

"OMSA Update" is a biyearly publication that highlights programming and other events at OMSA.



Office of Multicultural Student Affairs

OMSA UPDATE

{ SPRING 2006

Cultural Connection

director's Message

Dear Students:

Welcome back from the holiday break! You have entered another semester and we at the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) hope that it will be a productive one.

As you move forward this semester, remember the importance of reaching out to those who present different cultural frameworks than yours. It is also important for you to arm yourself with knowledge about other cultures so that you can make a difference in your everyday interactions.

Initially, learning about people whose backgrounds are different from your own may be uncomfortable, but as you continue to grow in both knowledge and comfort, it will become easier. If you can't find a way to do this, come by OMSA. We will introduce you to programs where you can learn about differences, and to students who are willing to discuss their cultures. Some of these programs and services are listed in this newsletter. In the words of Jawaharial Nehru, "culture is the widening of the mind and spirit."

Students and staff who participate in OMSA programs or volunteered in our office wrote the articles in this newsletter. They are a testament to the value of cooperation and collaboration that OMSA promotes. If you are interested in participating in our programs, please come by our office.

Finally, let me leave you with some quotes that may be helpful as you think about multicultural issues and diversity:

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

"You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty."
- Mahatma Gandhi

"The more freedom we enjoy, the greater the responsibility we bear toward others as well as ourselves."
- Oscar Arias Sanchez

"What we are saying today is that you're either part of the problem or part of the solution."
- Eldridge Cleaver, Activist

All of us at OMSA wish you a successful semester, and we look forward to meeting you, either at the office or at our programs.

Good Luck,

Napoleon L. Peoples, Ph.D.
Director, Office of Multicultural Student Affairs



a student's Perspective

Kiara Taylor, Freshman
OMSA Student Volunteer

I first learned about the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) during the Student Testing, Advising and Registration (STAR) program, and I told myself that I would go to an event when school started. The first OMSA event that I attended was the Cultural Café, where I met Ms. Beverly Walker. I liked the atmosphere of the OMSA office and its staff, so I became a volunteer.

The entire staff has been extremely helpful to my adjusting to VCU. I have met a lot of people through their programs that I otherwise would not have met. Most of these people were genuine and shared my interest in multiculturalism.

I attended every OMSA program last semester, and I would definitely encourage anyone who has even a slight interest in different cultures, or who would like to meet new people, to attend a OMSA program, or just go to the office and say hello.



a volunteer Perspective

Elena Schexnider, Sophomore
OMSA Student Volunteer

Volunteering at OMSA provides a great opportunity to meet new people and get involved, while also offering students a good support system, which is important in adapting to a new environment like college. Volunteering at different functions like the awards ceremony is fun and exciting because one gets a sense of belonging to a group of individuals with the same goal: celebrating diversity. In addition, the OMSA office staff, including Ms. Walker and Dr. Peoples, are caring, sincere and down-to-earth individuals. Ms. Walker is the leader of the Women of Color discussion group. The group meets every Tuesday at 4:00 p.m., and we talk about different issues around campus as well as societal issues that affect us as college students and minorities. The Women of Color group is a beautiful collection of people of different ethnicities and backgrounds giving many perspectives to enrich the discussions. On different occasions, we have guest speakers come and lead the group as well. You get the opportunity to learn about yourself, other people and the world by participating in the Women of Color Group and volunteering.

Please check out our schedule of events and services at www.omsa.vcu.edu.

diversity in *Action*

Joanna Quiambao, Senior
OMSA Student Worker

Two new developments will emerge at OMSA in 2006 that involve students, faculty, staff and the community. First, OMSA and the University Career Center (UCC) are in the process of organizing the first Annual Multicultural Conference. This year's theme will be Diversity in the Workplace. The conference is scheduled for March 27, and it will offer an exciting venue for all students, but especially first- and second-year students who are in the process of considering careers. A planning committee, consisting of ethnic student organizational leaders and faculty and staff, has been established under the leadership of OMSA Assistant Director Beverly Walker and UCC Associate Director Alicia Aroche.

