SUNY Cortland is making a continuous effort to increase diversity on campus. Programs like C.U.R.E., E.O.P., and study abroad help to bring together students of different backgrounds to promote and educate about diversity. We sat down with Dr. Davis Russell, SUNY Cortland’s Provost to discuss diversity on campus. Dr. Davis Russell is the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. She has been in this position since July of 2001. Some of her responsibilities include maintaining academic standards within the college, and representing the college at various SUNY, regional, and national meeting. Dr. Davis Russell is the first black woman to become the Provost at our institution.

What can you say about diversity on campus now, and how has the make-up of the student body changed on campus since you’ve been here?

Diversity is one of the goals of the institution and we want to make SUNY Cortland more diverse. Student diversity has increased but faculty diversity has not been as rapid. When I first came here a goal was set to increase student diversity at least 10% a year and we have met or exceeded that.

Why do you believe Urban Education is important?

As an educational institution, one that places a great deal of emphasis on preparing teachers for the future, there are a lot of our talented students in urban education. I do not think we know enough about urban issues and how to educate urban children. It is important as an institution to grow in that area and hire more faculty who are professionals in urban education because I think we have a contribution to make to the urban areas.

How do you envision the C.U.R.E. program in the future?

I think C.U.R.E. is one of the best models we have on this campus for a number of reasons. One, the way it’s structured, that it provides students with the kind of attention that they need. It creates a community for them within the larger community so that they feel a part of a smaller unit within the campus and it provides the kind of guidance that students need. So it’s a model that I wish we could multiply across the campus.

What advice can you give to future educators about teaching diversity in the classroom?

One of the pieces of advice I could give is that teachers learn more about the children in their classroom rather than operating on stereotypes to get to know their children: to get to know their learning style, to get to know what their needs are and then to structure different kinds of learning experiences to address those needs.
Interview with Dr. Davis-Russell (Cont.)

Campus that you think facilitate student diversity? What efforts do you think have been most effective?

There are a number of things we can do. At the student level, I think we’ve begun to do some of those things that are targeting the high schools where there are great numbers of students of diverse areas and so we have admission counselors going into those areas. In terms of faculty diversity, one of the things I’ve recommended to the deans is that the deans and their department chairs begin to establish relationships with universities that graduate large numbers of diverse doctoral students because once those relationships are established they will know us and when we’re searching they can direct their graduates to us. We will be coming up with a set of strategies to look at diversity in terms of representation of different groups, curriculum, also looking at the campus climate. I think it is insufficient for us to bring faculty and students here and not work on climate issues. The climate has to be one in which we will feel welcome and people feel at home. We will be looking at those issues as a group. We have committed ourselves to meeting regularly to find a way to do this. Targeting recruitment of students has been quite effective and admissions had been quite good in that area. I think we have to do more targeting in terms of faculty and staff, we have to make individual contacts. They prove to be much more useful. One of the things I suggested to the deans, for example, is to send faculty to the main conference and national associations of educators of color. If we have people recruiting, we increase our chances of getting faculty of color to come to the campus. I would like to see more student-to-student interaction. I was visiting with the student government leaders at the President’s house and when asked to respond to what things we can improve on campus they all said diversity. It’s not enough to bring us all on campus and we operate in our separate groupings. We have some challenges ahead of us.

Graduate Update: Tory Walley

Tory Walley graduated from Cortland and the C.U.R.E. program in May of 2004. He is currently finishing his Master’s degree in Teaching of Literacy at Columbia University in NYC. Tory writes, “The department is small. I have five professors that teach all my classes... including the head of the Curriculum and Teaching Department and literacy guru, Lucy Calkins. The classes all focus on urban education and the professors interests in literacy are very diverse.”

Tory decided to go straight from college to graduate school. He says, “I felt I needed more studies in the teaching of literacy before I began teaching my own classroom.” Tory chose Columbia for two reasons. “I chose Columbia because John Gaynor (K/1 teacher at Blodgett School in Syracuse) was a tremendous influence on forming my teaching beliefs. His classroom is based on the work of Lucy Calkins and Columbia University had her,” and because it is in New York City. Tory is happy he chose Columbia and is enjoying everything that New York City has to offer. “[In] New York City urban education is all around you. Because it is in NYC, Teacher’s College gets big names such as Jonathan Kozol, Gregory Mitchie and others to come.” The downside of life in the big city, he says, “...is the cost of living is more than triple that of Cortland.”

