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Crossing Borders: Dickinson, Dillard and Xavier Students Participate in a Cultural Exchange

Fall/Winter 2004



Two students from the University of Yaoundé help prepare a meal for the Crossing Borders students.

By Mara Waldhorn '06

Crossing Borders is an interdisciplinary exchange program which brings students together from diverse racial, ethnic, social, religious, and economic backgrounds in order to create social awareness and understanding in the US. Dickinson College, a historically white institution, has paired with Xavier and Dillard Universities (both historically black universities). This is the third year the Crossing Borders Program has been launched through Dickinson and Xavier. This year, Dillard was a first time participant.

The current Crossing Borders group is comprised of ten students from Dickinson, six from Dillard, and three from Xavier. The spring 2004 semester kicked off the program as the ten Dickinson representatives migrated from their quaint collegiate setting in Carlisle, PA to experience

four months at either Dillard or Xavier in animated and boisterous New Orleans. Six Dickinson students spent the semester at Dillard, while four attended Xavier.

In New Orleans, the Crossing Borders group met every other Saturday for three hours, participating in the class, *New Orleans: Gateway to the World*, which depicted the history of New Orleans, the city's cultural diversity, and its uniqueness from other large cities in the US. Students had the privilege of being taught by an array of visiting professors and lecturers. Additionally, the group was invited to attend a New Orleans-style meal (complete with fried chicken and fish, gumbo, jambalaya and red beans and rice) at the city's famous Dooky-Chase restaurant. It was here that students were graced by words of wisdom from Leah Chase, the restaurant's owner, well known in New Orleans for both her culinary talent and community involvement.

Other group excursions from which students benefited involved a day touring historic plantation homes as well as an adventure exploring New Orleans swampland. The spring semester gave Dickinson students not only the opportunity to enrich their education by attending school in a racially, socially, and culturally different atmosphere, but it also let them experience the city, where their stay overlapped with Mardi Gras and Jazz Fest.

Dickinsonian Mara Waldhorn explains what she got out of her experience as one of the few white students at Dillard University:

People find it odd when I tell them that I felt more at ease walking along Dillard's campus than I ever have at

Dickinson. Though my experience at an HBCU was my first as a racial minority, I have always felt out of place in the educational environments in which I have attended. Perhaps, to feel awkward and alone is part of growing up. We all may go through such phases, but in New Orleans I felt free of these internal tensions.

Dillard provided me with the realization that with different races come different cultures. I was always taught that we live in a world of injustice, but I would never have been able to comprehend racial difference without immersing myself in a culture so close to home, yet so foreign to the lifestyle in which I have grown up. Coming back to Dickinson with this immersion experience, taking courses about race as a social construction, and racial representations throughout the media and pop culture, has helped me put my time at Dillard into perspective.

It would be ridiculous to say that I now have all the answers to ridding the world of the racial smog which surrounds us. However, I have begun to realize that as a white American, who was born into privilege, I have a social obligation to use my knowledge to find constructive methods of improving race



Crossing Border students boarding a boat to travel to local pygmy village.

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relations in the US.

Part two of the Crossing Borders program uprooted Dickinson, Dillard and Xavier students from their home institutions and placed them in Cameroon, West Africa from July 6-August 7, 2004. The first week of this journey was spent traveling through Cameroon to cities, exotic beaches, Mt. Cameroon, lava flows, a chimpanzee rehabilitation center, small villages, museums, cloth markets, and faun palaces.

For the remaining four weeks of the trip, students lived in Dickinson's housing in Cameroon's capital city, Yaoundé. They attended an English 212 course entitled *Writing About Crossing Borders* where they read Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Catherine Dettwyler's *Dancing Skeletons*, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in order to get a sense of West African culture, the differences between the US and Cameroon, and the process of doing ethnography. Cameroonian students and professors from the University of Yaoundé also participated in the class, providing a native perspective on national issues such as AIDS, the role women play in society, the environment, and education.

