Catherine Pease

The last two years have blown by. Joining UMDLI and attending the 2008 NCORE conference created many feelings for me. I was both excited and apprehensive about examining how I viewed, thought and felt about the world. I also felt that this opportunity would provide tools and insights that I could quickly put to use making a difference. I heard and witnessed the reactions regarding diversity and class power ranging from arrogance to fear, ambivalence to anger, enthusiasm to resignation. OK, I thought, I need to read, learn and reflect. It was clear that these concepts have been caused by generations of intertwined layers of assumptions and judgments made on incomplete and/or erroneous beliefs. But I’m a good person with good intentions who is willing to work hard and make things better – so I can do this.

Unfortunately or fortunately over these two years, I realize how ludicrous my early view was. A typical example of white privilege! I feel humble and have been humbled for the things I have come to understand and appreciate. I still have much that I feel I can do to influence from a grass roots level to dismantle unfounded assumptions and stereotypes. I see even more clearly how I need to continue to examine my own life view.

The atmosphere within the UMDLI has been an incubator to help identify, examine, and transition flawed and sometimes questionable attitudes. Its ground rules for respectful and supportive discussions diminishes the embarrassment or guilt any of us may have felt in revealing a side of us that we’re not proud of. I feel this is one of the most crucial and effective supports for increasing awareness of diversity that the University can provide for the working and learning environment for its staff and students.

The work I need to do, for myself and others, will never end. Good intentions are fine, but not enough. I can feel guilty for what has been done or not yet done, but it is more important for me to focus on what positive things I can do tomorrow and the next day. I accept that I will miss some opportunities, but I believe that what I have gained from UMDLI will enable me to sow seeds of change for diversity and social justice.

Thank you Dean White and Devon Storman, for your support and leadership to the UMDLI.
Marlene Charron

UMDLI: Living the Journey Now

What a world this would be if we just built bridges instead of walls - Carlos Ramirez

True communication is an open bridge that works both ways
When we build bridges we can keep crossing them - Jane Alvarez

Now as I am reaching the end of this part of my journey as a member of UMDLI, I am aware of the gifts that I carry as I step forward, outward to new places where I can bring these gifts to others. I am aware of the bridges we built as a group when speaking openly and honestly about our experiences, our laughter, our fears and sometimes our shame. What an incredible opportunity this has been to bring the mirror up close and to examine those parts of ourselves… sometimes quite intimate… that need re-tooling, refreshing. How fortunate we are to be reminded of the decency as well as the fragility of our peers and co-workers as we explored the issues of racism, white privilege, religion. We learned to speak and hear personal “truths” in constructive and civil ways. We agreed to assume positive intent on the part of fellow members and we listened with respect. We kept crossing the bridges that we built and we are now going to bring the skills, the perception and the practice to new places, new relationships as we extend the reach of UMDLI on our campus and in our communities. Thank you for this opportunity. I will look forward to giving back.

Shelly Chasse-Johndro

The University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute’s mission is to “provide and cultivate opportunities to understand, appreciate, support and strengthen the diversity of our community.” In my opinion this mission is worthy of respect, dignity and pride. When I applied to the UMDLI team, my goal was to make a positive contribution to the institute, the campus, and the community. I feel that I have made progress on this stated goal but it will never be fully accomplished and should never be overlooked within the University, classroom and personal life. I feel that with my current position as an English Language Learner teacher trainer and my diversity training with UMDLI, I will continue to be an advocate for multicultural education. Over the past year, I have been very fortunate to be a part of this organization that allows one to grow personal at their own rate; speak freely without feeling the pressure to be political correct; share concerns and questions about morals, beliefs, and values; and create friendships that I feel will last a lifetime.

The UMDLI monthly meetings produced wonderful topics for discussion but I feel the members of this group played a very important role of educating each other and learning for one another. The 2008-09 members of UMDLI were all respectful and courage individuals who work in a predominately white institute but generated many thought provoking issues. The colleagues, most I had not encountered on campus, who progressed through this year created the most important learning opportunities for me. I take this moment to thank my peers who fabricated a wonderful year as I hope for many more learning opportunities with this group of individuals.
John R. Kidder

A year ago, I was looking forward to embarking on the personal and professional growth opportunity that is the University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute. At that time, I could not have even anticipated what a transformative experience attendance at NCORE Orlando and subsequent monthly UMDLI meetings would be. I feel forever changed, that my personal journey has just begun, and extremely thankful for both.

