This semester, three ECC students are completing an internship with Councilman Ron Rice. In particular, they are helping draft a code of ethics to be presented at the Newark City Council.

Working directly under Councilman Donald Payne’s chief of staff, another group of ECC students is focusing on social services for Newark residents while helping plan a summit on the needs of Liberian refugees, which will be held in Washington, D.C. later in the year.

All of these students are part of a new internship program initiated by Dr. Margaret Stevens, Director of the Urban Issues Institute (UII), and the steering committee she put together early in the academic year. “We are teaching students local accountability and global citizenship,” she contends, “things the classroom alone can’t expose them to.”

Placing students in internships in city government is just one of many initiatives generated by the UII Steering Committee comprised of students, community members and ECC professors, including Jennifer Wager, Eileen DeFreece, and Rebecca Williams. In February, for example, the UII co-hosted an education conference with the Faculty Senate at Hudson County Community College.

Turning its attention toward health issues, the Institute also sponsored HIV/AIDS week which resulted in more than 150 students being tested. “We’re saving lives,” Stevens says, “but also promoting self-love and a sense of community.”

“It’s really about making students aware,” added Professor DeFreece. “Students continued talking about it in some of my classes.”

While many people first became aware of the UII when Sharpe James took over, the institute’s roots go back to the late 60s and early 70s, according to Professor Stevens. Initially funded through a federal grant program, the UII once offered fellowships which supported graduate study.

Among its participants was current ECC Board of Trustees member Al Bundy. Sponsored by the Urban Fellows program during the late 70s and early 80s, Bundy interned in the Counseling Department and taught courses in group dynamics while working on his master’s degree at Montclair State.

What Mr. Bundy remembers most fondly were discussions and lectures with visiting scholars. “There were wonderful discussions and discourse,” he reflects. “They expanded the minds of all of us and made us understand what we were going to need in...
Faculty View

Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson & David Oliver Relin - reviewed by Milena Rubinstein

“The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family... ‘Doctor Greg, you must make time to share three cups of tea,’” says Haji Ali whom Greg Mortenson calls his mentor in his book Three Cups of Tea (coauthored with David Oliver Relin). These words are the essence of the simple but profound wisdom that runs through this most engaging story. Part adventure book, part travel journal, part self-discovery book, part triumph-against-all-odds story, Mortenson’s work is all of these. But for me, it is most of all a story about “West meets East” and the possible connections that can be created when both sides take the time to understand each other.

I came upon Three Cups of Tea a few years ago. I had recently finished Nine Parts of Desire by Geraldine Brooks, a journalistic account of the lives of women in North Africa and the Middle East. Though fascinated by the stories of Islamic women, my first reaction to Three Cups of Tea was that at the time, I didn’t want to read another story about the hardships of being a woman in that part of the world. However, the book reappeared in my reading path when it was selected by ECC’s Faculty Book Club, and after the first 25 pages, I couldn’t have been more delighted and impressed by Mortenson’s story. His passion for and commitment to building schools for children (especially for girls) in some of the most remote areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan are extraordinary. His mission is an act filled with humanity and hope. And although one must remain realistic about the extent of the change his mission might accomplish, its success, so far, is truly remarkable.

Mortenson and his organization have been able to build schools in unimaginable places where people live under some of the most precarious conditions. Forgotten by their government, the people of Baltistan and surrounding regions of Pakistan lead isolated lives lacking the most basic elements needed for survival. Mortenson eloquently demonstrates in his story that despite their circumstances, they have managed to survive and that they have a way and a system of life that must be understood and respected because it is key to their survival and to the possibility of exercising any desirable change in the area. Mortenson learns early on from Haji Ali that though these people may not be educated, they do have wisdom, and, his mentor tells him, if he wants to accomplish anything in Baltistan, he must respect their ways. It is by these words that Greg Mortenson lives as he tries to reach new places to build schools for the children of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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Islamophobia: Myth or Reality?
by Mikal Naeem Nash

On December 4, 2010 Mr. James Yee, Executive Director of the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-NJ), gave a keynote address and slide presentation on Islamophobia.

