Black History Month Events

- February 5, Researching Your Roots, 1-2:30 p.m., Allen County Public Library Main Branch, Genealogy Dept., 2nd Floor
- February 9, Pop-Up Black Queer History Fair, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m., Walb Union Hallway
- February 11, Open House in Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, 11-1 p.m., Walb Union 118
- February 11, Coach John McLendon Day, Women’s Basketball, 5 p.m., Gates Sports Center
- February 12, Coach John McLendon Day, Men’s Basketball, 7 p.m., Gates Sports Center
- February 16, Crucial Conversations with Children: Understanding Diversity, 6-7 p.m., Zoom
- February 17, The 13th: Film Screening and Discussion, 6-8:30 p.m., Walb Union 114
- February 21, “35 Dumb Things Well Intended People Say” by Dr. Maura Cullen, book discussion, 12-1:30 p.m., Neff Hall 101
- February 21, Mastodon Ally Training: Black Queer History, 12-1 p.m., Walb Union 114
- February 21, Black Card Revoked, 4-6 p.m., Walb Union 222-224-226
- February 22, Identity Roundtables, 12-1:30 p.m., Walb Union Classic Ballroom
- February 22, Eat to the Beats: Soul Food and Music, 6-8 p.m., Walb Union Classic Ballroom
- February 24, Diversity 101 Workshop, 12-1 p.m., Walb Union G21
- February 24, Skate Night, 8:30-10:30 p.m., Roller Dome North
- February 25, Multicultural Mixer, 5-7 p.m., Walb Union G21
- February 28, Diversity Bingo, 6-7 p.m., Walb Union 222-224-226

Chief Notes

We are so excited to publish this Black History Month special edition of Diversity Steps. February is Black History Month. The celebration of Black History Month began as “Negro History Week,” which was created in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson, a noted African American historian, scholar, educator and publisher. It became a month-long celebration in 1976. The month of February was chosen to coincide with the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln.

Since my arrival to PFW, it’s been my goal to elevate the Heritage Months (i.e. Black History Month, Women's History Month, Pride History Month etc.) to celebrate and grow our campus knowledge about these populations present on our campus.

This special edition is focused on highlighting the PFW BHM events, spotlighting Black faculty, staff, and students, and celebrating Black History: Past, Present and Future. We don’t celebrate heritage months to imply that one identity is better than another, instead to learn more about historically marginalized groups as we move our campus and society from equality to equity.

Special recognition to Rhonda Meriwether and the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs for leading this year’s programming efforts. Also, thank you to the many partnerships across campus.

There are events for everyone! I hope you enjoy this special edition of Diversity Steps!
Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs Mural

Originally Dr. Hammonds approached me, about creating a mural that would inspire empowerment and speak to the graduating students of color.

I, in turn, was immediately inspired by this notion and completely on board! One of my first thoughts was a metaphorical insight; many different shades of color help build our personal pyramids. It takes so much effort, dedication, and sacrifice for each of us to reach new heights. I proceeded to paint a red pyramid, representing the largest in Cairo, The North Pyramid. Wanting also to drive home a sense of destination and completion, I referenced the Mayan pyramids in making the summit a flat surface for the graduates to stand on. I'd like to think this ideal would resonate with me, were I standing behind a podium on the day of ceremony. I added silhouettes to play the parts of cheering peers and loved ones, as well as champions having made their way to this new height in their lives. The Mastodon in the background is to instill both strength and pride in the school that led and supported students and families along the journey.

I would very much like to thank Dr. Hammonds, Purdue University Fort Wayne, and the beautiful Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs for this blessing of an opportunity! I will cherish the experience.

“Be You! Be Great! Live Outside the Box.”
~ Seddrick Lorick, drieM

“35 Dumb Things Well Intended People Say” by Dr. Maura Cullen

Join the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion along with APSAC, CSSAC, and the Helmke Library as we read “35 Dumb Things Well Intended People Say” by Dr. Maura Cullen. From January 24 – February 28, we challenge participants to read 1 chapter of the book per day. A free copy of the e-book can be found by contacting the Helmke Library or http://rb.gy/t6cll6.

A book discussion with the author, Dr. Maura Cullen, is planned for February 21 at 12-1:30 p.m. in Neff Hall 101 as a hybrid event. Dr. Cullen will be on Zoom. Meeting ID: 996 1005 4846, passcode: 837830.