The conference will focus on the difficulty that some students have with selecting a major, the value of doing so early in the academic process, interviewing, acquiring mentors and other relevant topics. Students will have an opportunity to explore selected professions and career options with the speakers. Also, they will be able to ask questions like *What should I wear to the interview?*, *How can I secure internship information?* and *How will my race or ethnicity affect the hiring process?*

The objective of this conference is to present information about various challenges that students of color may experience in the workplace and as they plan for their careers. The conference will be divided into workshops and a panel discussion session. Students will hear the speakers and panelists discuss their experiences and get

valuable advice about getting a job and advancing in the workplace. Additionally, students will have time to ask questions and spend time with these successful leaders. Hopefully this will give these students a head start in thinking about their chosen career and the issues that they may face.

For additional information about the conference, go to www.omsa.vcu.edu or look for the information tables in the Student Commons during January and February.

Second, OMSA has resurrected the Multicultural Collaboration Council (MCC). The MCC initially began two years ago but was curtailed until the office moved to its new location. Now the group is functioning again and has strong participation from the groups advised by OMSA.

The objective of the MCC is to bring OMSA student organizations together so that they can support and learn from each other, and support OMSA programs. The purpose is to strengthen the collaboration and information process between the groups. The OMSA staff will help assist with the organizational meetings and advise when necessary.

RECAP – FALL 2005

men of color *Discussion Group*

Ijuanee Isom

OMSA Multicultural Program Specialist

The Men of Color Discussion group had a successful semester. The group's aim is to foster personal growth through discussions and supportive feedback. The goal is to facilitate bonding, open communication and group interaction. Averaging around six to eight members, the student participants openly discussed issues that affect men of color in the university environment.

The group convened every Thursday afternoon in the OMSA office to discuss topics of interest. Some of these topics generated by group members, facilitators, videotapes, articles and books included:

- + the plight of the Sudanese refugees in America,
- + the AIDS epidemic in the African, African American and Latino community,
- + the role of the maturation process of young males of color,
- + and the relations between Africans and African American males.

Members enjoyed the opportunity to meet, bond and collaborate with their peers. They encouraged each other to share their personal experiences and opinions and learned a great deal from each other's perspectives.

This spring, the group will continue to discuss issues that impact all men of color globally, nationally and locally. The group will meet every Thursday afternoon at 5:00 p.m. beginning on February 9. For more information, please consult the OMSA Web site, or visit the office on the second floor of the University Student Commons, Room 215.

salsa on *The Plaza*

Jahnissi Tirado, Senior
OMSA Student Worker

Salsa on the Plaza has become one of the many VCU traditions for celebrating a new academic year. The combination of music, ethnic food and dance filled the University Student Commons Plaza on August 25, 2005. Students, new and old, met and interacted with each other. Everyone was given the opportunity to participate in dance lessons offered by students and professional dancers. The range of movements and skills showed that you didn't have to be a pro to have a good time moving to the Spanish beats.

The most exciting experience for many of the new undergraduates was having the opportunity to actually learn the Salsa dance. Salsa is one of the more difficult dances compared to Bachata and Merengue,

multicultural *Book Club*

Alicia Aroche

Associate Director
University Career Center and OMSA Book Club Facilitator

This fall, we chose to read *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez. The novel tells the stories of four sisters from the Dominican Republic whose family flees the country during the height of political turmoil in the 1990s. They leave behind a privileged life against the backdrop of a tropical paradise. The family relocates to the Bronx, New York, where they struggle to learn a new language and culture. In addition to these barriers, the sisters grapple with the challenges of growing from adolescents to adults.

The sisters' stories are told in a series of short tales, which *Publishers Weekly* described as a "novel-like mosaic." Each sister recounts her journey to the United States from the Dominican Republic through rotating times and places.

Some of the themes explored in the book include family conflict, the meaning of language, race and class. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* inspired book club members to connect these themes to their own family histories in places such as Nigeria and Vietnam. Other members recalled similar themes from their travels abroad and shared their stories.

As with each semester, the OMSA Book Club provided an opportunity for participants to hear different perspectives on a book, and to inform the members about the culture featured in the book and those of the group members themselves.

The spring Book Club will meet on Tuesdays at noon.



Kwanzaa Celebration Speaker – 12/08/05
Interview by **Quasheena Carpenter**

For VCU's Kwanzaa celebration this year, OMSA and the Black Caucus introduced lecturer and activist Kevin Powell as the evening's guest speaker. Mr. Powell delivers about 100 speeches throughout the country and said this one was a closure to his year. "When I received the phone call to speak at VCU, I was happy," Powell said. "I love Kwanzaa speeches, and in fact they are my favorite thing to do."