The blindfold of ignorance and indifference caused by my white privilege has been removed and I now stand in the stark, sometimes painful, multicolored, and multifaceted light of truth. Not what I previously understood to be truth but a collective truth that has emerged through experiencing the narratives of individuals whose lives and experiences are vastly different than my own. Individuals who have suffered injustice, hatred, and oppression that I cannot begin to imagine and am not sure, had I stood in their place that I could have endured. For too long, I have sat back complacent enjoying comforts and opportunities that I have not earned, but that have been dropped in my lap merely because of the color of my skin. Unearned white privilege has opened doors and provided me advantages and opportunities about which many people worldwide can only dream. Shame on me for taking such an ignorant and indifferent view of the world and vociferously complaining about my own very minor occasional inconveniences or injustices. I was so lulled, as is most of white America, into a false sense of my own security that I had never stopped to examine what I never really knew that I didn’t know.

A basic and reoccurring theme that has emerged for me this year as a powerful truth is that white America has consistently and unilaterally decided that we know what is best for everyone who is not exactly like us, no matter how they are different, whether here at home or abroad. We are so arrogant and self-centered, that we think EVERYONE WORLDWIDE WANTS TO BE JUST LIKE US! Is this the case? Absolutely not. Have we ever collectively as riders on the North American continent of this big, blue marble called Earth ever given some serious, reflective thought to this question? The answer to this question is possibly never, but THE TIME TO DO SO IS NOW!

How do I know that the time is now? If you think we’re not all inextricably linked to one another hurtling toward an unknown future at breakneck speed with our collective destiny the responsibility of each and everyone of us, merely take a look at our current worldwide economic and potential pandemic health crisis. There is no more straightforward example of our mutual interdependence. We must get past our real and perceived differences and work side by side to build a future in which every voice is heard and valued and our collective success is measured and demonstrated by the respect and love with which we regard and treat one another and the worldwide assistance we provide to those who are the most oppressed and struggling. For when every person succeeds at that which is most important to them, we ALL succeed. There is no more apparent indicator of success.

I look around my house and think, where and why did I accumulate all this stuff? This question has led me to realize that part of the reason we are hated and despised as a county is that we do not live simply so that other’s might simply live. Our constant and obsessive consumerism has placed a stranglehold on the resources of the entire planet. The incredibly loud resource sucking sound that emanates from the Western Hemisphere,
North America in particular, forces others to work in sweatshops and live in deplorable human conditions to keep up with our unending demands. I have made a solemn promise to myself to try to live more simply and make do with the things I already have instead of buying more or perceived better products. Maybe if we all approached consumption of goods and services with this mindset we could in some small way begin to splinter the yoke of exploitation and oppression on the entire human race.

What have I put into practice and accomplished with all that I have learned at NCORE and UMDLI this year? The answer is not as much as I had hoped because my goals, in retrospect, were a bit unrealistically lofty. I am, however, proud of some small victories which I will share with you now.

I can say that I took a friend of mine to task when he expressed real reluctance to send his daughter to University of Maine at Farmington because he had seen openly gay and lesbian couples walking on campus. I think I really educated him, albeit not so gently, and challenged him to re-examine his point of view. Where he goes from here is up to him. Perhaps I planted a seed of change. As Frances Kendall often says, now he must do his own homework.

I am also proud that in the midst of a Christmas Party hosted by a local fraternal organization of which I am a member, myself and others created a Hanukkah table so several Jewish couples could enjoy this event in a more inclusive manner. This idea was initially met with some resistance by some long-standing members because they claimed it would create a precedent for future expansion. In fact, a Japanese-American member of this organization asked if I would decorate his table with a large Japanese flag. I gladly told him I would be pleased to do so if he wanted. It was quite wonderful to see blue, white, and silver in the midst of a sea of red and green that evening. Now to change the title of the party next year to a Holiday Celebration.

Sometimes the best lessons occur when and where you least expect them. Rabbi Dara Lerner was part of a panel discussion that I found to be very enlightening and informative this year on several faith traditions. Before eating any baked goods that had been provided as refreshments at the meeting, she inquired as to whether they had been made with lard. Lard is not acceptable within the dietary guidelines of Jews. My wife recently baked some goodies for a meeting and I made sure to quietly tell two of my Jewish friends in attendance that vegetable oil, not lard was used to make them. This small courtesy took a matter of seconds, but demonstrates the importance of both recognizing diversity and acting on that knowledge.

There were a couple of times this past year that I observed injustice and intolerance and did not act or become an advocate. I now regret my inaction and have made a commitment to stand up and speak out in the future.

I am very pleased that I cut through the misinformation, rhetoric, and scare tactics used by one political party and the self-proclaimed religious righteous, stepped into the voting booth, and voted for Barack Obama as the candidate best qualified to be President of the United States of America. Finally, the promise of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation has been more fully realized. I may not agree with some of the decisions that have been
made in Washington during the first one hundred days of this new administration, but
that is not dissimilar to my views on the decisions made by many previous
administrations. I am also pleased that Governor John Baldacci removed the barriers to
allow same sex union in this state. Such relationships neither diminish nor imperil my
marriage or anyone’s marriage. These are encouraging signs of movement in a positive
direction.