Yee, a Chinese-American citizen, born and raised in the U.S., is a former U.S. army chaplain and graduate of West Point who served as the Muslim chaplain for the U.S. prison camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Yee was imprisoned for speaking out against the treatment of detainees at the base. He was eventually cleared of all charges.

Yee was joined by a panel which included Hodari Abdul-Ali, Executive Director of the Give Peace a Chance Foundation, Donna Auston, Vice-President of the New Brunswick, NJ Islamic Center and Abdellah Hassan, an attorney from Elizabeth, NJ. The program was moderated by Prof. Mikal Naeem Nash of the ECC History Department.

The program addressed the growing climate of fear and hostility toward Islam and Muslims. Each panelist shared knowledge of Islam, personal experiences they’ve had with Islamophobia, and thoughts on what could be done to combat the many negative stereotypes people have of Islam and Muslims.

The program was well attended by students, faculty, and community residents, and gave a deeper understanding of the post-9/11 challenge facing our nation. It also encouraged more careful monitoring of major media outlets and their reporting of Muslim events and issues.

Professor Nash, author of Islam among Urban Blacks, Muslims in Newark: NJ, A Social History, and Professor Eman Aboelnaga of the ECC Math Department have been active in efforts to educate others about the history of Islam in New Jersey, and issues pertaining to the broader Muslim-American community. Professor Jennifer Wager, the Communications Coordinator in the Humanities Division, was also very instrumental in the organization and success of the event. Students in her communications class were involved in recording and editing the event. Support also came from the Student Activities Office and the Muslim Students Association of ECC. Patricia Slade, Director of Student Activities Office, and Supranee Vibulbhan in Graphics also lent their support to the event.

Continued on Next Page
order to be committed, in order make cities better.” Working with more creativity and considerably less funding than many of her predecessors, Professor Stevens has recaptured the Institute’s original spirit while refocusing on the present and future of the urban environment in Newark and Essex County at large. All of this started with a reshaping of the core mission, which Stevens and others have helped articulate: “promoting intelligent, compassionate, and sustainable civic engagement and youth leadership.”

“For me, it always comes back to leadership,” Stevens reflects. “Not enough people today are focused on creating leaders.” In the next several months, ECC students and faculty will put this philosophy into practice by working on a host of new initiatives sponsored by the UII.

State Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver will participate in the Institute’s “Panel on Redistricting” to take place in April. Institutionalizing an earlier initiative, the UII plans to host an annual “State of Our City” event.

Also in the works is a focus group aimed at better addressing the needs of military veterans, especially those studying and working at the college. This is a personal issue for Stevens who served her country in the National Guard from 1997 to 2004.

“We are all about promoting academic discourse about urban issues in a very balanced way,” Stevens declares. “At the same time, we need to have tangible, practical solutions and meaningful work.”

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Depression is a mood disorder which some professionals refer to as the “secret demon.” There are many forms of depression such as Hypomania, Mania, Dysthymia, Clinical/Major Depression, Bi-Polar Depression (Mixed Episodes characterized by cycling mood changes: severe highs, mania, and lows, depression), Teen Depression, and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Depression ranges from mild, to moderate, to severe.

Onsets of Depression are usually triggered by events that occur in an individual’s life; whether these are emotional or physical. These include the death of a loved one, a lingering illness, physical and/or emotional abuse, chronic physical pain, gender concerns, divorce, incarceration, a change in one’s financial state, a change in living conditions, medications, the birth of a child, unemployment, or other life-changing events.

Positive stress generated by events such as graduation, marriage, a new career, or the purchase of a new home can sometimes lead to depression. Some forms of depression are stress or substance-induced while others are caused by genetic predisposition. Generally, the person with depression has feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and helplessness. At an extreme the individual would be despondent.

Depression can be a tremendously severe psychiatric disorder which may have suicidal consequences, with alcohol and drug abuse compounding the condition. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 20.9 million American adults, or about 9.5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year, have a mood disorder. The median age of onset for mood disorders is 30 years. Depressive disorders often co-occur with anxiety disorders and substance abuse.

In our country, 2.6 million adolescents suffer from depression. A staggering 60% of individuals (approximately) who have committed suicide in our country suffered from a mood disorder.

