

# A Seat at the Table

## Updates from the Diversity and Inclusion Office

February 2014

In this inaugural issue, projects and initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion at Ferris State University are highlighted.

- ❖ At Ferris, like many public universities in Michigan and the nation, we have observed “achievement gaps” when comparing the graduation rates of our different student populations. The **Achievement Gaps Taskforce**, co-chaired by Fritz Erickson and David Pilgrim, is a thirty-person group charged with identifying strategies to close the achievement gaps and help as many students as possible to be successful at Ferris. The Taskforce began work in Fall 2013, and is scheduled to conclude its work at the end of Spring 2014.
- ❖ Do you know a student who needs a warm coat? Please help by donating a gently used coat to the First Lady’s Attic; you can drop them off at CSS 312. Also, please let students know that there are coats available. They can email the First Lady’s Attic at [flattic@ferris.edu](mailto:flattic@ferris.edu) with their name, phone number or email, and size. We will find a coat for them.
- ❖ Spring enrollment figures also reflect our commitment to being a diverse, welcoming campus. Ferris reported increases in the number of students who identify as African-American (up 5.6%), Hispanic (up 17.4%) and of two or more races (up 29.5%). Our international student population also rose significantly (up 21%). The only reporting group that saw a decline in numbers was Asian students.
- ❖ February is **Black History Month** and there are many events scheduled on campus. Highlights include a screening of *Fruitvale Station*, *My Black is Beautiful Conference 2014*, featured speakers Dr. Umar Johnson and Dr. Pasquale DiRaddo, and alumnus Khalid el-Hakim's *Black History 101 Mobile Museum*. More information about Black History Month events can be found on the [Campus Calendar](#), [Diversity and Inclusion Calendar](#), or the [OMSS](#) homepage.
- ❖ **First Lady’s Attic** has registered 1468 Ferris students since 2009. Items supplied to students include 319 men’s suits, 459 men’s long sleeve dress shirts, 111 women’s suits, 167 women’s blazers, and 252 blouses. We could not do this without all the great donations. If you have professional business clothes you don’t wear anymore, donate them to The Attic. Drop off your donation at Pete’s Cleaners in Big Rapids, mention they are for the First Lady’s Attic, and Pete’s will take care of the rest. The

Attic is currently located in Helen Ferris Hall, room 125. We are looking forward to our new space in the University Center.

- ❖ In the spirit of educational equity, the **Center for Latin@ Studies** launched two programs. Through the Woodbridge *Promesa* Summer Success Program rising high school seniors in Grand Rapids completed nine credits of college course work in Summer 2013. The successful curriculum, rooted in students' cultural backgrounds, will expand from Grand Rapids to Holland in 2014. *Promesa* Scholars: A Community Cohort provides financial and academic support to Ferris students connected to a partnering community organization. All eight students successfully completed their first semester and five of the eight are in the Honor's program. Together, *Promesa* programs intentionally work toward increasing diversity and equity in education.
- ❖ ***The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross***, a PBS documentary series that examines African American history and includes an interview with David Pilgrim and images from the Jim Crow Museum, is now available on DVD. A copy of the DVD, with limited public performance rites, is available to be checked out at FLITE.
- ❖ **The Faculty/Staff Diversity Mini-Grant Program** provides funds for new, innovative projects, workshops, and activities that strengthen excellence in diversity and inclusion. Recently funded projects include *Nowruz – Persian/Iranian New Year Festival*, an Interpreter Program at the Birkam Health Center, and *The Mythology of the Jewish Experience*.
- ❖ The Ferris community came together for the 28th annual **MLK Celebration**, "Together We Will..." Events included the 20th annual Faculty/Staff In-Service, The Harmony Project's *Tunnel of Oppression, I Stand For/I March For* banner stations, a food drive, the Freedom March followed by *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross*, a Community Meal, Student Tributes, and the spoken word group *The Dark Noise Collective*. The community meal, which was supported by food donations from many local restaurants, served over 55 people and met a real need because there were no other free meals provided that day. More than 60 students volunteered at MLK Celebration events. Thanks to all who helped with these programs.

"Diversity may be the hardest thing for a society to live with,  
and perhaps the most dangerous thing for a society to be without."

— William Sloane Coffin Jr.