Join us on March 21 for our Impact Action Day, 12-1:30 p.m. in NF 101 as we discuss intentional actions to be done at PFW to bring about impact.

Eats to the Beats

Join us on February 22, 6-8 p.m. in the Walb Union Classic Ballroom to sample some soul food (smothered chicken, collar greens, mac and cheese, and more) while listening to music by African American composers performed by PFW students and guest artists.

Catered by Smile More Catering

Limited seating – tickets available in Walb Union 118.
Students Spotlight

Jalon Pipkins

A little about yourself
I'm a senior majoring in General Studies at Purdue Fort Wayne and play on the basketball team. I am from Paris, Texas but have made Fort Wayne my second home. I graduate in May and plan on playing pro basketball as long as I can.

What does Black History Month mean to you?
For me Black History Month is very important because it provides an opportunity to celebrate and appreciate the culture of black people where it might not be so visible throughout history. I believe there is a lot of slighting that happens, therefore Black History Month is a great opportunity for people to not focus on things that the world may need to overcome but to focus on how African Americans have affected the world positively.

Thoughts about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at PFW?
I believe the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion here at PFW is amazing. It’s one of the many reason I chose PFW and to graduate here. I believe we’re at a critical time dealing with these types of things and PFW is doing a great job shining light on Diversity, Equity, and inclusion.

Mireina Keith

A little about yourself:
I’m a sophomore in Computer Engineering Technology. I’m currently in a co-op program this semester at Nidec. I’m the President of Black Student Union, Outreach Director for IEEE, and Secretary of NSPE.

What Does Black History Month mean to you?
Black History Month for me is a time to express, educate, and empower. During this month, I feel that it’s time to celebrate Black culture and reflect on blessings given to us. In this month, we educate ourselves and our peers on African American history and way of life. We spend time with loved ones embracing our ancestry and remembering the hardships fought along the way. This month we pride ourselves in the strength that runs through our veins.

Thoughts about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at PFW?
My thoughts on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Purdue Fort Wayne are that we should strengthen our community on campus. There are so many ethnicities on campus which lays down the foundation for diversity. When we come together and create a space that we can all call "home" that is where the inclusivity and equity can emerge beautifully.

Celebrating Black History Month
Staff Spotlight: Ranada Clark

A little about yourself
I am originally from Michigan, so I love and miss being around the water. I was the first of six children in my family to obtain a college degree. I am a wife and proud mother of four beautiful young-adult children and our dog Coco Chanel. One of my favorite foods is Mexican, and when I am not working, I enjoy listening to historical romance and detective novels.

What does Black History Month mean to you?
To me, National Black History Month is the opportunity to pause, reflect, discover, and uncover those who have come before us to help create a foundation. It is time set aside to honor the men and women who contributed to American History, our inventors, activists, educators, doctors, attorneys, and so many more. We celebrate the lives of those men and women who persevered through hurt, fear, discrimination, miseducation, violence, and death. It is about embracing the courage of those who believed we would live out better days one day. Days of being inclusive—authentically experiencing the meaning “indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Black history is a part of me, even the parts that I don’t yet know or understand, the me that is ever-evolving, and it is a part of the foundation on which we as a country stand.

Thoughts about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at PFW?
I am so excited about DEI here at PFW. I believe the time is right for everyone, including myself, to become uncomfortable and move from our comfort zones. I also believe there is so much we can learn from one another. When we choose not to embrace opportunities to ask questions and share genuine heartfelt thoughts, ideas, and uncertainties, we not only cheat ourselves out of an experience to learn but also those around us. Taking a stance to be silent is choosing to rob someone of a lived experience. So, I am looking forward to seeing our growth here at PFW around diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are a campus full of educators; no matter our position, title, degree, or hierarchy, there is always room for growth when remaining open-minded.

Faculty Spotlight: Curtis Crisler

A little about yourself
Curtis L. Crisler was born and raised in Gary, Indiana. He received a BA in English, with a minor in Theatre, from Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW, now PFW), and he received his MFA from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Crisler is a Professor of English at Purdue University Fort Wayne. Contact him at www.poetcrisler.com.

What does Black History Month mean to you?
BHM has traditionally been a time where people can access the historical contributions of African Americans. I feel, how we relegate things to months (Black History Month, Women’s History Month, National Hispanic Heritage Month, etc.), should be reevaluated into a poignant representation of our universal history and everyone that makes us what and who we are today. With that said, BHM is where I wrote my first poem about Jackie Robinson, with help from my mother, way back in fourth grade. I’ve been creating and being inspired ever since then.