A month in Cameroon enabled students to bond through exciting, yet sometimes unfamiliar, excursions and situations. Hiking in knee deep mud and water through the Cameroonian equatorial forest in search of a local pygmy tribe; learning how to prepare traditional Cameroonian meals (frying plantains, fish, and chicken over an outdoor fire); and leaving footprints along a black sand beach were some of the unforgettable experiences which Crossing Borders students enjoyed.

Dillard Junior, Ashley Wilson was able to conceptualize her status as an American after the time she spent in Cameroon. She explains:

One of the moments in Cameroon that really helped me to step out and see the differences in culture was a visit to the United States Embassy. Three of us went to take part in a pre-departure



Crossing Borders Students, Professor Robert Ness of Dickinson (far left), University of Yaoundé students, and Professor Edward O. (Teddy) Ako of the University of Yaoundé (far right) pose with native Cameroon dance troupe after a performance at their farewell ceremony.

orientation for Cameroonian students traveling to the U.S. to study abroad. It was interesting to realize the small things mentioned in the orientation in order to avoid cultural snafus. The program leader talked about Americans being uncomfortable with silence-always feeling the need to talk and entertain. She also talked about how we say things we do not mean like "See you later," which could mean later that day or later that year. I never realized the distinctive quirks and pet peeves that define us as Americans.

To complete the exchange, the students from Dillard and Xavier spent the 2004 fall semester at Dickinson. Here, the group participated in the final class *Conflict and Social Change in the US*, which dealt with important events in America's history that have molded the nation's current racial identity. Students took trips to Harpers Ferry, West Virginia (location of John Brown's raid, and important aspects of African American and civil war history) as well as the museum, battlefields, monuments, and cyclorama at the Gettysburg National Civil War Park. They focused on racial representation at each location and

compared it to the current aspects of inequality in America today. Topics for the final project in the class included papers about the unsung heroes of the Civil Rights Movement, the country's perceptions of HBCUs, and a video documentary about students' as well as the US' perceptions of Africa.

Through Dickinson sponsored trips, Dillard and Xavier students had the opportunity to visit east coast cities such as Baltimore, Washington DC, and Philadelphia. The Crossing Borders Program arranged a trip to New York City to bring the group together one last time for a night on the town and to the Broadway musical *42nd Street*.

Edriane Brooks, a Junior at Dillard, found her time at Dickinson to be the most difficult aspect of Crossing Borders; however, the experience has made her realize how much she appreciates her home institution.

Before I came to Dickinson, I thought it was going to remind me of my high school, which was predominantly white. In reality, it is more separated here than it was in high school. My classes have been okay this semester. I thought because I would be attending

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Left to Right: Sarah Yeskel, Jasmine Robinson from Xavier and Edriane Brooks from Dillard conduct an oral interview at the Community Studies Center.

such a “prestigious” university that the classes were going to be much more challenging. I joined the African American Society at Dickinson which was fun and exciting. I also participated in the Phon-a-thon, which was really nice because I was able to meet different people. The thing I miss the most about Dillard is the feeling of being in a large family. At Dillard, I feel like I have many people who care about me and support me on a personal and academic level. When I walk around Dickinson, I feel like I am invisible to others. I enjoyed Dickinson's campus and learning from the different faculty members I did speak with. Even though Dickinson promotes diversity non-stop, I wish it didn't seem like the races are so segregated.

After talking to most of this year's Crossing Borders participants about their experiences throughout the past year, it has become clear that this program is not an easy one. The challenges that both white and black students faced individually and within a dynamic group setting have been powerful and character changing. It is important that we acknowledge the students who participate in Crossing Borders, because they have begun to acquire knowledge which will help to advance progressive racial opinion and thought across the globe.



Crossing Borders students in New Orleans with the well-known owner of the Dooky Chase Restaurant, Leah Chase, after a meal of traditional New Orleans cuisine.

