly sessions allow me the luxury of slowing my life down for a few hours and be in relationship with a committed group of people who make themselves vulnerable to issues of diversity that impact us all. The connections I have made and the learning and growth I have experienced will be with me forever. I consider my fellow UMDLI associates brothers and sisters in a journey for what is right, for what is necessary, and for what we as a society must be about in the world.

The mission of UMDLI with its emphasis on “doing diversity” from the bottom up has been such a powerful and refreshing model of work. The idea of coming into a group for my own learning, without preconceived notions of what we or I must accomplish has been both inspiring and motivating. This approach of “diversity from the bottom up” has lead to both expected and unexpected outcomes. What I had expected to do and have done in conjunction with my fellow UMDLI and Extension colleagues is revive the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Diversity team and educational outreach for the department’s 300 employees.

An unexpected outcome has been my initiating a quarterly civil rights staff meeting for the 10 employees of the York County office of University of Maine Cooperative Extension. We have been meeting to discuss how our programs can reach a more diverse clientele in York County and challenging each other to move forward with these efforts. Our county group has also focused on a topic of learning for each meeting with activities such as watching a video such as “Understanding Race” or having my staff colleague Aileen Fortune lead us in a discussion of gender. Our entire staff has become engaged in these discussions and is coming up with great ideas for future shared learning opportunities and inviting in guest speakers.

Being a member of UMDLI has also helped me bring multicultural issues and speaking up in difficult situations and conversations to the forefront. I am less likely to remain silent and thus a collaborator in issues that oppress others and more likely to speak out – hopefully in ways that engage people and get us thinking and discussing issues and not isolating each other.
I am so thankful that the University of Maine has created UMDLI and that I have had the privilege of being a part of it.

**Reflections 2006 by Mary Beth Willett**

This journey began long before I consciously became aware of it. Sociology class was my first recollection of learning about the social structure and how it impacts different classes of people. Taking courses for my masters was the beginning of when I had to think about it more critically. Learning about the different identity developmental theories of students in college as well as the idea of white privilege. Never before had I even thought about the privileges I was given because I was born white. In contrast, how those privileges had become a way to oppress others without me knowing or even having to think of how that might occur. But since it does happen, I wanted to learn more.

I became fascinated with learning about white privilege. Reading Allan Johnson’s book and hearing him speak helped me to further understand the many forms that power takes such as social class, money, gender and color of skin all contribute to the society in which we live and as a result is split into the haves and have nots. Listening to Tim Wise’s lecture I found myself on the road less traveled. It felt as though he was taking me deeper into this world of white privilege of which I had not understood at all. The history as I knew it was crumbling. Reading his book, “white like me,” continually felt like it was breaking me open. Open to new thoughts, new ideas and new ways to think about issues that are basically not discussed. I wondered why there has been no discussion in the circles I traveled….and found it is because we have white privilege and part of that privilege allows us to NOT think about or talk about these difficult issues.

Attending the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in New York was another moving experience. I had the opportunity to hear many speakers and learn so much it really was sad and painful. It is like grieving the loss of loved one and finding out they weren’t who you thought they were. My whiteness made me feel alone and scared, sad and somewhat isolated. All those things that oppressed people feel all the time! This had a profound impact on me, in that I realized there was much work to be done and that I had a responsibility to do this work. You cannot do anything about what you do not know. In some ways it is freeing to know I have a responsibility to do this work. My goal is to create purposeful opportunities for dialogue and understanding around issues of white privilege.

Coming back from the conference I made the commitment to take responsibility for breaking the patterns of oppression. Attending the UMDLI sessions have played an enormous part in helping with this. In addition, I decided to do an independent study on diversity for my masters and created a plan that included contributing to the university in as many ways that I can during this two-year experience Which included a video showing for faculty and staff, residence life training, a panel discussion about UMDLI and NCORE for HED561, I encouraged everyone to attend, “sweet honey in the rock” and attended, “spinning into butter” and had a discussion with the actors after the show. Given my hectic schedule I was unable to take part in other activities on campus to show
support of different cultures and races. It makes me happy to know that there is more for me to take part in, on this campus, in the future.

I am honored to be a part of UMDLI. This is an extremely important group of people that come together to discuss these important issues, to think about them and work through them and to make this a better university, a better community and a better world.

I look forward to spending next year with the new group and going to the conference in Chicago!

