Some preamble:
I decided to join UMDLI in my third year as English department chair, after it had been running for two years. I have to admit that at first I had held off because I had watched so many different attempts to bring the University to engage diversity end in frustration, conflict, or just a brief and brilliant flash of good work. When I finally paid attention and discovered that what it was about was creating a grassroots cadre of people committing to their own development, and that the funding wasn’t drying up, I realized this was not just window dressing, but a real opportunity to engage in work that had a future.

For two decades I have been teaching people to read across cultural lines. So much of the work in my classes has to do with letting white people discover they are cultural beings, in order to help them look at the literatures of others with awareness that they are bringing their own cultural values, prejudices, and filters to the reading. We also do a lot of conversation on confronting the emotional stages of loss white Americans experience upon encountering the versions of America expressed in the drama, poetry, fiction and nonfiction narratives of people who have suffered oppression in North America. Usually I have done this by the seat of my pants, by a bricoleur’s approach and a combination of instinct and experience and what I’ve been able to borrow from wise teachers along the way. But my participation in UMDLI has already provided me opportunities for gathering resources, improving my skills, and focusing my efforts.

Getting into it:
Going to NCORE in Chicago last May—especially attending the pre-conference institutes—put me in touch with a lot of tools and processing exercises for dealing with white privilege and racism, and with a number of people who have been working in exactly this area for years. Their generosity impressed me immensely, and I came home thinking of how I could begin to integrate this material into existing courses. Devon even let me try out some of the workshop exercises with my fellow UMDLIers—I was so grateful for people’s willingness to experiment and to do some scary emotional work together—your support is wonderful, everyone!

I love going to UMDLI meetings! What a luxury, to be able to spend a four-hour block each month with people engaging in work for an end to racism—and this goes on for two years! Next year I’ll really miss meeting with Jose & Marybeth (such troublemakers), and Frank and Chris and Carl—but we know where to find you, and it will be great to know you’re carrying on a commitment to this work. I’m eager to get to know the new members who are coming into the work—it’s
a great thing to know there are more people each year willing to take an oar and row.

It’s already apparent to me that I am going to get out of UMDLI what I put into it, and from the beginning I’ve been thinking about what it will mean next year to be an “active alumna” of the process. Last fall I brought some of the exercises on identifying white privilege and eliminating racism to students in the Innovation course I was teaching, and they begged to be able to take a whole semester course on the material so they could be trained as trainers for their peers or for their future K-12 students. I couldn’t fit this teaching into my life as chair of my department, but this is one of the teaching directions I intend to pursue as I leave the chair’s office and go towards active alumhood.

One of the best things about UMDLI is that it provides a safe and constructive zone for experience and expression; ordinarily the University is a place where one has to defend one’s intellectual work, and as healthy as this may be, we do not have much room for doing the emotional and personal work necessary for becoming agents of change. I give so much credit to Bob White for his visionary commitment and to Devon Storman for her wisdom and infinite patience; they are both leading this process in the ways it needs to be led.

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Chris Finemore

UMDLI
You’ve planted the seeds
And watered with care,
Weeded as needed
Helping us do our share.
Our members have bloomed
With a passion that is rare,
You’ve nurtured us all
With your warm tender care.

As I prepare to bid farewell to this chapter of my life I am saddened to think that I will not be seeing and learning from my UMDLI family on a monthly basis. This has been the most incredible journey of my life. I have grown from a meek and timid introvert to a confident and independent person. I feel I have the tools, education, and support network necessary to confront issues of diversity head on. I am prepared to leap when necessary knowing that if I do fall I have the power and support to get back up and keep going. I am prepared to educate others on issues of diversity and will strive to make a difference in others lives for the positive through education.
So with my rose colored glasses OFF, my mind soaked with knowledge and a heart full of friends I start a new chapter in my life. As an Alum and Ally I am looking forward to this new journey and the opportunity to educate others on issues of Diversity.

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Frank Wertheim

As I look back on my two year experience with UMDLI it has been a wonderful journey of deepening my understanding of the myriad of injustices that permeate our society and world. Wonderful because I was able to take this journey with a group that has felt like brothers and sisters, and with whom I know we struggle and will continue to do so to make small yet persistent chips in the walls of injustices – and that ultimately they will crumble. They may not come crashing down, or crumble all at once, but doing this work has made me believe that each of us can and do make a difference.

I have learned a lot from my two years with UMDLI – learned from fellow UMDLI-ers whom I see as wonderful mentors and a support system – to have patience when facing difficult issues – not to just rush to judgment (though this remains a personal challenge) but to sit with an issue for a bit – let the anger pass and try to put myself in someone else’ shoes. For whom am I but a person with his own biases and “isms” – I may feel enlightened in many ways by my life long journey with issues of social injustice – yet I know we all have our own prejudices and capacity for hatred.

