Westmont strives to be a community informed and enriched by thoughtful and intentional study of and interaction with multiple cultures. As a liberal arts college rooted in Christ, we celebrate diversity as an aspect of God's creation; we strive to create community out of rich diversity as an aspect of building God's Kingdom in the world; we value the range of perspectives on the world that stimulates intellectual and personal growth; and we seek for faculty and staff to apprentice students in the art of dealing with diversity in constructive ways. It is an aim of Westmont to prepare graduates who will function intelligently, effectively and for the good of our increasingly intercultural world.

Racial Equality and Justice Trip
Seventeen Students and Two Parents Join Elena Yee in This Year’s Spring Break Trip to Mississippi and Alabama

In Mississippi, the group supported the work of the John M. Perkins Foundation’s Zechariah 8 project by painting houses and other related work. (Visit the Foundation’s website at www jmpf.org.) Daily Bible studies were led by Dr. John Perkins and Professor Lowell Noble on Christian community development and on the theology of oppression and justice. Evening discussions focused on the issues and realities of race relations, racial prejudice and racism.

Here are two reflections on the week of hard work, tough discussions and spiritual enrichment.

From junior Ashley Kraybill:
Most people don’t hear about oppression, poverty, or racial segregation that often, but I have been exposed to these issues throughout my life. Even so, previous experience and knowledge did not prepare me for the week in Jackson. I felt as if this week changed my perspective drastically, and was an incredible eye-opening experience of my own privileges, and the oppression of others. To understand the historical background of the sociological structure of our society is so important, and I think everyone should be required to learn about it in depth. To think that a mere 50-60 years ago the color of someone’s skin could make them less of a human, and deserving of the humiliation, segregation, and torture, slaves faced, is incomprehensible. Not until exposed to these realities through experience and discussion, rather than solely through books, could I come close to understanding its impact on people then and today. I learned about the world in a way I never have before, and felt as though my experiences will stay with me always.

Letter to Dr. Winter from Stan Fluitt, father of senior Sam Fluitt:
This past week I had the privilege of accompanying the Director of Intercultural Programs, Elena Yee, and 17 Westmont students to Jackson, Mississippi. I’d like to take this opportunity to express how impressed I was with the caliber of the men and women I spent the week with. Seeing first hand the pain and despair resulting from racism is very emotional. I was moved by their ability to articulate some very difficult feelings, their compassion and the depth of their convictions. I’ve worked for the Department of Corrections for 21 years and am surrounded by many men the same age as your students. It’s very easy to look around my job site and get discouraged. This past week has been inspiring and eye opening for me. I was blessed being able to interact with the students...Wayne Perkins, who was in charge of the work assignments in Jackson, told me several times how much he learned about the world in a way he never have before, and felt as though his experiences will stay with him always.

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From Long Range Plan Excerpts

Diversity Consultants

Last year, Provost Shirley Mullen and Vice President Jane Higa engaged consultants Derek McNeil and Brenda Salter McNeil to review from a diversity perspective a wide range of Westmont documents from our mission statement to our admissions brochures to our diversity statements. On March 26, 2007, Brenda spoke in chapel. She also met with key faculty, staff, and students to share what she and her husband observed about the college’s key institutional documents. She met with the Campus Diversity Committee and also representatives of the Long Range Plan. The McNeils’ observations were very helpful and will be considered by the Diversity Committee and the Long Range Planning Task Force as they develop future recommendations.
O

ne year ago at this time, Shirley Mullen reflected on the fact that the faculty search efforts in 2005-2006 did not result in hiring any women or persons of color. She shared with faculty that “The search season … revealed the range and depth of questions that remain for us to deal with in terms of how we see the overall institutional goals of diversity translated into our hiring practices.” To what extent are the questions she identified a year ago still unanswered?

1. In general, what would count as “success” in our hiring in the area of diversity?

2. When we speak of “diversity” what are we willing to see changed in our community? What are the limits beyond which change is viewed to be a compromising of mission?

3. How do we think that concerns of diversity should enter into the discussion of candidates? Is it a factor that operates when “all else is equal”? That is, does diversity enter only when there is a “tie” in other qualifications?

4. What about the range of “diversities” that inevitably enter into this discussion? For example, how do we weigh the value of diversity from an international context over against diversity within the U.S. experience? And would a candidate from say, Zimbabwe or South Africa, who was white “count” as much as a candidate from these countries who was black? And what about curricular diversity as opposed to diversity of ethnicity? What are the relative merits of a majority candidate who teaches say, African or Asian history, relative to an Asian candidate who studies Shakespeare? And does it matter whether a candidate of color is committed to being an activist on matters of diversity?

5. At a process level, it became very clear that we do not have structures in place that relate the overall institutional goal of diversity in hiring with the particularities of each search. Clearly, there is a range of views among individual faculty and among departments on these issues, and we have always allowed departments a “veto” in hiring. That is, while it has been understood that a Search Committee or the Provost’s office might not hire someone that a department wanted, it has equally been understood that a Search Committee or the Provost would not require a department to accept a candidate that it did not want.

