



DAC Newsletter:

Introducing Our New Co-Coordinator

Diversity Action Committee (DAC) is a committee composed of faculty and students of Siena College, working together to increase knowledge of diversity and to effect positive change within the Siena community concerning issues related to gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, and disability on campus. Its purpose is to provide information and new perspectives on these issues; to improve personal and working relationships among our community, notably raising awareness of and acting in prevention against sexism, racism, ageism, classism, heterosexism, ableism and other forms of categorical prejudice and discrimination in support of the College's Human Rights policy; and to deepen knowledge and appreciation of diversity through integrated courses and focused programs. Inclusivity is a value and a practice we foster that benefits all of us in an educational setting.

In this Newsletter, we are pleased to introduce our newly elected Co-Coordinator, who will serve in a leadership role for DAC in the next two years. Marcela Garcés, Assistant Professor of Modern Languages (Spanish), and Keith Wilhite, Assistant Professor of English, have both served as elected faculty representatives for DAC. Moving forward, they will take the lead as DAC continues in its efforts to create a culture of diversity at Siena College.



Marcela Garcés, Assistant Professor of Spanish

As a Spanish professor and a person who identifies with many different cultures, I exemplify, pursue and share diversity in many ways. My commitment to diversity is reflected in teaching, scholarly and service activities at Siena College.

I have worked with members of my department to bring film directors, scholars and speakers to the Siena community to share their work and ideas about diverse groups of people from around the world. I regularly incorporate service learning into my courses so that students grasp the importance of not only reading about diverse communities, but also engaging with them on a personal level. For instance, in 2013, I received a summer grant from the Diversity Action Committee and was able to teach an advanced Spanish film course entitled "Spanish 400: Diverse Perspectives in Contemporary Peninsular Spanish Film."

My students learned about diverse groups in relation to disability, the LGBTQ community, immigrant minorities, and women. Students responded very positively to this innovative course and completed a service learning assignment with members of these groups.

My scholarly work also reflects my commitment to diversity. I wrote an article about the advanced film course, which is currently under review, because I want to share the importance of diversity work with the broader academic community. In addition, I wrote and published a creative manuscript about my diverse identity, which I have shared with Lisa Nevarez's Latino Literature Class as well as with the Multicultural Studies working group.

I served as a member of the Diversity Action Committee from 2012-2013, so I have an understanding of the committee's foundation and commitments. Since then, I have been a strong supporter of DAC initiatives, and have made an effort to attend DAC-sponsored events whenever possible, and encourage others to do the same. I particularly enjoyed the two-day IGR Workshop in August 2013. I was able to incorporate information about "learning edges" into my film course. I also participated in the DAC Open Forum on April 1, 2014.

I have worked with many organizations and departments on campus to collaborate with programming related to diverse groups, such as The Office of Academic Community Engagement, The Damietta Cross-Cultural Center, The Office of International Programs, the Spanish Club (for which I am currently the faculty adviser), the Sociology Department, The Fair Trade and Social Justice Office, the International Studies Program, the Multicultural Studies Program, the Office of Residential Life, Latinos Unificando Nuestra América (LUNA), Black and Latino Student Union (BLSU), the School of Liberal Arts, the Sophomore Year Experience, the Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King Lecture Series, and the Sr. Thea Bowman Center for Women.

The experience and enthusiasm I bring to working with the campus community will be an asset as I work with Dr. Keith Wilhite to take on a leadership role as the Co-Coordinator of DAC in the Siena community. Our combined experiences and interests will surely make us an effective team.

Keith Wilhite, Assistant Professor of English

Like my colleague Dr. Marcela Garcés, I promote the value of diversity through my teaching, scholarship, and service to Siena College.

In summer 2013, I received a DAC Fellowship for Curriculum Diversification to develop an Honors seminar, "Literature and the Law." The course allowed students to explore literature's engagement with legal questions, but more specifically, we focused on marginalized voices and the spaces that the law protects and neglects, addressing issues related to ethnic identity, women's rights, urban ghettos, and apartheid. By the end of the course, students demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of literary texts in the diverse, global context of social justice.



My scholarship on the "literature of place" in American literature leads to questions about domesticity, the gendered "prisons" of suburbia, and the racial discourses of urban decline. My book manuscript-in-progress and my forthcoming edited collection deal directly with these issues, but I have also recently completed two essays more specifically related to my interest in sexuality studies. One focuses on Progressive Era vice reform, racial discourse, and literary representations of prostitution, while the other addresses Cold-War era advice literature on marriage, family, and sexuality in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*.

Since Fall 2012, I have also served as an active member of DAC. In 2012, working with Dr. Ruth Kassel and Dr. Arindam Mandal, I immersed myself in the "Diversity Survey Report." I pored over and synthesized ten pages of comments in order to compose a concise but representative narrative of faculty concerns and recommendations for improvement. This work culminated with a "Food for Thought" forum in February 2013, where I led a discussion among 15-20 administrators and faculty members. I have continued my active engagement this year by participating in the two-day IGR Workshop in August 2013, and in the DAC Open Forum on April 1, 2014.

As DAC Co-Coordinator, we will pursue several inter-related goals. First and foremost, the committee has already developed an action plan based on the data we have collected over two surveys (2012 and 2014), and we look forward to putting this plan into action. Second, while continuing the spring DAC Open Forum, we should also consider a campus conversation in the fall semester. The topic would vary from year to year, but we should have a set event on the calendar to address pressing diversity concerns—including, for example, research and scholarship, tenure and promotion guidelines, classroom practices, and campus climate.

DAC could also take a more active role in supporting faculty development programs. These programs might include a combination of informal and formal mentoring opportunities, as well as professional development support for diverse faculty or faculty pursuing non-traditional research. Finally, we also think it vital to celebrate the good work that is being done—especially at a time when the tone on campus ranges from downtrodden to toxic. DAC could create opportunities to showcase the positive work that the faculty is doing in the areas of curriculum diversification, community engaged scholarship, and diversity research.

Dr. Marcela Garcés and I will bring distinct but complementary experiences to our role as DAC Co-Coordinator. I look forward to working with her over the next two years as we continue to promote inclusivity as a value and a practice that benefits the entire Siena community.

This Newsletter marks the end of Dr. Laurie Naranch and Dr. Fanny Söderbäck's term as DAC Co-Coordinator. It has been an honor to serve our community in this capacity, and we are thrilled to see Dr. Garcés and Dr. Wilhite taking over and continuing the important work DAC has been charged to accomplish. Two new elected faculty representatives will be joining us in the Fall — Cruz Bueno (Assistant Professor of Economics) and Jesse Moya (Assistant Professor of Education) — as well as four new student representatives, to be elected in September.