I would be extremely remiss not to thank Steve Weinberger and Catherine Pease for their
support of my UMDLI membership and participation. Without their support, I could not
have gained so much from my first year of participation. Congratulations Catherine on
UMDLI Alum status and thank for being a role model to me on many fronts. Thanks also
to NCORE Crew San Francisco it was great to get to know all of you. To my esteemed
NCORE Crew Orlando colleagues (Shelly, Steve, Debra, Valerie, and Sara) I say this,
“The journey is always sweeter when you travel with genuine kindred spirits and
friends.” I truly value and appreciate each one of you. Thanks also to Carl Mitchell, a
UMDLI Alum, for his generous efforts in opening my eyes and spirit to Native American
injustice including economic racism right here at home. I could not imagine a better,
more knowledgeable mentor in this regard.

As for year two of the UMDLI experience, I can’t wait to get started and see what new
vistas, insights, and revelations will emerge. Let the power of transformation through
education continue.

Kathy Ingraham

One of the most surprising things in life is learning what you didn’t know you didn’t
know. Joining the UMDLI was one of those surprising moments. One of those “AHA”
moments when I realized I didn’t know anything about diversity, that I had lived a very
sheltered life in my own little world and had no idea what was happening around me or
my personal responsibility to make a difference. I am amazed and thankful for the
knowledge I have gained and equally amazed at how much I still have to learn. I’m
thankful that I have had to step out of my “comfort zone” and hope I will be able to
continue to do this when it is necessary to share what I have learned through the UMDLI.
I appreciate the connections I have made and I am very grateful for the friendships I have
forged with people who are concerned with the same issues I am. The UMDLI has been
a life changing experience for me and I hope it is just the beginning of a long road of
change.
NCORE was an awakening experience and UMDLI kept the fires burning. The experiences have become a part of my soul. My mind, heart, and my very being will forever accept others for who they are. I will embrace differences and be curious and open to learning more.

I have been blessed by the experiences in my life. They have made me who I am. UMDLI has been an experience like no other...a true opportunity for growth and understanding. I am humbled by the experience...an experience I will treasure and share for a lifetime. UMDLI has been like a huge breath of fresh air, enough to gently purge my entire being. I have acquired a greater inner peace and outer strength.

From my time in UMDLI, I now understand the question I have asked myself should not be “Why am I so infrequently the person I want to be?” What I should be asking is, “Why do I so infrequently want to be the person I am?” I have gained the confidence to be and like the person I am.

“You don’t know what you have until it’s gone.” This phrase comes to mind as I think about how much the experiences of NCORE and UMDLI have meant to me and how much I will miss it. Had I not had these experiences, I would not have known what I was missing. How unfortunate that would have been! I now know and realize how fortunate I am to have been able to participate in UMDLI.

Every campus of the University of Maine system should sponsor a diversity leadership institute. Just think of the impact this opportunity for diversity education would have on our universities and our state!

**Intrinsic to UMDLI:**
- Understanding
- Modeling
- Developing
- Learning
- Introspection
Stephen Allan

Diversity is a collective possession that requires an individual's understanding. Without insight into ourselves, where we come from, our prejudices and privileges; it is impossible to understand the world, that place that exists outside of our personal consciousness, where we interact with others, where we are required to assimilate, and in doing so, embrace what is foreign to us; in order to join our fellow social participants in establishing a universal design of mutual respect, compatibility and compassion; a goal that has strangely eluded humanity for millennia, at least until the modern era where we find our planet shrinking, where we must now confront the unknowns of other cultures, classes, races, sexual orientations, genders, religions and disabilities on a daily basis; whether it is communicating with a customer service representative in Mumbai, reading a blog maintained by someone in the Islamic world, traveling to a destination half-way across the globe in less than a day or meeting someone from the other side of town. It is now our responsibility to tighten the threads of this important social fabric and ensure a better world. It starts with the individual and results in a global community of social harmony.

But what of the campus community's progress toward diversity here at the University of Maine? Have we achieved that social harmony? In many ways, the college campus is a microcosm of society as a whole. More so than any other community in the State of Maine, our campus contains numerous populations with differing life experiences. This is a place where that social harmony should, and must, flourish; and I believe we are continuing forward in reaching that goal. The simple realization that diversity is needed and action must occur is 90% of the journey; but it is the gap of that last 10% we must forever strive toward; to treat it as a Sisyphean task so that we never rest and erroneously think our work is done. The UMDLI, the formation of which is part of the initial 90%, is an important instrument in attaining a more harmonious community; not only for the campus, but for each level of society of which we are members: campuses, municipalities, states, nations, continents, hemispheres and the international arena as a whole. The UMDLI is achieving this through each member examining his or her surroundings and seeing it with sympathy and, especially, empathy; and sharing those observations, strengthening the group so that we may continue spreading diversity into the collective consciousness. We have a continuing responsibility to better our environment and ourselves and success is measured by our eternal efforts.