6. And finally, at the process level, the question of working by consensus or vote became an important consideration in this year’s committees as never before. At least so far, we have determined that consensus is still desirable to move forward with a hiring.

Selected prayers from

2000 YEARS OF PRAYER

Compiled by Michael Counsell
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A prayer from Zaire

O, Chief of chiefs, we kneel before you in humble adoration. Like the bird in the branches we praise your heavenly glory. Like the village sharpening stone, you are always available and never exhausted. Remove, we pray, our sins that hide your face. You know that we are poor and simple; that we are often hungry while we work. Send rain at the right time for our gardens so that our food may not fail. Protect us from the cold and danger by night. Help us to stay healthy so that we may rejoice in our strength. May our villages be filled with children. Set us free from the fear of the fetish and the witch doctor and from all sorts of superstitions. Save the people, especially the Christian boys and girls in the villages, from the evil that surrounds them. All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ your Son.

A prayer for racial harmony by Oliver Warner (1903-76)

Father, you have made us all in your likeness and you love all whom you have made; suffer not our family to separate itself from you by building barriers of race or color. As your Son our Savior was born of a Hebrew mother, but rejoiced in the faith of a Syrian woman and of a Roman soldier, welcomed the Greeks who sought him, and suffered a man from Africa to carry his cross; so teach us to regard the members of all races as fellow heirs of the kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
No!!! Alana, you can't do that! You don’t understand what you are getting yourself into! You do realize that you are white, right? What you just joined is not only a dance class; that is the Mexican Mafia!

It is true, I didn't know what I was getting myself into when I signed up to be in Folklorico my sophomore year of high school. If I would have known that the darkening of a single bubble next to a word that I couldn't even pronounce entailed a full semester of traditional Mexican dancing, typically known for girls with massive skirts that are whipped around to create beautiful flowing circles of fabric, I am most positive that I would never have had the audacity to even entertain such a notion. Honestly, I didn’t know anyone who could properly pronounce the name of the class I was signing up for... folklorico, flameica, flalulu. Unconsciously I was setting myself up to enter into a thin bubble, which had never before been tampered with. Like the air-head blonde portrayed in countless chick-flicks, I was entranced with the possibility of taking a dance class with my classmates, but was completely oblivious to the cultural ramifications to my decision. The fault line that I was about to straddle was soon to create earthquakes in my life that would provide me with a new terrain for me to explore for the rest of my life.

I entered classroom 1305 of Central High School East Campus at exactly 1:55 pm on a warm Monday afternoon to attend my first folkloric dance class ever. The teacher, Sr. Jimenez, seemed to like things orderly; he assigned seats according to last names. In this all too familiar seating arrangement, I took my place in the back corner with the Zapatas, Sanchezes, and the last of the Quintenillas. As I sat in what felt like a blanket of seclusion, I looked around and quickly came to the conclusion that I was no longer at home. The colors of the faces I saw were not that of the friends I had been raised with during my sheltered childhood. As I analyzed the array of dark and light browns it started to feel like my skin was missing something, and it occurred to me that the missing characteristic was color.

From across the room a new scent entered my nostrils that was unfamiliar and slightly repulsive. It was the nauseating smell of chili sauce on plain chips that, from that day forward, will never be stamped out of my memory. Listening to the surrounding voices brought me the sense that you were roaming the streets of Guadalajara on a warm afternoon with people bustling about and talking with old friends from the past. The community that bordered me caught up with previous dance partners and reminisced about their eventful summer breaks. These conversations were a kind of tradition in school rooms after months of separation, but there was something that set these particular conversations apart from others I had participated in. I suddenly recognized that the grumble of noises that I was engulfed by were not in my native tongue; they were in Spanish.

While sitting in the midst of this foreign atmosphere, thoughts intruded on my mind at intense rates. Feelings of excitement, fear, intimidation, tidiness, amazement, and awkwardness filled my heart as I sat in silence. My senses were on the verge of overload as my mind tried to process the new stimuli. I could hear my friend's voice in my already heavy laden ear as I realized why he had called Folklorico the Mexican mafia.

My mind wandered as I stared at the sparkling face of the cholo sitting across from me, wondering if he would ever utter a word to me. Even if he did, would I understand it? My eyes then landed on a short teenager in the middle of the room with red, curly hair, an olive complexion and a goofy smile. I began to wonder if he would ever even know my name.

As the class volume continued to rise the teacher began to speak. While I am sure that half of the pupils were annoyed at this interruption, I was relieved. The alleviating part of my new dance teacher's introduction and speech was the normally taken for granted fact that it was in English. Sr. Jimenez proceeded to explain what states we would be doing dances from and what "zapatas" we needed to have by the following week. Though it was comforting to hear the only language I understood, it was now the concepts that were in a foreign language. "Mexican states" and "zapatas," what were these things? These new surroundings and languages led my mind to complete distraction while leaving a flavor of anticipation for what was to come lingering in my body.

Over the next few days of class I mustered up the courage to utter a few sentences to the fellow across from me. I came to know this man as Javier Sanchez and over the next couple of years I came to relate to him not only as a dancer, but also as a friend. Luis, the intriguing guy with the red hair from across the room, not only came to know my name but became one of my best companions.

