

## University of Dayton Diversity Lecture Series

### 49. Best Diversity Program

University of Dayton

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#### Description

With the help of Dayton's corporate community, the University of Dayton sponsors an annual Diversity Lecture Series as part of a larger strategic plan to increase inclusion and diversity on campus and prepare students, faculty, staff and the Dayton community for success in a global society. The series is sponsored by the offices of the president and provost. Besides a public address, speakers are asked to meet in a small-group setting with University of Dayton students for a question-and-answer session. They also typically visit the Dayton Early College Academy, a charter high school on campus that prepares a mostly diverse student body for success in college. (See two-page description).

The 2007-2008 slate featured Spike Lee, Kirk Franklin, Juan Williams and Maria Hinojosa. Past speakers have included:

- Andrew Young, humanitarian and civil rights leader
- Coretta Scott King, humanitarian and civil rights leader
- Clarence Page, Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist
- Nikki Giovanni, poet
- Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*
- Johnnetta B. Cole, past president of Spelman College
- Paul Rusesabagina, hotel manager who inspired *Hotel Rwanda*
- Eric Michael Dyson, author

#### Goals and Objectives

The University of Dayton launched the series to help prepare students for a diverse world. "We are creating an educational environment that parallels the world the students will depart to once they graduate. At the University of Dayton, they will learn to see the world through different eyes," said University of Dayton President Daniel J. Curran.

The series is also an image-building tool. It's designed to improve perceptions of the University of Dayton as a campus that welcomes and embraces diversity. Increasing diversity ranks high among the University's strategic priorities.

## Description of How Project Fits into Institutional/Advancement Goals

Throughout its history, the University of Dayton has placed an importance upon diversity. It admitted women on an equal basis with men 40 years ahead of many other Catholic universities. Diversity is reflected in the University of Dayton's mission statement: The University of Dayton is a comprehensive Catholic university, a diverse community committed, in the Marianist tradition, to educating the whole person and to linking learning and scholarship with leadership and service.

Daniel J. Curran, president since 2002, has made diversity and inclusion a major focus of his presidency. The University of Dayton's definition of diversity goes beyond race and gender. In a March 2005 letter to faculty and staff, Dr. Curran defined the institution's philosophy in this way: "The University of Dayton strives to be a community committed to the Catholic and Marianist educational tradition. Within this tradition, we recognize the importance and educational value of other traditions and beliefs held by members of the community. These traditions and beliefs are shaped by a wide variety of life experiences: culture, race and ethnicity; religious backgrounds; gender; socio-economic status; age; sexual orientation; and varying abilities. We are committed to achieving an intellectual, cultural and social environment on campus in which all are encouraged to make their contributions. We all have gifts to share and can learn from one another. ...We will make systemic adjustments over time that allow the University of Dayton to retain its distinct identity while becoming a model institution that truly prepares students for success in a diverse, global workplace.

The University of Dayton's commitment to diversity and inclusion is communicated clearly in its strategic plan, *A Vision of Excellence*: "The guiding spirit of this University is the Society of Mary's dedication to inclusiveness, community, and education that addresses and fulfills spirit, mind and body."

### Audience

Most lectures are free and open to the public, with free seats set aside for students at the ticketed events. The Diversity Lecture Series reaches three primary audiences:

- 1) The local African American and Hispanic communities. For some members of the audience, these lectures are their first introduction to the University of Dayton.
- 2) University of Dayton students. The University of Dayton is made up of predominantly white middle- to upper-class students. Approximately 75 percent are Catholic.

3) Prospective University of Dayton students, primarily African American and Hispanic.

### **Staffing**

No full-time person manages the Diversity Lecture Series. Organizational responsibilities fall primarily to these seven staff people:

Lynnette Heard, executive director of the president's office and coordinator of the Diversity Lecture Series

Susan Sauer, assistant vice president for advancement resources

Paula Sideras, director of special events

Teri Rizvi, associate vice president for University communications

Marc Martens, director of corporate and foundation relations

Gina Gray, graphic designer

Jeanee Parsons, production manager

In addition, a 28-member steering committee and a number of subcommittees choose the slate of speakers, prepare the itineraries, organize logistics and strategize on promotion and marketing opportunities. The committees include a cross section of administrators, faculty, staff and students as well as representatives from local arts and cultural organizations and the media.

### **Budget**

The 2007-2008 budget was approximately \$200,000, which covered speaker fees, set-up charges, promotional materials and pre-event dinners/receptions for the sponsors. In addition, the University of Dayton received a \$20,000 two-year commitment from the United Way of Dayton and thousands of dollars of in-kind support. That included more than \$33,000 in on-air and Web promotion from WDTN-TV and \$15,000 in print advertising from the *Dayton Daily News*. RTA provided free bus service for students attending the Spike Lee talk at the Schuster Performing Arts Center downtown, and Ross Buick-GMC-Hummer provided limousine service for the speakers.

### **Challenges**

In a market where corporate philanthropy is down, the University of Dayton has struggled to generate consistent financial support for the series from local businesses. This remains the Diversity Lecture Series' biggest challenge as the University of

Dayton seeks popular speakers who can draw a diverse audience of students and community members.

## Results

The series in 2007-2008 drew more than 5,000 people, with standing room only at several of the venues. The talks attracted significant media coverage from the *Dayton Daily News*, WDTN-TV and the Associated Press, which covered Spike Lee's talk. WDTN produced a half-hour show on Kirk Franklin, whose videotaped appearance with the University of Dayton's Ebony Heritage Singers was featured online (<http://www.udayton.edu/News/Article/?contentId=8655>). Promotional ads ran in the *Dayton Daily News* and on WDTN-TV. The series was also publicized through postcards, posters and e-mail.

The series is helping to boost diversity on campus. Deposits from African American students are up by one-third for fall 2008.

The series also has raised the University of Dayton's image as a campus that honors diversity and inclusion. During the 2007-2008 academic year, University of Dayton President Daniel Curran received a national and a local award for his commitment to diversity and inclusion.

In August 2007, he received the inaugural Joseph E. Lowery Human Rights Legacy Award from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at its national conference in Atlanta. The Rev. Raleigh Trammell, chair of the national board of directors of the SCLC, nominated Curran for the honor. "Dr. Curran was chosen because of his dynamic leadership in diversity in this community," Trammell said. "He is committed to a community for all races. ...Dan has exposed the community and students to so many dynamic speakers and philosophies of thought."

In October 2007, Curran was awarded a 2007 Humanitarian Award from the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ) of Greater Dayton. "The humanitarian award recognizes those in the community who, through their work, do our work. They are proponents and advocates of social justice," said Patricia Meadows, executive director of NCCJ. "Dr. Curran has lived our mission through his work and leadership at UD. This award recognizes all the diversity and inclusion initiatives that have been developed under his leadership. It's for his personal advocacy and energy toward building a more inclusive community."