

April 2006

Office of the Provost (570) 662-4804  
<http://www.mansfield.edu/~academic/>

## Celebrating Humanity

The Mansfield Creed says, in part, "We believe in celebrating humanity. We enrich ourselves and others by sharing and exploring our similarities and differences." Let's explore how, and more importantly, why we put this idea into action at Mansfield.

There are many compelling social and political arguments about why diversity -- in students, faculty, and staff and in the curriculum -- must be a priority for Mansfield University. Although I agree with those arguments and have some very personal reasons for embracing diversity as an issue, I will try to approach the issue here from a purely educational perspective.

When our students leave Mansfield, they enter a world that is fundamentally different from the one that you and I knew at the same age of our lives. Globalization has occurred faster than anyone predicted. Suddenly, ideas, people, and products can easily cross borders and travel great distances. This changes everything; we are now at a transformational moment in the culture and economy of the planet, and we must prepare our students for this new world. Every Mansfield graduate, regardless of their area of specialization, is virtually guaranteed to live and work with people from cultures and ethnic backgrounds different from their own.

When those from diverse backgrounds come together, regardless of whether the differences stem from regional or ethnic culture or national origin, it is a teachable moment. They might assume different things about how to interact, and this can cause confusion and tension. But when you ask two people to solve a problem together, these different assumptions can become an asset, because these people might see the problem in different ways, and this will help solve it. And the people learn about one another along the way.

To participate in a diverse world, our students need to be familiar with such

differences. This must include more than "book learned" knowledge about people of different cultures, but also experience in interacting with people who don't necessarily share the same expectations and who may have different customs than their own. Teaching an awareness of the issues across our curriculum, coupled with opportunities to learn effective behavior in such situations, is a critical part of preparing our students to succeed when they leave our campus.

Educational trips and field experiences, both abroad and within this country, can be an effective way for us to help our students prepare. But just as the most effective way to learn a new language is to be immersed in a context where that language is the norm and using it is the only way to function, it should be obvious that the most effective way to prepare students for a diverse world is to create frequent ongoing encounters with those cultures. Increasing the human diversity represented on our campus, including students, faculty, and staff from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as other countries, is part of preparing our students for the world they will live in when they move beyond Mansfield.

Our foundation documents, including the mission statement, the Mansfield Plan, and the Mansfield Creed, identify diversity as an important element of the ideal Mansfield. Because we agree on the goal, well-intentioned colleagues who understand the issues can reasonably disagree about the best methods for achieving the goal; that debate can be both constructive and collegial. Regardless of our views on the politics surrounding issues of diversity, as educators we must recognize that diversifying our campus in the most inclusive sense is a critical element of creating the proper educational environment at Mansfield University.

- Michael Renner

## News in Brief

- \* For the first time, Mansfield is participating in the Frederick Douglass Summer Scholars program, hosting advanced doctoral students to teach summer courses as temporary faculty.
- \* Both the Nursing and Social Work programs hosted successful site visits by their accrediting agencies, and have been re-accredited for the maximum possible terms.
- \* This year, Mansfield University has created the first McKelvey Scholars Summer Abroad program, taking 20 students from seven different institutions for a four-week program of academic work and cultural experience in England.

## Spotlight on Scholarship

Congratulations to...

- \* Linda Rashidi, English and Modern Languages, has been named a Fulbright Scholar for the 2006-07 year. She will spend the year teaching and doing research in linguistics at the University of Sophia in Bulgaria.
- \* Dick Soderberg, Biology, recently presented a paper on pollution from trout hatcheries at the joint meeting of the American Fisheries Society and the Wildlife Society.
- \* Helen Biblehimer, Nursing, presented a paper titled "History, Geography, Culture and the Canadian Health Care System" at the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Studies in the U.S.