Reflections 2006 by Devon Storman

The University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute (UMDLI) is completing its second year. As an active ALUM of the UMDLI and the Institute’s Coordinator I am very pleased with what I am seeing. As with any new initiative there are the “best laid plans” and the hopes and wishes that the new venture will prove successful. There are numerous ways to measure success—some structured, some not so structured. Formal assessment tools can and will be used to substantiate the UMDLI’s existence. My reflection deals more with the day-to-day evidence—people’s stories/my stories.

Story – Jose Cordero and Barbara Smith (Planning Committee member) sought volunteers from the UMDLI to facilitate RA/RD diversity training sessions focusing on the film, Race and Culture. MaryBeth Willett and Devon Storman answered their need and were rewarded with the opportunity to step outside their workspace and into the student auxiliary services arena—a wonderful example of how the UMDLI breaks down the barriers and develops relationships outside the norm. My personal experience was refreshing in that I learned there are many “traditional-age” college students who are very interested in race, culture, and privilege issues. The group I facilitated was excited about the possibilities of bringing diversity work to their RA/RD positions and making a difference in their worlds.

Story – UMDLI members Carl Mitchell, MaryBeth Willett, Susan Russell, Tammy Light, Jose Cordero, and Devon Storman, and Jerry Ellis and Susan Nichols from the planning committee attended the Penobscot Theatre production of Spinning into Butter. The play portrayed the struggles of staff and faculty at a primarily white campus around diversity issues. The evening culminated with an opportunity for attendees to talk with the cast members and the contributions of UMDLI members brought UMaine’s diversity interests to the broader community. We also heard from cast members currently living in urban areas who shared their perceptions and experiences with us.
Story – The member recruitment process both last year and this year was a reinforcement of the need and value of the UMDLI. Both years we had over two dozen people attend the information sessions and our applicant number exceeded the available slots. Institute members and planning committee members comprised the selection and review committee. The interview process was an incredible experience for reviewers and applicants. We found ourselves making connections we might never have had without such a broad-based recruitment effort. When this happens stereotypes begin to falter and fall. My own experience with this was an amazement that applicants from Athletics were offering to help us with diversity. Well, of course! Why was I thinking they could use our help? It will be great to begin sharing our experience and expertise with each other with two new members from Athletics.

Story – Jose Cordero, MaryBeth Willett and I had the awesome opportunity to host two members of Sweet Honey in the Rock for lunch the day of their performance at UMaine. Jose took a chance and placed a call prior to their visit inviting them to lunch. We met them at the airport hotel restaurant and during lunch we were told that they rarely see anyone other than the stage crew when they visit college campuses. They were very happy that we were interested enough in them personally to want to meet them. They invited us backstage after their performance and thanked us from the stage that evening. What an honor to share some informal time with these incredible women! I think we brought honor to the University of Maine by showing these African-American women that we cared.

Story – Validation—what an important thing! Karen Pace and Dionardo Pizana from the University of Michigan Extension facilitated the March session of the UMDLI. Fran Sulinski and Susan Russell had attended their NCORE session on difficult multicultural discussions in June of 2004. Fran recommended bringing them to UMaine to work with Maine’s Cooperative Extension people and to work with the UMDLI. I learned a lot from them. Their “Approaches to Positive Confrontation” were the most in depth that I have seen. The approaches ranged from “Being aware of yourself...” to remembering “that silence is consent...” These seasoned professionals validated our work and our Institute by saying that they were impressed to find a model for diversity change that was working on ourselves as white people. Although we do have some racial diversity in our Institute, it was reassuring to hear from them that excellent work can be done by white people who care enough to look inward to understand their own development and how they can be their own best change agents.

Further reflection...These stories help to show that the structure and the commitment and energy of the Institute has helped to meet the original goals of the UMDLI: 1) creating a grassroots, bottom-up approach to diversity efforts; 2) developing a well-connected support system of trained role models, staff development trainers, speakers, mentors, ambassadors, and diversity planners and consultants for the campus and the greater community that is growing in number each year (grown to 20
individuals); 3) providing collaborative opportunities for diversity work that provide accountability, assessment opportunities, and structure to the work; and, 4) presenting opportunities to identify, recognize, and honor those individuals, units and organizations that are committed to diversity work.

Beyond the structured goals, I have grown both personally and professionally. The immersion into diversity work through the structure of the Institute has given me the time, the confidence and the desire to develop my understanding of myself and the social and power structures that surround me. Owning who I am and living my life with a purpose provides opportunities that would not exist without my UMDLI colleagues, their experiences, values, and views.