The amazing dancing skills that I learned in Folklorico are nothing to be sneered at either. I was awarded the privilege of dancing with the Garcia sisters who were outstanding dancers, seeing as they had been practically born with zapatas de Folklorico (dance shoes) on their feet. I learned how to move my feet faster than I ever could have imagined possible. Soon the differences that were so pronounced the first day of class began to fade away into the Mexican music and monotonous tapping of feet.

I took a journey into a new world every time my feet hit the cold tile of room 1305. This world was uniquely different from the one I had grown up in, but it was still one in which I belonged. Though people watching from the outside may have thought that I stuck out like a giraffe in a family of mice, I came to know better. According to my companeros (classmates), when it came to twirling skirts and stomping feet with rhythm on a hard wood floor, I was just as Mexican as the next cholo.

The education that took place over the next four semesters not only popped a cultural boil that had been festering at Central High School for years, it altered my future and realigned the backbone of my thinking forever. At the end of my high school career I was able to scan the packed Folklorico dance floor and instead of hearing language that was not my own, I heard the laughter, clomoring and, to Sr. Jimenez’s dismay, excited screams of valued friends. Instead of staring at faces that contained more pigment than mine, I saw faces that had all of the same features as mine: a nose, mouth, eyes, and ears. The scent of chili sauce on chips still burnt my nostrils as I breathed in, but instead of the stench being from afar, it was coming from the open bag that was resting in my hand. I no longer wondered

continued under Mafia page 4
Resident Assistants Learn by Playing
by Associate Dean of Residence Life Stu Creek

Residence Life at Westmont has had a longstanding commitment to developing residence hall communities where all students can call the place they live “home.” Part of this commitment is found in our desire and growing ability to hire RAs who represent the diversity found at Westmont, and also can be successful in facilitating a broad and deep sense of community in the residence halls. We know that a key factor in determining whether or not they will be successful in this endeavor is the extent to which they are aware of and sensitive to issues of diversity and cultural difference.

With this in mind, we have implemented a few games or exercises as part of an RA’s training designed to explore and learn about issues such as: culture, race, ethnicity, and privilege. We are also able to help RAs develop an understanding of how our careful attention to these issues can positively impact our efforts toward creating a sense of belonging for all.

The first game is called BaFa BaFa. In the game, the staff is broken into two different groups and put into two separate rooms. Each group is then given instructions on developing its own unique culture complete with their own values, norms, lines of power, and unique communication patterns. Once these cultures are developed, a few RAs at a time are selected from each group to be “visitors” to these other cultures. After a few minutes interacting with the other group, the “visitors” return to their own group to report about what they discovered on their trip. This process happens several times until either all the students have “visited” the other culture, or they have become so frustrated that they just give up trying to understand the other culture. Through the course of game students discover that the two cultures are so different from one another that it is difficult to even understand what is happening in the culture, much less participate in it. While being fun to play, the BaFa BaFa game is also a great way for RAs to become more aware and sensitive to the challenges and feelings one might have in trying to be a part of a community that has a different culture than their own.

In the fall semester as part of the RA class, we do an exercise called The Race of Equality. In this exercise, all the RAs are asked to stand in a line and continue looking straight ahead while facing the same direction. Then the facilitator reads a series of questions focused on race and socio-economic status and asks them to either take a step back or forward if it applies to them. One example of a question would be, “If you can easily find a band aid the same color as your skin, take a step forward.” After all the questions are read, the RAs are instructed to observe where they are relative to others in the room. While this exercise can be very emotionally challenging for the participants, it does open up opportunities for conversation around issues of white privilege, race, and socio-economic differences. This exercise is especially important because it gives space to explore not only how our varied backgrounds and experiences shape us differently, but also how to provide ways to embrace these differences in a healthy way as a community.

Of course, this isn’t the only way we work with RAs to equip them to be able to do their best to foster a sense of belonging for every resident in their hall, but I hope that sharing these examples at least gives a glimpse into how we are modeling for one another the importance of engaging in learning experiences that help us discover new perspectives and ways of being in the world that—as we embrace them—give real richness and depth to our community life together.

On The Web!
Check out what you can access via Westmont’s Web page on diversity:

- Diversity-related excerpts from the Long Range Plan
- The Annual Report on Diversity
- Information about Intercultural Programs
- Diversity in Evangelical Higher Education
- Links to diversity in higher education Web sites.

Bookmark the site and return to it periodically to see what’s new!

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Helen Rhee
Bill Wright
Elena Yee

Mafia cont’d from page 3
if the guy across from me was ever going to talk to me; I already knew his life story. I came to understand that though we were shaded differently on the outside, had distinct backgrounds, and had certain preferences on how things should be done, we all had an intense passion that enabled us to work together and impact the world around us. These people were no longer the Mexican mafia, because the Mexican mafia was a name made up by judgmental people for a group that was not understood, instead they were just ordinary people; people who were ultimately on the same team as everyone else.