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Chapter 7

Concluding Remarks and Looking Ahead

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It is a truism that we live in a global village. Technology, communication, and the movement of people and ideas have blurred national and continental boundaries. Presentations from students, staff, faculty, and the administration at the Global Voices Symposium illustrated that concept. Themes of community, identity, human understanding, and hospitality were dominant.

In his remarks, Provost Paul Benson noted that America's most treasured values came "from somewhere," and challenged students to "examine and appreciate the [...] rich and diverse streams of human life and culture that have formed us, that make the world our home."

Repeatedly, the theme of contributions of immigrants to America's traditions and culture emerged. Keynote speaker Imbolo Mbue, originally from Cameroon and educated at Columbia University, devoted time on the life of immigrants in American society. Reading extracts from her *Behold the Dreamers: A Novel*, she praised America for its values and contributions to modern society but lamented over a resurgence of racial and anti-immigrant attitudes in the country. She invoked America's best ideals, citing the founding principle of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men [and women] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among those are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Based on that, she challenged the audience to return to the country's most valued character of empathy, and individual and social responsibility. And so we must ask: To what extent does UD's inclusive community concept reflect those aspects?

In the opening session of the symposium, speakers raised questions about the extent of campus inclusivity and the very meaning of community. "To speak of global voices," noted Christopher Agnew, "is to reflect on the extent to which the world—international students,

international faculty, and the cultures and societies from which they come—has the power to shape what we do, what we teach, and how we act.” And the University’s standard rhetoric about the unquestionable good of community, he concluded, is not always consistent with community’s double-edged reality: a reality of inclusion through exclusion that, by definition, must identify an out-group of Others. JW Terry concurred, noting that shaping policies through the lens of “racism, white supremacy, [and] simple stereotypes,” undermines the drive towards genuine inclusivity. Una Cadegan, Tim Kao, Haimanti Roy, and Jia Yang agreed that we live in an important moment of history and the university cannot be static in its message of inclusive community. They urged the university to continue with the march towards more internationalization of the campus. An important part of the Marianist character, Una Cadegan proposed, is to “foster global interconnectedness.”

In the “Global Voices on UD Campus” session, participants Amal Alrasheed, Yasir Fraish Al Busaidi, Youssef Farhat, and Blaise Mosengo spoke highly of their education at UD but lamented at the failure of institutional structures to do more to implode stereotypes. Yasir likened UD to his home away from home. But Amal, soon after her arrival on campus, felt like an outsider:

I wanted to be part of the UD community; however, people seemed uncomfortable whenever I opened a conversation. I had a tough time understanding why it was always awkward when I started a conversation with an American. I started to think that both Americans and I myself were uncomfortable having conversations because of the fact that I am a Muslim and Saudi, and because of the fact that I am different than anyone else here.

I felt isolated in my first semester at UD. I felt like an invisible human being in the classroom. I used to be very popular back in Saudi Arabia; I used to know many people. However, this changed when I came here. I hated the fact I was not a social person anymore, and I wanted to go back to Saudi Arabia where I can easily get involved within a community without facing any challenges. Although I thought of giving up, I did not give up this great opportunity. I decided to spend my freshman year observing the factors behind the whole “uncomfortable situation” between me and Americans.

With time, things turned around for Amal. As she gets close to graduation, Amal acknowledges that she will miss UD and its community. Her experience, she concludes, was worth it. Blaise began his speech by identifying his Congolese heritage, then, like the previous

speakers, expressing a sense of frustration over the existing negative perceptions of Africa picked up from casual readings and conversations. However, like his colleagues, he sees a change. While there were stories of pain and isolation from panelists, all agreed that with time they adjusted to UD culture and increasingly became part of the UD community.

A particularly significant part of the symposium was learning about the transformations that many students experienced after participating in one of our immersion/study-abroad programs. Alexis Bovell, Breann Porter, Mark Rasmussen, and Carlos Rodriguez presented in the “Bringing the World to UD” session. All spoke passionately about their experiences. Through these programs, they developed a new awareness of individual and social responsibility, empathy, and human understanding. Returning home, they felt different. They more easily found their voices and felt a sense of fulfillment. Some became leading advocates for the institutionalization of study-abroad and immersion experiences, arguing those experiences are a tremendous asset to UD’s drive to create a genuine inclusive community.

A similar message dominated the presentations of Malcolm Daniels, Karen McBride, Mary Niebler, and Susan Wawrose at the “Solutions and Next Steps” session. With experience of study-abroad and immersion experience under their belt, all four advocated a significant increase in UD’s efforts to stimulate interest in study-abroad programs. Given the emerging significance of the Global South regions, Malcolm suggested curricula changes that would make “‘deep engagement’ in some global issue [...] a degree requirement for all academic programs.” To be successful with this, he called for a “moratorium on Eurocentric programming,” which would compel students to choose non-European geographic regions and program options.

One unresolved problem appears to be how to better disseminate information about the impact of immersion-type programs. There is ample evidence pointing to the transformative nature of immersion programs on participants, yet students are not signing up in large numbers for those experiences. There are many stories of success, including those of Anne Gabonay, Ben Kolber, Tracy Kemme, Patrick Strauss, Mary (Harvan) Gorgette, John George, Christine Vehar Jutte, Susan Brown, and Emily Teadford. Recently, Samantha Windsor submitted to Mary Niebler her reflection paper following her 2017 immersion trip to India; it reads, in part:

But what do these lessons mean? It was one thing to learn about community, coexistence, and love halfway around the world, but if I cannot carry these experiences back to the U.S., I would venture to say my time abroad was spent in

vain. What I found this summer within myself is a passion for diversity. I think before I left for India, I could appreciate diversity. I thought it was something fun and exciting, to get a variety of viewpoints and experiences all talking together in the same room. Upon my return to the U.S., I don't know that I see diversity as a fun bonus, but as an absolute necessity. We live in a vast and brilliant world, filled with more languages, foods, cultures, and people than we can even imagine. I, in fact, could spend my entire life traveling the world and never be able to experience all the wonder that it holds. I discovered that not only is there beauty in other cultures, but also important lessons that our brothers and sisters around the world must teach us. To miss out on these lessons is to miss out on a vital part of our own human experience.

The symposium acknowledged that the UD campus has made tremendous progress in global consciousness and awareness. Yet significant challenges remain. Reforms of institutional structures to foster genuine inclusivity in our campus community remain lagging. The University must do more to provide students with an intellectual foundation about the Global South. More courses focusing on these regions should be included in the curriculum. It is inconceivable that students doing study-abroad and immersion programs in countries within the Global South continue to have limited knowledge about those areas prior to departure because they could not find the necessary courses to take.

Finally, policy must ensure that efforts to promote internationalization and domestic minority-group recruitment and retentions do not become a zero-sum game. Both can and should thrive simultaneously, without setting one against the other to a point that a gain for one translates into a loss for the other. As University President Eric Spina correctly noted, creating a “university for the common good” means paying attention to the realities of a new global system—and it entails an understanding of the diverse and intercultural nature of the world.