Tory says that he feels prepared for the challenges of graduate school. “Classes at Teachers College are hard, but the preparation at Cortland helped. The anthropology minor has given me the background to understand a lot of ethnographic research...the biggest benefit of being in C.U.R.E. was that the C.U.R.E. classes developed my ability to think critically. That is one thing that I see being taught here in every class.” He also has met challenges at Columbia. “Many of the students are very competitive...the student emphasis on grades makes for a high-stress environment at times. The standards of achievement are high.”

Tory encourages anyone who wants a Master’s in Literacy to apply to Teachers College at Columbia. “There is a scholarship that pays for everything with the commitment to teaching in NYC for five years. I will help any interested C.U.R.E. student try to find a scholarship here”
“Mr. Gaynor, Mr. Gaynor, he’s bothering me.” Those are the welcoming words I heard right before I took that first step into Mr. Gaynor’s K-1 class. Working in an inner-city school you come to learn many things about how you yourself feel about helping others, and about important issues such as linguistic diversity. Thursday September 14, 2004 was our first time going to spend the day at Blodgett. All I can recall racing through my mind is “What if the children don’t like me or what if I do not know how to interact with them correctly?” I had not spent a whole day with more than two children at a time since I was working with eight and nine year olds in a summer camp when I was 15 and 16 years old. Holler If You Hear Me by Gregory Mitchie was the only book I had ever read that dealt with issues of urban education. I was scared to think that some of the children in the K-1 class would be like the kids in the book.

Arriving at Blodgett I hid away all fears and negative expectations and walked in with a big smile and my head held high. The students had just finished their math time and Mr. Gaynor gave them free time before library. This gave me the chance to go around and introduce myself to the children. I had a great time watching the girls play house and the boys build bridges with the blocks. Just after my first day being there with the K-1 class I knew for sure that teaching was for me.

My favorite experience of my five weeks with Mr. Gaynor’s class was our time in the park after they had gone apple picking. I remember looking at each student getting off the bus with their bags full of apples eager to tell their stories of the hay ride to the apple orchard and the time they spent watching the apple cider being made. After lunch they had time to run around and get rid of all their energy on the swings and diving into dirt box. I was astonished to see the kids had no remorse for their clothes getting dirty. They continued to jump into the dirt and tackle each other in the wet grass. I hadn’t laughed as hard as I did that day in a very long time.

After my five weeks I have learned so much about what it means to be a good teacher. I’ve seen a good teacher really takes the time to get to know his/her students and their families. It’s very important for the teacher to have family support when teaching a young child. I also learned the importance of building strong self-esteem. When Mr. Gaynor sees that one of his students is doing exactly what they are supposed to he says, “Oh thank you for sitting quietly after I had asked the class the first time” or “Good job making your W’s.” These small compliments to his students make them feel so special and help build a stronger student teacher relationship.

As my next five weeks with the sixth grade approach I hope that I will be able to learn just as much as I have with this class. I am eager to learn more about what it is like teach in an urban school. I really did look forward to Thursdays with Mr. Gaynor and hope that when I become a teacher I can feel like that every day about my job. It will be something that I know that I love to do and will have the best time doing it.
The Start of Who I Would Become
Ana Elisa Rodriguez

Dancing in my mother’s womb
I felt the beats run through me
Like a drum beating my culture
Letting me know I was alive
I was a little habichuela
Growing in mamá’s belly
Taking in everything before
I was let out into the world

I was born to the sounds of Salsa
Música Latina
I was given a lot of flavor
With a little comida hispana
And all this the start of
Who I would become

And now I dance
To those same rhythms
I hear them in my head
Because I have chosen not to forget

Where I’m From

Central Islip a.k.a. C.I.
Not just a town
But also a neighborhood
The place where I was raise.
Not just me,
But eleven others, my brothers and
sister,you see.

Many adventures and many fun
times
Walkin’ to the corner store with only
a dime
Shinin’ up my church shoes
For church on Sunday mornin’
Stay up on Saturday night
Until the crack of dawnin’

Running the perilous streets
I was the craziest tomboy
A basketball was my favorite toy
Going to the park, getting’
schooled by the boys

I played ball with all my might
Then runnin’ home tryin’ to beat
the street lights
There are a lot more memories
and times of fun
But my time is up now.
So I gotta run.

Rose Graham