Since he delivers numerous speeches that deal with other issues, Powell said it has been 5 years since his last Kwanzaa speech but his inspiration came from the young people. Tiana Burton, the executive-at-large publicity manager for Black Caucus, said that although she knew about Kwanzaa she still gained a lot from Powell's speech. "His speech inspired me to be a critical thinker," Burton said, "and to commit my life in some way back to the community."

Powell told the audience the world needs change, and no time can be wasted because change needs to happen right now. "It will take the work of the young people," Powell said, "but I have faith or else I wouldn't be here doing these speeches." The crowd involvement was what Powell describes as respectful but students in the audience like Jameia Atkinson said "every word he spoke was helpful" and she didn't want to miss anything. "His speech was something that we all needed," Atkinson said. "It was for some of us the closure to our semester."

At the end of the night aside from his speech, Powell wanted to leave the students with one message: "Don't take the opportunity of getting an education for granted. Getting an education takes more than four years, it's your life."



interview *Kevin Powell*

and it requires patience to learn the footwork. But once it's mastered, anything goes!

This year, Salsa on the Plaza was filled with excitement as students jumped in line to learn the steps. An instructor took the stage and broke down the movement from easy steps to more complex spins and turns. The ultimate joy was when students paired to dance on their own. And, although it appeared that some students forgot the footwork, they still made the effort to dance and integrate their own mix into the dance.

Salsa on the Plaza gave the students, faculty and staff an opportunity to interact together, and it gave a wonderful welcome to the student body during their first week of school.

upcoming *Events*

SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications for the VCU Dining Service Multicultural Scholarship are now available! The VCU Dining Services Multicultural Scholarship program is sponsored by ARAMARK Educational Services. The program has been designed to encourage high academic scholarship and to recognize the promise for diversity for undergraduates at VCU. Students that have demonstrated outstanding academic scholarship in the classroom, as well as leadership in diversity efforts at VCU, may be considered for a \$2,500 scholarship to assist with university tuition and/or books.

All full-time VCU undergraduate students who will complete their degree after the fall 2006 semester may apply for the scholarship. Applicants must have a 3.3 or higher cumulative GPA and show demonstrated leadership in diversity efforts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Applications are available online at www.omsa.vcu.edu. Deadline is February 28, 2006!

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

OMSA coordinates the annual calendar of events for the month-long celebration of African-American accomplishments. The series of university activities offered by students, faculty and staff includes workshops, lectures and performances. This marks the 15th annual celebration! Posters and calendars will be available by the end of January at OMSA (University Student Commons, Room 215).

The following events are sponsored or co-sponsored by OMSA. Please visit www.omsa.vcu.edu for the full listing of events.

- 2/13 Sharon Dabney-Wooldridge**
University Student Commons, Richmond Salons III-IV
4 p.m. – 6 p.m.
- 2/13 Nikki Giovanni**
University Student Commons, Commonwealth Ballrooms A-B
7 p.m.
- 2/20 King Saleem Khalfani, NAACP Virginia State Conference Executive Director**
University Student Commons, Richmond Salons, 7 p.m.
- 2/21 Omar Tyree, "Why Good Girls Crave Bad Men"**
Based on the Novel *Cold-Blooded*
University Student Commons, Commonwealth Ballrooms A-B
7 p.m.
- 2/27 Soul Food Café**
University Student Commons, Commonwealth Ballrooms A-B
7 p.m.

In addition to the Black History Month Poster, OMSA is also sponsoring the 14th Annual Black History Month Juried Art Exhibition. The contest is open to both VCU community High Schools and VCU undergraduate and graduate students! Applications are available at www.omsa.vcu.edu.

CULTURAL TRIO

The trio consists of the Cultural Café, Taste of Culture and the new Cultural Explorations. The Cultural Café offers a relaxed atmosphere where students and others have an opportunity to get together in an environment where they can listen to poetry and jazz, watch films, listen to presentations and just relax. Coffee, tea and pastries are served in a café atmosphere. The Taste of Culture offers students an opportunity to taste foods from various ethnic cultures, and the Cultural Explorations offers OMSA student organizations an opportunity to present their cultural groups through presentations, workshops, lectures or other formats. This program will focus on educating students from other cultures.

The dates for each series are listed below. Please check the Web site for further information regarding the sponsoring organizations and cultural background. All events are held in the OMSA office.