Dickinson Students at the Pennsylvania Sociological Society: Equality, Democracy, Education

Katherine Wood '05

This past October in Philadelphia six students and one professor represented Dickinson College and the Community Studies Center at the 54th annual conference of the Pennsylvania Sociological Society. Each student planned and delivered a presentation based on previous original research. Most of the projects were part of collaborative research and experiential programs between various Dickinson social science departments (such as sociology, international studies, anthropology, and American studies) and the Community Studies Center.

The conference theme was “Equality, Democracy, Education: 50 Years After *Brown vs. Board of Education* and Beyond”, in recognition of the fifty-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's momentous ruling against school segregation. Appropriately, the Society invited Dr. Patricia Hill Collins as the keynote

speaker. Dr. Hill Collins, originally from Philadelphia, is Professor and Chair of the Department of African-American Studies at the University of Cincinnati. She is also the author of several well-known books on black feminism, race, class, and the quest for social justice. Her captivating address, “From White to *Brown and Back: Colorblind Racism as a System of Power*”, analyzed the lack of progress in creating a truly equal America, in public education or anywhere else. She questioned the current approach in American racial politics that attempts to ignore our differences in its attempt to create equality, and criticized the idea that racism is somehow created through merely talking about race.

Valerie Harmon, presenting on Saturday morning, touched on many of the same themes that Dr. Hill Collins later discussed in her address. In fact, at one point Dr. Hill Collins referred directly to Valerie's paper, which described her personal experiences as a participant in Dickinson's Crossing Borders program. This interdisciplinary program brings together black and white students from Dickinson and two historically black colleges in New Orleans to study diversity of race, gender, and class. Crossing Borders students spend time together over the summer studying at the Dickinson site in Cameroon, West Africa. Later, all of the participants spend a semester in New Orleans and a semester here in Carlisle, taking a class together on diversity issues.

During another morning session, which examined narratives and memoirs relating to African-American life, achievement, and education, I presented a family history based on interviews with Major Robert Owens of Carlisle, the first African-American ever to be elected to the Carlisle Borough Council in 1987. My research was carried out as part of an oral history study of Carlisle's African-American community, a joint Sociology Department and Community Studies Center effort.

In the afternoon, Robert Shaw,

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Student presenters, Katie Wood and Robert Shaw, prepare for the PSS Conference at the Community Studies Center.

Mara Waldhorn, Sarah Hiller, and Danielle Rosenau presented their work during the Student Paper Competition. Danielle, the first Dickinson student to present, summarized her research as a summer intern where she helped prepare a hospital for a transition to a private-room-only facility. Her research showed that hospitals that only have private rooms have better care and better patient satisfaction. A few other important issues relating to patient satisfaction were air quality and ventilation, lighting, nurses, noise level, and institutional culture, among others.

Later on, Robert, Mara and Sarah presented the results of their research as part of the 2003 American Mosaic, a program supervised by the Community Studies Center and the Dickinson departments of history, American studies, anthropology, and sociology. In the fall of 2003, students in the Mosaic did fieldwork with Mexican migrant workers in Adams County, Pennsylvania. Later in the semester they carried out more fieldwork in small communities in the state of Michoacán, western Mexico, the home of many of the Adams County migrants. These three students presented the results of their field research projects in Mexico and Adams County.

Robert Shaw returned to Mexico with Dickinson's semester program in Querétaro in the spring of 2004, the semester after the Mosaic, and spent part of the summer of 2004 following up on his initial research in Michoacán. He did a presentation on the economic and developmental impact of circular migration on three small communities in Michoacán. Mara focused on the ways that children experience migration and cultural adaptation, both in the United States and in Mexico; much of her research was based on case studies and interviews of a small number of migrant youth. Sarah researched the return of migrants from the States to their homes in Mexico and how this impacts two particular Michoacán communities. She paid particular attention to the tendency among successful returned migrants to use their money to build new homes for themselves and their families.

