Dr. Havidán Rodríguez

At the 2017 Opening Convocation, I had the privilege of addressing our new first-year and transfer students. One of the things I emphasized to these students was the importance of embracing diversity as a critical advantage—because living and learning in a diverse, inclusive, and welcoming environment prepares students for success in careers, as community members, and as globally engaged citizens.

UAlbany truly stands out in this regard, as one of the most diverse R-1 universities in the nation. Not only have we succeeded in recruiting a highly diverse group of students, we also succeed in retaining and graduating students who are underrepresented minorities. This success has been recognized by the White House, which named UAlbany as an “Engine of Opportunity,” and by a New York Times study that found us to be among the top universities in the nation in creating social mobility for students.

Consequently, it is no surprise that diversity and inclusion have emerged as a core institutional priority that will drive the initiatives developed under the University’s Strategic Plan. This is a theme that resonates with our faculty, staff, students and our community because we know that excellence and diversity go hand in hand, and make us a much stronger and vibrant institution.

In addition to prioritizing diversity and inclusion, to truly meet our vision of inclusive excellence, we must come together as a community to ensure that our campus climate is welcoming and provides equal opportunities to all. We also need to assess the

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Science departments develop BCAMP to attract/retain minorities to STEM majors

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the departments of biology, chemistry, atmospheric science, math and physics are excited to present the BCAMP Consortium. BCAMP, taken from the first letter of the participating departments, was established to foster a culture of diversity and inclusion in the UAlbany science departments.

Each BCAMP department has established a Diversity and Inclusion Climate Committee and these committees, said Patrick Jean-Pierre, ODI assistant director, are analyzing data on diversity and inclusion, developing recruitment and retention strategies, and establishing protocols to ensure an inclusive environment.

Attracting, retaining and graduating minority students, particularly African-American, Latino and Native Americans, to STEM majors is rife with challenges. Finding the students poses one set of problems, but many who enter college as STEM majors drop out or change majors for various reasons.

Getting STEM students to UAlbany, keeping them in the department and graduating on time is a global issue and we are always looking for creative ways to overcome these challenges, said Dr. Tamra Minor, Chief Diversity Officer. “I’m glad to have these departments come to the table asking ‘how can we work together and what can we do to resolve the issue,’” Minor said.

The biology department has made some headway in diversifying its undergraduate program, but is looking to BCAMP for ways to attract and retain graduate students, said Dr. Richard Cunningham, professor and chair, department of biology.

“We continue to search for ways to diversify our graduate programs,” he said. “We understand that as the world grows the department must continue to grow as well. We hope to have some exciting initiatives coming in the next academic year to
It’s been four years since we officially launched UAlbany’s Inclusive Excellence campaign, UACCESS – The University at Albany Collaboratively Creating Excellence, Scholarship and Success. In this timeframe, we have had many accomplishments and provided opportunities for the campus community to move toward a more diverse and inclusive place to live, work, and play.

What I’m most proud to report is that we are beginning to embrace the inclusion mindset. It’s not just enough to work toward diversity, but do so while simultaneously embracing inclusion. From we have to do, to we want to do.

Diversity is more associated with a compliance mindset. It says “let’s make sure we check these boxes.” Are we in compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and all other applicable federal, state and local non-discrimination laws, ordinances or regulations. Do we have people from diverse backgrounds and those who are of a different race, color, creed, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, veteran status and all other named categories?

An inclusion mindset says that now that we are in compliance and are diverse that all people, even those not mentioned in protected categories, feel respected, accepted and allowed to function fully. Previous research, particularly that in business settings, has shown that diverse AND inclusive groups tend to perform at a higher level.

This being the case, diversity AND inclusion makes UAlbany better prepared to fulfill its mission and meet its stated goals and objectives. In essence, it makes us better.

This year, the ODI individually, and in partnership with other campus groups, units and organizations, will continue to offer and support those programs, events and activities, as well as provide guidance and direction that moves us further toward Inclusive Excellence. We ask that you engage with us. Attend the events. Ask for assistance and guidance. Actively dialogue with those not like you. Be open to new thoughts and ideas. And work knowing that you are making UAlbany the kind of place where all are respected, supported and appreciated.

It’s the Great Dane way.

BCAMP (From page 1)

continued to strengthen our department’s efforts.”

Added Dr. Christopher Thorncroft, professor and chair, department of atmospheric science.

“We are looking forward to exchanging ideas and learning best practices from others in the consortium,” Thorncroft said. “We’re also excited to learn new ways to increase the diversity in the department so we are better equipped to tackle some of the most challenging and inherently interdisciplinary problems that we are facing in the 21st century.”

Coordinated by Jean-Pierre, the BCAMP consortium has organized a speaker series and department roundtables to address diversity and inclusion gaps. Additionally, BCAMP has established a unit-specific Dialogue in Action Science Series, an off-shoot of the campus-wide series, to provide a mechanism for faculty to have ongoing conversations about diversity and inclusion issues. The first BCAMP Speaker Series will be held Dec. 8, from 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. in the Campus Center Ballroom. The session is entitled “Best Practices: Cultivating Success for Unrepresented Populations in STEM and Non-STEM Areas.” Dr. Phyllis Robinson, professor in Biological Sciences at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, will be the keynote speaker. The UAlbany campus community is invited to attend this session.

Rodrígues Reflections (From page 1)

“micro-climates” across campus, whether in academic departments, student organizations, or administrative offices. And we need to embrace diversity in all of its dimensions—including thought and expression.