Deborah Mitchell

First, I would just like to say what a pleasure it is to be part of UMDLI; it has opened my eyes up to so many things. Sharing thoughts and feelings, not being afraid to say that sometimes I am afraid. Learning about different cultures and beliefs. Learning to understand the pressures of everyday life and that there is prejudice against everyone, whether it is race, gender or religion.

What I have learned most in UMDLI is that I am very much a recipient of white privilege. I would not have believed it if someone had told me a year ago that I had white privilege simply by being white, let alone believing in the topic. The subject offended me
when I first heard about it, I will admit this. I did not want to believe that simply because the color of my skin, I was entitled to certain privileges in life. I felt that this was simply made up by someone whom was disgruntled.

I spoke to a dear friend of mine who happens to be a person of color. We were speaking about equality among men and women. The statement that he made was that you may be female but you are still white, which “ups you on the food chain”. I found this statement interesting and saddening.

One thing that I did realize is that when I watched a movie or a television show that featured people of other ethnic backgrounds, I found that I didn’t always relate to the characters in the movie. I now watch the movies with fresh eyes…

I once was at a seminar that featured a clip from the Dave Chappelle show. There was a person of color in the room. I did not dare to laugh at the clips. I did not want to offend this person. It was interesting though; the person of color was laughing out loud at all the racial slurs and even the “N” word being used in a skit.

I find that just by putting on a uniform, I feel some discrimination from people simply because I am a Law Enforcement Officer. I feel the prejudice that is associated with the occupation I have chosen. The comfort is that I can take the uniform off and blend in with everyone else at the end of the day. Some people feel this pressure all the time, and two fold what I have experienced. How sad is that?

I guess what I have most learned from this experience, the importance of learning new cultures and beliefs. I love to share my experiences with others and realized how dull the world would be without differences. Without color…

Sandra Caceres Tijerina

These two years at the UMDLI have been a great experience. I am thankful for the support Dave Megquier and Karen Keim have given me in order to participate in the Diversity Leadership Institute and to the participants that helped me see reality in different and challenging ways.

Participating in the UMDLI throughout these months was a great experience. I was able to learn more about my self and also understand more about the culture of the United States.

There are many advantages in pursuing multiculturalism in higher education institutions and probably the one that I learned from the most was the fact that in order to create a multicultural campus we need the active participation of the community. The efforts that the University of Maine does in regards to this important process needs to go beyond the institution, in order to educate students and staff in fundamental issues about diversity. We all need to make a contribution to a multicultural community. The UMDLI is one institutional effort that has moved in that direction. Under UMDLI, we moved closer to
understanding that we need to change and improve campus in order to make it more inclusive for students, faculty and staff.

I am very pleased to see students in the classroom concerned about multiculturalism and thinking about how we can help and create a positive impact in our campus. I am also very pleased to see in my department the support and willingness to learn more about those students who need our guidance. But most of all I am very glad to see how we can come together as a group and support each other to address issues that could directly impact the education and experience of the students that come to the University of Maine.

Mary Beth Willett - Active Alumni

This year has been both stressful and rewarding as an active alumna in UMDLI. I started off the first day of fall semester having surgery and tried to play catch up for the rest of the year. I was scheduled to be part of the UMDLI sessions and each time it came time to plan the sessions I felt overwhelmed. However, what I quickly decided was that UMDLI was an investment in the future of this university. To serve in this capacity has been an opportunity to grow personally and professionally. Having the diverse group of people in UMDLI and in the planning committee who know me so well creates a foundation of colleagues whom care about what you are experiencing both personally and professionally. This group reaches far beyond the College Success Program’s staff with whom I work and identify. The support gives me a renewed sense of how work could actually be and look like with people coming together from different work backgrounds to share in a transformative experience that helps us to become more tolerant, understanding and compassionate with colleagues from “other” departments. All too few opportunities occur that allow us to reach out across the silos to work together for a worthwhile goal – diversity. This word is bantered about and for those not in UMDLI is something that has to be done – part of a job so to speak. But, for those of us who owe so much of who we are today to UMDLI, we understand how underestimated and overused this word is. To underestimate this word in the context of the human experience is to negate many people’s lives, experiences, their history and their culture. The University of Maine Diversity Leadership Institute is part of the Division of Lifelong Learning and speaks to the ongoing need for learning in the area of Diversity and all that the word encompasses. Understanding and learning about diversity issues helps me to break down the barriers of my own misunderstanding. The institute does this in a way that is respectful, inclusive and those that have come before lead by example and share their journey. I have come to realize no matter what is happening in life or at work, there are things that are worth the interruption of the daily tasks and UMDLI is one that leaves you a better person. I am proud to have chosen to stay actively involved and am grateful for the opportunity to continue.