Recently, Robert Shaw was named the winner of the student paper competition, with Mara Waldhorn a close second. I believe I can safely venture to speak for all of the participants and say that our trip was a great success, and a very productive way to become involved in the professional application of sociology to the world around us. (We had a lot of fun, too.)

Diversity Monologues: Raising Diversity Awareness at Dickinson through Creative and Artistic Performances

By Makeeba Browne '05

As part of a longer week of Multicultural events, Dickinson College saw its second year of the Diversity Monologues this November. Multicultural week is a series of events

that emphasizes diverse cultures at Dickinson College through a series of different events including dinners offering food from a diverse range of cultures, the Multicultural Expo, which included vendors offering arts and crafts from different cultures, and a talent show.

Michael Benitez, who is now serving his second year as director of the Office of Diversity Initiatives, brought the program to campus last year. "The program provides a different learning experience for Dickinson College staff, faculty, and the college community as a whole," he said. "It provides a different way of learning about diverse issues."

The Dean of Students, the Associate Provost for Academic campus Life, the Community Studies Center, the Asbell Center, and the Departments of Sociology, American Studies, and Economics all sponsored the Diversity Monologues as many believe this event to be a vital and rewarding addition to Dickinson's campus. The Diversity Monologues is a contest designed to emphasize the creative and artistic talents of Dickinson students who are passionate about the issues of diversity. It was designed essentially to raise awareness about diversity from an imaginative standpoint, moving away from lectures and workshops that usually accompany messages about diversity. Students, then, are able to compete with their peers, performing a creative piece of their choosing. Three winners are then selected and awarded cash prizes by a panel of judges that included various staff and faculty at Dickinson.

On November 11th, the students selected performed their monologues in front of an audience of peers, faculty, staff, prospective students, and the Carlisle community. Various students from the Office of Diversity Initiatives served as the hosts for the evening. In the opening remarks, Julia Deupree '07, stated "the purpose of the event is to spread the message of diversity and help further understanding. Diversity is misunderstood but affects all our lives.

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Lauren Smith '06



Caldwell Gaffney '05



Gabrielle Joffie '07



Evan Ross '08

The competition and evening as a whole express student creativity and talent from a global perspective." The performers for the evening included Lauren Smith '06, Caldwell Gaffney '05, Gabrielle Joffie '07, Evan Ross '08, Makeeba Browne '05, Valerie Harmon '05, Rick Raymond '07, and Ebony Hawkins '06, a visiting student from Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana as part of Dickinson College's Crossing Borders Program.

The student performances were followed by key note speaker Tim Wise, one of the nations leading anti-racism lecturers, during which he discussed the importance of addressing racism as a real problem that must be recognized as such in order for the racist structures within the United States to disappear. He called on all members of the audience and society as a whole to combat racial injustice when it was presented to them within their daily lives.

The winners of the 2004 Diversity Monologues contest were Lauren Smith with "Glad I'm Black,"

Gabrielle Joffie, with "Privilege from the Eye of the Beholder," and Rick Raymond with a piece about the duality of his life in an urban setting and his life as a Dickinson College student. The performers were glad to be given the forum to perform something of importance in a creative setting. Smith stated, "a lot of people view being black in a negative way. I wanted to celebrate the positive without needing a reason or a special occasion." Other students, like Gabrielle Joffie, wanted to use this forum as a place to spread a political message. "I wanted to get a message out about white students," says Joffie. "I overheard students saying 'Dickinson is so diverse,' and 'there is no race problem at Dickinson'. I wanted the minority students to hear what whites were saying; I wanted to assume the role of a typical white American at a typical liberal arts school. I wanted minority students to see both sides. I was not trying to sympathize but to understand the problems that come with difference so that we can fix them." And for Rick