Cultural Café – 3/8, 4/12 // **Cultural Explorations** – 3/22, 4/19
Taste of Culture – 4/26

INTERCULTURAL FESTIVAL (ICF)

An official VCU tradition, the Intercultural Festival celebrates cultural diversity. This day-long outdoor festival involves over 30 different VCU cultural student organizations and attracts the VCU and Richmond community, as well as people from all over the country.

The festival offers an array of activities, including performances, cultural displays and exhibits, VCU art student showcases, cuisines from local restaurants, a fashion show and a parade. Other exciting activities for visitors of all ages include dance lessons, arts and crafts from around the world, games and face painting. There are also chances to win grand prizes.

The 2006 ICF will be held on Saturday, April 9. For more information, please e-mail icf@vcu.edu.

MULTICULTURAL SPEAKER SERIES

The new series presents successful multicultural community leaders to discuss their rise to responsible leadership positions, the issues they faced, the lessons learned and the skills they developed to become a success. Successful programs for fall 2005 presented such profound leaders as Ms. Tonya Gonzalez, Manager of the Hispanic Liaison Office for the City of Richmond, and Mr. David Baugh, a well-known criminal defense lawyer.

We look forward to the continued success of the series with the following leaders for the Spring 2006 semester:

- 2/13 Sharon Dabney-Wooldridge**, President and CEO
The KleaneKare Team, Inc.
University Student Commons, Richmond Salons III-IV
4 p.m. – 6 p.m.
- 3/27 Judge Roger Gregory**
United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit Court
University Student Commons, Richmond Salons III-IV
4 p.m. – 6 p.m.
- 4/10 Kamini Pahuja**, CFO and Director of Finance
Alloy Polymers, Inc.
University Student Commons, Richmond Salons III-IV
4 p.m. – 6 p.m.

OMSA VOLUNTEER TEAM

Our team is still growing! We invite students to join us who are interested in assisting with various activities to gain experience in program development/implementation, networking and marketing. Volunteers also learn how to work with people who are culturally different. Please stop by the office or visit our Web site to join!!

DISCUSSION GROUPS

The Discussion Groups are designed to discuss current issues related to women and men of color. The focus will be placed on exploring racial, social, cultural issues and educational and career goals. The Women of Color Discussion Group will be held every Tuesday at 4 p.m., beginning February 7. The Men of Color Discussion Group will be held every Thursday at 5 p.m., beginning February 9. All meetings will be held in the OMSA office.

omsa-advised *Organizations*

African Student Union
Black Caucus
Black and Latino Student Alliance
Caribbean Student Organization
Chinese Student Association
Ethiopian Student Union
Filipino Americans Coming Together
Intercultural Festival Planning Board
Kuwaiti Student Organization
NAACP at VCU
Latino Student Association
South Asian Student Association
Vietnamese Student Association

MULTICULTURAL BOOK CLUB

Students have the opportunity to increase their knowledge of cultural and social issues through reading and discussing books in a relaxed interactive forum. The club meets every Tuesday at noon, beginning January 31. Space is limited; please sign up at www.omsa.vcu.edu, or call 828-6672. All meetings will be held in the OMSA office.

The book club will begin the spring semester with *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. In this debut novel, Hosseini accomplishes what very few contemporary novelists are able to do. He manages to provide an educational and eye-opening account of a country's political turmoil – in this case, Afghanistan – while also developing characters whose heartbreaking struggles and emotional triumphs resonate with readers long after the last page has been turned. And he does this on his first try.

BROWN BAG DISCUSSIONS

(Meets in the OMSA office, noon – 1 p.m.)

- 2/2 Dress Codes – From the Conference Room to the Club...**
What is Considered Appropriate in 2006?
- 2/16 The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement: Is Hip Hop Blowing it?**
Discussing the values of the civil rights movement and how they clash with the current trends and ideals of commercial hip hop music.
- 3/2 All Latinos aren't Mexican**
Discussing the differences among Hispanic ethnicities.
- 3/23 All Asians aren't Chinese**
Discussing the differences among Asian ethnicities.
- 4/6 TBA**
- 4/27 TBA**

OTHER SPRING 2006 EVENTS

- 3/28 OMSA Appreciation**
University Student Commons, Commonwealth Ballroom A-B
3 p.m. – 5 p.m.
- 4/5 Multicultural Academic Achievement Awards**
University Student Commons, Commonwealth Ballroom A-B
6 p.m. – 8 p.m.
- 4/27 PACME Awards**
University Student Commons, Richmond Salons I-IV
3 p.m. – 5 p.m.

staff *Information*

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