

“More Light Less Heat” by Gladys G. Moore, Director of Diversity and Inclusion

Last week's *The Mount Holyoke News* raised many questions related to race, racism and white privilege here on campus. One response to the various articles was the scheduling of two student caucuses, one for students of color and one for white students which were held late last night in Hooker Auditorium and Cleveland respectively.

Much concern has been expressed about the need for and wisdom of having separate caucuses in which to raise these concerns about racism and white privilege. As the new Director of Diversity and Inclusion this is a great time for me to weigh in on what's happening. I do so with the full support of my co-chair on the Multicultural Community and College Life (MCCL) Committee, Debbora Battaglia, and the Coordinator of Multicultural Affairs, Tanya Williams.

First, it's important to note that the caucuses held last night were but a recent example of the ongoing dialogues about privilege and power in their varying manifestations that have been occurring on the Mount Holyoke campus for decades. While new catalysts call for new reactions and responses, Mount Holyoke has been in a process of critical self-examination around these issues for long time. And let's face it: systemic change usually occurs at a glacial pace. Thus we need long-haul perspectives, long-term institutional memory, and deep-seated commitments from students, staff, faculty and administration to the work of anti-oppression transformation that befits an institution like Mount Holyoke.

In addition to remembering that we've been here before, it's also important to be aware of the reality that growth is often uncomfortable. While inter-group dialogue continues to occur here, sometimes it is necessary for the sake of both hearing ourselves without judgment and for healing, that separate caucuses be held for different groups. Indeed, such caucuses have been held throughout the history of social justice movements and are generally clarifying and productive. Doesn't being educated at a single sex college speak to the need for this kind of separateness on occasion?

Last night's caucuses, because they were rather hastily planned, were by no means fully inclusive of the diversity present within the Mount Holyoke student body. Thus bi-racial and multi-racial student caucuses were not held. This in no way implies that the feelings and perspectives of these students are unimportant. It just means that we clearly have more work to do as we continue to dialogue across difference on this campus.

I dream a campus community here at Mount Holyoke where not only students, but staff, faculty and administration are all involved in the wonderful work of building bridges rather than barriers; and where we truly live into and value our differences rather than merely "tolerate" them.

What happened last night was the continuation of a process --- a process in which every part of the Mount Holyoke community is invited to participate. We need safe spaces in which we can all be raggedy and other spaces in which we are challenged to grow in our awareness of what it means to be continuously anti-oppression in our attitudes and behaviors. I look forward to living amidst our struggles for wholeness and sanity here on campus, and invite you all to explore, both separately and together, the ways in which we can be different but not alienated.

Shalom,
Gladys
October 2007