Raymond, the monologues was simply a place for him to express some of the issues pertaining to his daily life. "It was an interesting aspect that I wanted to share with people. I wanted to create a window of opportunity so people could see what I went through and where I came from." Many of the students who performed were somewhat disappointed in the lack of diversity in the turn out for the event, but all thought that the program was a good idea and were proud to take a part in the activities. Joffie states, "I would have rather there be a lot of different kinds of people who performed rather than just black students, maybe some white students. Diversity isn't just about race; it means a lot of different kinds of people. I think people are reluctant because they think its something that relates only to black students. Most of the audience was black as well, so it was like preaching to the choir." However Lauren Smith stated "It's a good mixture of people writing and performing, and it's very personal because it's all you! People take things more seriously when it's personal."

Makeeba Browne '05



Valerie Harmon '05



Rick Raymond '07



Ebony Hawkins '06



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University of Kentucky Professor Brings *Hollywood Canteen* to Dickinson

By Mara Waldhorn '06

An all campus power outage did not stop Sherrie Tucker from speaking with a group of interested student ethnographers at Dickinson College on December 3rd. American Studies Professor Cotton Seiler and the Community Studies Center brought Tucker to campus to talk with his 302 Fieldwork Methods class. Tucker's lecture was open to all members of the Dickinson community, and seemed to be well received by those who attended.

Professor Sherrie Tucker grew up in the San Francisco Bay area of California, where she received her undergraduate as well as two Master degrees (Creative Writing and Women's Studies) from San Francisco State University. She completed her doctorate at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 2000, Tucker published her first book: *Swing Shift: "All-Girl" Bands of the 1940s* which followed the same research and topics as her PhD dissertation. In an informal interview Tucker explained that she first became interested in women jazz musicians while taking a course about the history of African American women from her dissertation advisor, activist Angela Y. Davis.

Tucker is a Professor at the University of Kansas, and was the fourth recipient of the Louis Armstrong Visiting Professorship in the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia University, New York, New York. She is teaching and conducting research at Columbia during the 2004-2005 academic year, and is currently working on her second book: *Dance Floor Democracy: the Social Geography of Memory at the*



Hollywood Canteen. It is this current research which she presented in her lecture at Dickinson.

In introducing Tucker, Cotton Seiler explained to the audience that her work represents "the best blending of theoretical research with ethnography." Tucker gave an overview of her current research explaining that the Hollywood Canteen was a well-known night club in Los Angeles, California where WWII military personnel were entertained by employees of the motion picture industry. Most of the entertainers and hostesses were secretaries for Hollywood stars and film industries, as well as movie extras and non-mainstream performers known at the canteen as "starlets". A bulk of Tucker's research is comprised of the oral history interviews which she conducted with women who worked at the Hollywood Canteen.

Hostesses danced with the soldiers who came into the night club. An important aspect of Tucker's research is the issue of segregation at the Hollywood Canteen, and whether or not it was common to see integrated dancing or mingling within the social setting. Most of her white informants explained that they can remember the dance floor at the Hollywood Canteen as being integrated, while blacks responded that it was segregated. One white informant explained that there was no racial tension when dancing at

the Canteen because "race was not yet a problem in the US," while some of Tucker's black informants recalled integrated dance couples being broken up by military force.

Of Tucker's entire informant pool, only one white woman can recall dancing with a black soldier. She explained that she came to the Canteen to dance, and thus did so with anyone who asked her. However, she also explained that she was confronted by other hostesses asking her why she was dancing with a black man. During World War II, Los Angeles was not an integrated city; thus, it seems unlikely that the regulations of segregation would not have been implemented in the Hollywood Canteen.

This question of integration, along with others posed by Tucker, are difficult to answer based on the qualitative methodology she used. Memory serves a large part in recreating the atmosphere of a nightclub which thrived nearly sixty years ago. She discussed what she calls "the national memory". She asked: Do interview respondents remember the experiences they had at the canteen? Or, do they recollect certain images based on the way society was constructed at the time, and the way perceptions of the 1940's have shifted since then?

