Dr. James Ochwa-Echel on Diversity

As a Faculty Fellow for diversity, I am always reminded of an OXFAM aid worker who observed “before people are willing to accept change in practice, most people not only have to learn the facts but also have to become convinced of the relevance of such innovations to their lives” (OXFAM, 1990). It’s therefore my task to provide our community with the information and facts that will hopefully make us all aware of the importance and relevance of diversity to us as individuals and to the work we do at Eastern Washington University. Information and facts come in various forms and formats. Diversity initiatives are one of the formats. The following were some of the initiatives taken in the fall quarter:

Community Outreach

- President Dr. Arevalo provided funds that enabled EWU to sponsor 30 students to attend the Third International Globalization, Diversity and Education Conference in Spokane from March 1-3, 2007. According to some students, the conference provided for very enlightening educational experiences. Students were grateful for the opportunity the president availed them and hope more opportunities will be provided to students to attend conferences in the future.

- Office of Career Services organized an alternative spring break as part of service learning and civic engagement. Students traveled to Louisiana which is one of the areas that was hit by Hurricane Katrina to offer their help to the victims of the hurricane. The project was planned in concert with Community Collaborations, a non-profit organization dedicated to linking college/university groups to volunteer experiences. According to Ms. Mary Kate Hawkins, the community engagement coordinator who organized and planned the project, “The mission of the alternative Spring break 2007 was to provide EWU students an alternative to the traditional spring break by engaging them in a challenging and fun opportunity to lead and learn through direct service experiences. Through these experiences students learn to reflect on the importance of social justice and civic engagement.” While in Louisiana, the students worked with the local community to restore several homes. They also toured New Orleans Museum and the New Orleans Animal Rescue Shelter. The hope is that the students will bring their experiences with civic engagement and social justice awareness back to our community, and be leaders that promote the importance of civic engagement to EWU students.

Visit the EWU Diversity webpage located under “Explore EWU” at www.ewu.edu.
The first annual Alternative Spring Break, sponsored by Career Services, was held this past March. Ten Eastern students and two staff members traveled down to Violet, Louisiana, to aid in the disaster relief efforts. The participants were fortunate to have the opportunity to meet local residents and gain knowledge on the work that still needs to be done in the areas hit hardest by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. During their time in Louisiana, the group aided the local community by working alongside homeowners in restoring their homes. This included the demolition of two homes infested with life-threatening black mold, composting two vacant lots to purify the contaminated soil and rebuilding family homes by sheet rocking. The last day was spent working with the public by conducting tours of the New Orleans Museum of Fine Arts and providing the human touch to animals displaced by the hurricanes at the New Orleans Animal Rescue Shelter. The EWU Alternative Spring Break was eye-opening for all participants and an experience that will not soon be forgotten. Because of the great response to this event, planning is already underway for a trip to Nicaragua next year.

Dr. Geneva Gay, professor of education at the University of Washington Seattle and internationally known multicultural educator, conducted a workshop entitled “Transforming Your Curriculum Through Multicultural Education” on Friday, March 9, 2007. The workshop was attended by over 50 participants, mostly faculty. Prior to the workshop, Dr. Gay met for breakfast with the president, deans and associate deans. Dr. Gay answered questions from the administrators on curriculum transformation and diversity issues as it pertains to EWU.

Further discussions were held between a select group of faculty, administrators and interim provost Dr. Ron Dalla to discuss the way forward in regard to curriculum transformation. The challenge for EWU is to move the idea of curriculum transformation from a workshop into the classroom.

Nineteen proposals were submitted for this year’s Board of Trustee’s Diversity Initiative Grants for the “short-turnaround” period; the projects of which should be completed by mid-June 2007. Thirteen out of the nineteen proposals were funded.

Please see: www.ewu.edu/x3400.xml.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my former student assistants Jordan Knox and Brittany Bobbit for the wonderful job they did during their tenure. I am also grateful for the contributions of the current student assistants Claudine Richardson and Julia Pitangui. Last but not least I want to encourage every one on campus to support the diversity initiatives by attending the upcoming events.

Thank you for your support.

Dr. James Ochwa-Echel
Faculty Fellow for Diversity.