From Karen and Dionardo I learned we are better off embracing the “ism perpetrators”, for only then can we engage them in a meaningful discussion that may help people open up to a different perspective or understanding – and ultimately lead to a change of behavior. From Phyl Brazee and Barbara Blazaj I learned so much of the power of forgiveness. Watching pieces of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee hearing and stories behind them I realize that the only way to reach people embroiled in hatred is to understand the circumstances which has brought them to where they can act in such ways, and that the only way to reach their inner humanity is for us to embrace their humanity – for then we can all see the simple essence of life and culture on this planet – we are but mere humans.

I have been inspired by UMDLI alums – and watched our numbers and our power grow. I hope that I will strive to become such an alum – staying to connected to this work and to our network of brothers and sisters – and continue to participate in the institute as many of them have – dropping in on meetings if
they are drawn to – leading sessions – and continuing to inspire us by example and ongoing learning. I embrace this transition to alum as I see a new group of shining faces come forward to form the UMDLI core group for 2007–08, as I know they will join us, make our numbers higher and our power stronger.

I want to thank the University of Maine Cooperative Extension for seeing the importance of this work – allowing me the time and travel to be a part of UMDLI. I am proud to work for an organization that values this work, continues to support employees to join UMDLI, and dedicates funds in times of financial difficulty. Lastly I want to thank Devon Storman for her unwavering dedication to UMDLI and her deep compassion and thoughtful introspection that has been a source of inspiration to me. Thanks Devon for being a great teacher and mentor.

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Tammy Light

I want to thank you for another outstanding year as a member of the UMDLI. It’s difficult to use words to describe how important this group has become to me. I’ve been fortunate to attend monthly meetings over the past two years and I have made lifelong friendships and allies with people I may not have had the opportunity ever to know.

I have made a lifetime commitment to diversity commencing with my first trip to NCORE in May of 2005. I see and question the world in a very different way and I notice both subtle and blatant biases in others, as well as my own. I was raised in an environment that did not appreciate the beauty of diversity and the “deprogramming” of such biases has taken some time and effort and at times relationships have been strained because of my newly found appreciation of diversity. Even through the adversity, it is well worth the journey.

My dream is to be part of a world that differences do not promote hate and racism. As tragic events in the world unroll such as 9/11 or the shootings at Virginia Tech, people try to make sense out of a situation that has no plausible explanation. History has shown us that ethnic profiling often occurs after such events, even if the perpetrator is unknown.

I have been given an incredible opportunity to educate myself through my interaction with the UMDLI and its members. Although I’m moving into Alumnae status I will continue my personal voyage and share my experiences and have open dialogs with other members of the UM community and beyond. My rose colored glasses have been discarded and never will I be blind to injustices. I am committed to offer my hand and assist, in whatever way possible, to anyone discriminated against. I will no longer be a silent bystander in a world of
offensive comments, or jokes, that use peoples culture or race, for the purpose of entertainment. I vow to use my privileges in a positive manner and will not tolerate “isms” in any environment under my control, especially in my work environment.

I want to thank you Bob White for his leadership in starting this fine Institute. He is wise beyond his years and he has made diversity on this campus a priority and he has made a difference.

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Mary Beth Willett

It is with bittersweet emotions that I write this reflection on my experiences over the past two years with the UMaine Diversity Leadership Institute. It feels as though the two years have passed too quickly! I have so much more to learn and experience and share!

But, there does come a point in every journey that one needs to move on and take the leap of faith and know that all that I have learned throughout the process will serve me well; that I will continue to learn and grow because I have met so many wonderful people along the way to help me!

I started out being ashamed, guilty and hurt by all that I learned about white privilege. I have gained a sense of accomplishment knowing that those emotions were necessary in order to get clear about the role that I play in contributing to a system that is “exquisitely designed to get the results that it intends”. Understanding this role helps to gain perspective regarding all “systems” of oppression. I cannot change what I do not understand. Attending the UMDLI sessions and the NCORE conferences has done so much to help me to understand the amount of change necessary in order for UMaine to be effective in its strategic plan regarding diversity. This change requires many different voices in many different areas in the institution.

I have always said that UMDLI is UMaine’s best-kept secret, even though it is no secret at all. UMDLI provides the opportunity of a small group of administrative staff and faculty to come together to create a community that is challenged and supported by active alumni. Allowing each member to discover, dissect, evaluate and process the difficult issues surrounding diversity and all the ism’s that hinder our development as a university and as a nation.