2005 Patagonia Mosaic

By Lauren Cencic '05

Our third Patagonia Mosaic took professors and students back to Argentina. The student-faculty research team is composed of nine students and Professors Marcelo Borges of the History Department, Susan Rose of the Sociology Department; and John Osborne of the History Department. The group left for Comodoro Rivadavia, Argentina on January 2nd and returned to Dickinson campus on the 21st. Comodoro Rivadavia and the surrounding area are composed primarily of company towns built around

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the oil industry. The Patagonia Mosaic studies the fascinating history of immigration to the area as well as life in these company towns. The mosaic participants were involved in multi-faceted research including bilingual oral history interviews, archival research, and examining personal family records and memorabilia. The trip again included host family stays for the students. Meetings and trainings began during early December to help students plan for the trip as well as gain technical skill in scanning, filming, and interviewing techniques. Both the group and the people of Comodoro Rivadavia are very excited about the project which continues the research of the earlier two mosaics which were held in 2001 and 2003. Students and faculty returned to campus to continue as a class in which the gathered information will be organized and the students will complete research projects. Two students have also registered for an additional independent research component to the mosaic in which they will work on larger research projects for additional credit. Information and student projects from the first two mosaics can be found at <http://deila.dickinson.edu/patagonia>.

The Geology and Sociology of Disasters

By Lauren Cencic '05

A new exciting January study abroad program for Dickinson students began this year. Sixteen students joined Sociology Professor Daniel Schubert and Geology Professor Benjamin Edwards for a research project on the island of Montserrat from January 8, 2005 to January 22nd. The island of Montserrat has three volcanoes including one which is still active.

The island has suffered two major eruptions in fairly recent history, in 1995 and 1997, which have left the island devastated. The economy has been destroyed and the population has dropped from twelve thousand in the 1990s to three to four thousand today due to emigration. Every year, the rain brings down more debris from the mountain which creates continued havoc on the island. The main tourist and agricultural area in the south has been completely covered and destroyed. This program is an exciting blend of sociology and geology in which all of the students are involved with both researching individual and collective trauma and studying cataclysmic events. Students conducted an oral history of a place, ethnographic research, comparing rock samples of the three volcanoes which are of varying ages, as well as did some active monitoring of the volcano while in Montserrat. The group spent the first week in Montserrat living in the wooden emergency shelters and stayed in villas for the second week. The two course mosaic (one course in Sociology and one in Geology) continues throughout the spring semester.

Upcoming Event...



The Central Pennsylvania Consortium will host the Africana Studies Conference and Black Cultural Arts Weekend at Franklin & Marshall College on April 1-2, 2005.

Representations of Blackness: Performing Africa in the Diaspora and the Diaspora in Africa

By Lauren Cencic '05

Blackness as a social or racial category and its representation will be explored in an upcoming conference brought about in part by Dickinson College. The event is being planned by the Central Pennsylvania Consortium which has been promoting institutional collaboration between its members, Dickinson, Franklin & Marshall, and Gettysburg colleges, since 1968. This year's conference is designed to build upon last year's which looked at the globalization of African peoples. The conference will be held at Franklin & Marshall College on April 1-2, 2005 and will examine the ways in which social identities are performed in Africa and its Diaspora. Any and all forms of blackness will be considered in the conference which will be a unique combination of panels, plenary sessions, and performances that will include song and dance. Paper and performance proposals have been submitted on a wide range of topics within the theme of performing blackness. Included in these themes will be the representation of blackness in many different locations and types of communities as well as constructions about blackness in other settings both within and outside of Africa. The event also includes everything from hip hop to academic papers. Featured guests, Danny Glover and Felix Justice will speak on Friday evening. The conference is completely free and open to the public. Please see the conference's website at <http://www.dickinson.edu/prorg/cpc/africanastudies.htm> for a complete schedule of events and for registration information.



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