Research on the human brain serves to point out that there are differences between the brain of a depressed person and a normal functioning human being who is not depressed. Serotonin, a monoamine neurotransmitter, is a chemical which is decreased in the brain of a person suffering from depression. There is a possibility that the neurotransmitter norepinephrine is implicated in depression. However the study is not conclusive.

If the sadness, lack of interest, and significant distress in the life of a person persists for more than two weeks, the person is suffering from depression. The frequency, intensity, duration, and severity of these symptoms will vary depending on the individual.

Treatment for depression may include, but is limited to, antidepressants and a combination of psychological/psychiatric intervention, in addition to proper diet and exercise. Some popular forms of treatment are: Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Psychodynamic Therapy, Interpersonal Therapy, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and Gestalt Therapy.

Aside from the above therapies, as well as acupuncture and massage therapy, increasing your activity is an effective therapy. Keeping yourself busy, pursuing hobbies, going for walks, enjoying the sun, engaging in cardio-vascular activities or simple exercises serve to keep your mind occupied, thus elevating the secretion of endorphins in your brain.


In conclusion, clinical depression is devastating to the person afflicted with the disorder and quite upsetting to those who love them. I respectfully suggest for you to become familiar with the above condition as you will come across many in your life who suffer from this debilitating disease. It is indisputably a plea for help.
In the first week of February, I received a notice of the annual activities planned for African-American History Month at ECC. I noticed that the listing of this year’s activities was titled “African History Month.” Wondering what happened to the “-American” that I am used to seeing, I emailed a colleague who is involved in this celebration and asked what happened. He wrote back a very polite response explaining that African-American history was part of African history and that the celebration should also include those from the Caribbean, Central and South America and present-day Africa. “Fair enough,” I wrote back in my two-word response, holding back the emotions rising within me. Interestingly, when those feelings later erupted, I did not find anger (the world is angry enough as it is). I found a deep sense of sadness.

I feel a deep sense of sadness for a past that is being forgotten. Having reached the half-century mark, I can remember a time when African-American History Month was Negro History Week. (Though we were “colored” when I was born, “Negro” was the preferred term by grade school.) During that week the same dozen or so figures from the past were reintroduced (Banneker, Tubman, Douglass, Carver and company). After a week of stories and quizzes, they returned to their shelf for another 51-week hibernation. I remember the meetings, petitions, arguments and general teeth-pulling required to get the week expanded to a month. As our racial moniker changed from “Negro” to “Afro-American” to “People of Color” to whatever it is now, I saw the celebration grow to include not just a memorization of the dead but also a celebration of the living. For many people, all they will ever learn about the struggles and triumphs of “Up from slavery” African-Americans will occur over these 28 days. To see the celebration co-opted in this way is sad.

I feel a deep sense of sadness for a present where we are becoming invisible (in the sense of Ralph Ellison, not Claude Raines). My classes have students from all over the world and at least twice a semester, I will be questioned about my heritage. Once they realize I am not Jamaican or Portuguese or Puerto Rican or Senegalese or Dominican or Chinese or Middle Eastern (the seven I usually get) and I explain my heritage (including that one branch of my family has been in Newark since the 1850s), I get “the look.” It is a variant of the look that I used to get in high school when I went to Westfield or Short Hills or the North Ward of Newark. The look of puzzlement when something (or someone) is out of place. The look that silently says, ‘But how can you be there?’ Now, their vision of me as someone without a culture doesn’t bother me much and it doesn’t affect the class or the students’ learning. I remain very proud of the College and all that it does to help our students achieve their full potential. Still, to be seen as an artifact of a time gone by is sad.

I feel a deep sense of sadness for a future where we as a people face extinction. In some of my classes we cover natural selection and populations ecology as part of a general course in biology. And, like all livings things, groups of people can be driven to extinction. (Think not? Spend some time on the Reservation. And no, Foxwoods Resort Casino doesn’t count.) Learning from our history, which we were once denied, is one of the only ways to help prevent a loss of our culture (again!). Bringing other cultures into this celebration in the shortest month of the year (Yeah, we haven’t forgotten that) means some things will have to be deleted. So who decides? Does Simon Bolivar replace Ralph Bunche? Does Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf replace Mae Jemison? Does Toussaint L’ouverture replace Dr. King?

I wonder if this is how the dinosaurs felt.