As an active alumnus, I now have the responsibility to seek out opportunities to use the knowledge I have learned through the UMDLI. It is a new phase of an ongoing experience. A natural transition whereby I can help to create a
Looking forward to the future of UMDLI; I hope that we will one day be presenting at the National conference on Race and Ethnicity our model of change at the grassroots level on which UMDLI was founded. As a group of alumni, we will also be afforded opportunities to affect committees and positions that enhance diversity. My hope is that by our example we can impact the upper administration to help gain support for a greater vision of diversity at an institutional level. With the education, leadership, resources and a shared value towards diversity, we will be able to create a university that truly embraces diversity and all that can be gained financially, academically and developmentally. A place where everyone who works, teaches and attends UMaine understands that diversity is a lived and shared value and extends into the surrounding communities in which we live!

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Marcia Joy Douglas

I just reread our “Ode to UMDLI “ and it made me smile and stop to think about our year together. I see so much of our different points of view there as well as the things that we share. Each of our sessions has moved me and surprised me in some way. Whether the surprise was created by someone simply sharing or by the content of the material presented, the cumulative effect has been profound. Most of my insights regarding privilege and diversity are personal ones that have occurred in secret. I do not find myself speaking all the things that cross my mind. The sessions we share have given me the opportunity to begin to open up those secrets and speak about them. The warmth, sincerity, and generosity of the group have enabled me to begin to trust regardless of the risk.

I find myself trying to avoid seeming stupid, callous, or hurtful to others. But when you begin to look at your white privilege you must suddenly see a side of yourself that you did not know or want to know about. You have to admit that you have been ignorant in thought and deed in your life and that hurts. You begin to question all your ideas about yourself. That is tough but wonderful if you can stand it. Learning to cut your self a little slack is a good thing but too much just lets you off the hook. Brutal honesty is what is needed right now.

I have become willing to say what is on my mind more of the time but I am still paranoid that I will make a mistake with how I say something or that if I say what occurs to me it will reveal more of my privilege and the blindness that goes with it. In our monthly sessions I see that many are much further along
the path than I am. It makes me listen and try to absorb the wisdom around me. I wonder if I will be able to know what to say when push comes to shove. My heart is open I just need to find my voice. It is OK to fail if in trying you learn to try again.

This reflection is about my personal journey into difficult territory. What I learn through this process I will be able to teach with my thought, behavior and speech in the treatment of those around me. It will be taken it into the classroom as well as the conference room and office. As I change myself I affect the state of diversity on this campus in tiny ways. As I continue in this pursuit my ability to affect bigger changes will also grow. Little changes add up to big ones over time. The sublimation of character is the duty that everyone owes himself. To promote love, compassion, service, the unity of all humankind, and world peace; this is the true and final goal of this work.

Here is my Ode to UMDLI.

ignorance talking & taking leads to anger of self confronting & strength, not respect
trust–steps sometimes means dignity just is, in acceptance
new vulnerabilities taking other ignorance down down down
together the fire–ideas that share
softness of mistakes & vulnerability appear inside–out outside–in Growth
Scarey reflections falling leaving others
Who–what unknown self is your shell?
really to want with play what each is, making love true
Don’t stop sharing dance is up give up
fly crazy make hope is we coming now and now know
laugh life a hurt fear dissolves
cry & change responsibility of info & grief into becoming bliss together
Bliss is
&
is It

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Nancy White

What an amazing journey this year with the UMDLI has been for me. I took a leap of faith when I sent off my letter of interest to Dean White. I had never been a joiner or a group oriented person, and working from a Cooperative Extension program based in Rockland I never really felt part of the wider University. With an increasingly diverse client caseload, an African–American son-in-law, and a bi-racial granddaughter, I did know the time had
come to stretch and open myself to this unique and challenging learning experience – so I jumped.

I found myself in Chicago at NCORE. I had no idea what I was getting into! Speaker Tim Wise told me I was WHITE with a capital W. The speakers that followed, as well as many participants, made me feel WHITE with a capital W, without telling me. What an amazing place to be! The energy was palpable, colorful and contagious! Words like racism, class, diversity, bias, prejudice, discrimination, social justice, racial justice, power, and privilege were defined and expounded upon. They swirled thru my head night and day. I observed, I listened, I spoke, I dialogued, and I was listened to. I was told I could never be a Sister but – I could be a friend. The week was so powerful I hated for it to end but the energy was so strong and the lessons learned so deep that I can still feel it resonate thru my being.

The UMDLI group has challenged me with ideas that were foreign to me. Who thinks about unpacking an invisible knapsack each day? I do now. Who thinks about when they are white? I do now. Who looks at the cost of white privilege? I do now. Who thinks about how best to become an ally to those you encounter each day. I do now. And the list goes on. I continue to learn from and with this thoughtful, respectful, courageous, and compassionate group. The hard work continues. I don’t always succeed but I have had my wake up call. I am trying to work from a place of hope and love.

When I was small and wanted something I was told “Just reach for the stars” and you will get it. What if all the WHITE people “just reach for the stars” and as we reach look back or down and take hold of another’s hand and raise that hand with ours? What a world we could have!