Throughout this process, we will need to engage in difficult conversations, but we are up to the challenge. This is a collaborative process—a journey that we need to embark upon together. With leadership from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, guidance from the President’s Council on Diversity, and the excellent work of the Strategic Planning Committee, I look forward to working closely with all of you to continue this vital effort.
Student Association Leaders Discuss Diversity Plans/Activities
By Jerlisa Fontaine, President, & Aniel Luna, Director, Intercultural Affairs, Student Association

My name is JERLISA "JUJU" FON-TAINE and I am a current senior at the University at Albany majoring in human biology on the Pre-Medical track with a double minor in Business and Africana Studies. I, also, serve as the Student Association President.

I’m from the Bronx, and I’m very proud of that fact because the Bronx community helped sculpt me into the young lady that I am.

I have come to realize that UAlbany is very diverse, but we struggle with inclusivity. We struggle to assure that students from various backgrounds, ethnicities and differences are communicating with each other and are learning about and respecting each other’s different experiences.

As president of the Student Association, I make it my responsibility to interact with people of various religious and cultural backgrounds to find ways to establish programs and initiatives that will get all these people in the same room to have conversations around issues that affect our communities and relationships with people that are not traditionally like us. I do my very best to stay current with social issues and social accomplishments, so that I may include these relevant topics in my everyday conversations with my peers. I believe it is important to make diversity part of my routine conversation so that people do not feel that diversity is only reserved for a lecture or a workshop but instead, is something that should be valued all the time.

To all students interested in improving UAlbany’s diversity and inclusion, it is important to get involved on campus through the various departments and clubs so that you can acquaint yourself with people from all backgrounds. We must learn to come together to share experiences with each other so that we find our commonalities. Although being with people who look like you and like everything that you do is a natural affinity, it’s more effective to branch out and not limit yourself. It makes you more prepared for the global society where we will live, work and play.

My name is ANIEL LUNA, and I’m currently the director of Intercultural Affairs for the Student Association. The mission of my department is to promote diversity and inclusion through UAlbany in order to create a safe space for students to interact with one another and attain a college education. We plan on executing our mission through a series of events hosted by my department, such as the Cultural Carnival, which help to display the diversity across our student body, and the important role it plays in bringing life to this campus.

Aside from hosting events, we also encourage unity and collaborations among organizations representing different cultural and religious backgrounds. Each month, my department facilitates a Multicultural Student Advisory Council (MSAC) meeting, in which student leaders of these cultural and religious organizations gather in a room. Each meeting agenda tends to vary from month to month, depending on what the student leaders want to talk about, or which resources on campus we believe are important for student leaders to know more about, given the role they play in their organization. The main goal of these meetings is to allow student leaders the opportunity to be in the same room as representatives from other organizations, helping create a supportive community within MSAC.

This work is important because over the past couple of years I’ve come to realize that diversity is crucial in any setting, but it’s not effective when different groups of people are constantly competing to be better than another group. Nationwide, this is a trend that has prevented our people from coming together to make sure their voices are heard on issues affecting them in similar ways throughout America. We need to start encouraging unity among all groups of people, and what better setting to start doing this than on a college campus full of the world’s future leaders.

I believe it is important to make diversity part of my routine conversation so that people do not feel that diversity is only reserved for a lecture or a workshop but instead, is something that should be valued all the time. — Fontaine

Jerlisa “Juju” Fontaine

Aniel Luna
Mindfulness Improves Health, Assists in Social Justice Work

In October, Conversations for Change and The Art of Conversation were pleased to present “Integrating the Whole Self Into Social Justice Dialogues and Actions. During this event, Dr. Loretta Pyles and Dr. Salome Raheim helped participants to learn techniques for integrating the whole self - body, mind and spirit - into social justice work. Pyles and Raheim were asked to share some of their presentation in the following Q&A.

Q. Why is a mindfulness practice helpful to those involved in social justice work?

A. Mindfulness can help people to see their own habitual patterns, to cultivate a more conscious relationship to internalized oppression and to disrupt the re-enactments of trauma and oppression that can happen in organizations and institutions. Moreover, it can address issues of burnout and cultivate more sustainable social justice work.

Q. How can oppression and the trauma associated with it impact the mind-body-spirit continuum?

A. Racism, sexism, toxic/digital capitalism, able-ism and a host of other isms can affect everything from immune system functioning to addictions to disempowering interpersonal communication patterns. It can result in isolation, marginalization and a sense of a lack of belonging to the community.

Q. Can you talk a bit about the role of privilege/power in oppression and how mindfulness practice can attend to this?

A. Even for people who tend to be more aware of the ways that they have privilege and power, I believe most of the stories and residue reside below consciousness. Thus, mindfulness can help one to become more intimate with and conscious of the experience of privilege and power. Conversely, mindfulness can help one to be more connected to one’s subjugated selves too. When we are more aware of these things, we can de-identify with them and then they are not running the show. We can act from a place of clarity, compassion, and empowerment.

Q. Doing this kind of work can be a vulnerable experience, what tips do you have to address those feelings?

A. I think facilitators need to be skilled in holding space for people. Also, facilitators need to have done this work personally before taking it public.

Q. Can you share an exercise with readers?

A. Sitting in a comfortable position and either closing your eyes or softening your gaze, notice your breath and the shape that the breath takes in the body. Perhaps you notice the breath in the belly, chest or nostrils. Continue to let your awareness rest on the breath for a few moments. Notice the flowing nature of your internal landscape, that everything is constantly changing.

Q. Can you suggest any readings or additional resources for our readers?

A. Beth Berila, “Integrating Mindfulness into Anti-Oppression Pedagogy: Social Justice in Higher Education”
Loretta Pyles, “Healing Justice: Holistic Self-Care for Change Makers”