2007 UMDLI Reflection
Submitted by Devon Storman

I first met Frances Kendall in June of 1999, in a Conference Room of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. It was my first session of my first NCORE Conference and I was excited and frightened. I didn’t know what to expect and when I looked around at the other people in the large, very full session, it was clear that I, as a white person, was in the minority. That in itself was uncomfortable enough but the topic of the session was “White Privilege.” What to expect?

For a day and a–half, I listened to Frances Kendall talk about white privilege. It was a lot to absorb and understand. Although I don’t remember her exact words during those hours, I do know that she changed my life. I had dabbled in
privilege issues in my Women’s Studies classes so I had an introduction to the topic. I went from the 101 version to upper level understanding in two days. Since that time, I have read, discussed and thought privilege issues on a daily basis.

Kendall is a regular presenter at NCORE and I have sought her out every year that I have been fortunate enough to attend the Conference. Her message about white people doing their own personal work is a valuable one. To quote from her recent book, “...those of us who are white and, by definition, have white privilege must engage in sustained self-examination about how our race affects our lives.”

One thing I have learned from my own self-examination is that you cannot do other people’s work for them. I cannot convince a white friend, colleague or family member that they have unearned privilege and that unearned privilege is negatively impacting his or her life. Each person has to do his or her own work. What I can do is try to convince these individuals that there might be work to be done. If they turn out to be the least bit curious they can read Frances Kendall, Tim Wise, Brian McNaught, watch any of the numerous films on the topic, or talk with people known to be interested in privilege issues.

One of the things I like about the UMDLI is that the members, as individuals and collectively, look at issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, and societal issues in general at a personal and global level. We are training ourselves to be thinkers and change agents at the very level of our existences. When I say to you as the reader of this statement, “You need to understand who you are and how that reality not only impacts your life but the lives of others.”, I expect you to be curious, I wish that you will become curious enough to investigate, and I dream that you find a person inside of you who can stand up to oppression and say to your own friends, colleagues and family members, “You need to understand who you are and how that reality impacts your life and the lives of others.”

Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race, Frances E. Kendall, Routledge, New York, NY,
It is humbling, reflecting on my membership in the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute. Thinking back on the experience might be equated with explorers looking back over their shoulders upon their long trek across a vast expanse of wilderness and unknown…but now they see the path they have made. I too have made my own path. However, I will never go back the way I came. UMDLI has taught me all too well, that once you step on the path, it’s a life long journey forward that never will end. So, as I leave my active member status behind and look ahead into the void of all that is being an alumnus I will be ever watching to see who takes the path I have cut. Who will cut new paths that intersect with mine? Who will benefit from my learning and my mistakes?

When Devon organized UMDLI around the NCORE experience she knew what she was doing! Through those amazing conferences, I have made personal connections and built networks at home, at work, and beyond. I have met inspirational people who have authored numerous books, directed movies, and organized conferences and activists movements. It is with these people that my awe struck awareness began. Yet, what I have only come to realize recently, I have found those feelings, multiplied by ten, with the members of UMDLI. They constantly inspire me with the work they do every day. With the words they use. I am inspired with their actions and their relationships. I am honored to stand with them in this journey and look forward to what the future has in store for us.

As I look forward I am hopeful. The new membership is strong and willing to commit to there learning and changing. I am hopeful that their experiences will serve as a solid example of how the climate of this university needs to change. That administration, faculty, and students alike need to understand the need for change, commit to that change, and offer the human resources to facilitate that change. They should see UMDLI and its members as a resource to aid that process. UMDLI is a successful role model for change and people want to be a part of it. This is the beginning of great things to come. And I am honored to be a part of it!
On Being An Ally

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ Everyone needs an ally...maybe several.

  What is an ally?

Ally means different things for different people.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ I don’t really know how to be an ally.

  How does someone, anyone know how to be an ally?

Read, listen, watch, share, empathize, and take risks.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ Being an ally is really hard.

  What is it about being an ally that is difficult?

I could make mistakes.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ Privilege is a burden.

  How can being privileged be a burden?

Privilege creates walls and walls create hate and bigotry.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ I don’t know why I should take the risk.

  What is in it for me to be an ally?

Sharing of my privilege lessons the burden of privilege.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ I don’t hate anyone.

  Can I hate and be an ally?

Everyone is socialized to hate someone—reframe.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ I’m a good person.

  As an ally, isn’t tolerance enough?

Yeah, I love it when you tolerate me! Celebrate difference.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ I can be an ally.

  Why would I even think I have a choice?

It is a privilege to ally.

_**Ok, here is the deal.**_ You can be an ally.

  Why would you even think you have a choice?

Use your privileges wisely.

Devon Storman, April 2007