Thoughts about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at PFW?
My thoughts on DEI at PFW find us in a place where we tend to discuss and want implementation of it, but due to COVID, budgetary issues, enrollment, recruitment, retention, etc., we are constantly fighting for better representation against what seems like a backlash of issues that keep us from moving more towards establishing any valid gains. I mean, it’s 2022, and I’m the only Full Professor that’s African American/Black on campus? I baffle at this. I returned to my alma mater to address DEI, but also, I would like to be a presence/voice that can foster in more students, administrators, professors/faculty, and staff who want to contribute to enhancing our metropolitan stature and the community that represents and homes us.
Local African American Champions

“Hana L. Stith was born in Fort Wayne in 1928. She graduated from Central High School in 1946 and received both bachelor's and master's degrees in education from The University of Saint Francis in 1960 and 1965, respectively.

In 1960, Stith was among the first African-American teachers to be hired by Fort Wayne Community Schools. She taught at McCulloch Elementary School, for 17 years until its closing. There she gained respect and recognition for her teaching skills and compassion for children. During her 36-year teaching career, mostly in inner city schools, she spent 22 years in the classroom and 14 years as a Title 1 math and reading teacher. She retired in 1996 from Fort Wayne Community Schools.

Stith had been a community activist for as long as she could remember. At age 14, she joined the first Junior Branch of the local NAACP. As an adult, she was a member of the original Fair Housing Group and of the Panel of American Women. Stith was the first female appointed to the Fort Wayne Redevelopment Commission, serving 12 years under four mayors, and was the longest-serving member on the commission. She also served on the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission for four years and on the Fort Wayne Board of Safety for six years. She has always been known for speaking up for those who couldn't speak up for themselves.

She served as a docent at the Lincoln Museum and on the executive board of the NAACP. Stith was cofounder of the African/African-American Historical Society along with her late husband. In February 2000, she founded and opened the African/African-American Historical Society Museum, after having researched and collected materials for the entire museum for 35 years. She was the museum's CEO, manager, and director until February 2013. She passed away on September 5, 2018.” (Article first appeared in the Journal Gazette, Feb. 25, 2016)

“Charles Redd was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1930. He attended West Virginia State College and the Detroit Institute of Technology. He moved to Fort Wayne in 1968 when he became the director for the Urban League of Fort Wayne.

Redd not only protested school segregation but helped organize “freedom schools” for children involved in school boycotts. He was also a Democratic City Council member from 1983 to 1991.

In the late 1990s, he served on the board of the Metropolitan Human Relations Commission, helping shake up the organization after the council removed seven commissioners because of infighting. In 1997, he became interim director of Metro until a full-time director was hired. He resigned from the board after just a year and half because it seemed his work there was complete.

He served as the president of the Voter Information Center, an advocacy group he formed in 1990 targeting the financially disadvantaged and ethnic minorities.

In 2008, he became the first recipient of Mayor Tom Henry’s Key to the Fort award.

Redd also served on the Headwaters Park Alliance board for decades and was an original member of the Headwaters Park Commission in the 1980s, which created the park from what had been an industrial area of downtown. Redd passed away on January 27, 2013.” (Article first appeared in the Journal Gazette, January 29, 2013)

Thunderous Steps FORWARD

Ms. Ezel Smith was a champion of hard work, dedication and love for her, then, IPFW students. Serving 53 years and being honored with the with the renaming of the IPFW Diversity Scholarship to the Ms. Ezel Smith Diversity Scholarship.

The Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion pays tribute this Black History Month to the work and legacy of Ms. Ezel Smith! We stand on her shoulders as we take Thunderous Steps DEI FORWARD here at PFW.

If you would like to commit to becoming a financial donor to DEI work here at PFW, please contact Eve Colchin (eve.colchin@pfw.edu) or Dr. MarTeze Hammonds (mdhammon@pfw.edu).
“It is our conviction that diversity stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life.”

Fostering collaborative strategy
Openness to varied ideas
Realistic strategy building
Willingness learn, grow, and ACT together
Align mission/vision to all DEI work
Role modeling change
Determined to remove systemic barriers

MEET OUR STAFF

MarTeze Hammonds, Ed.D.
Chief Diversity Officer
He/him

Shubitha Kever, M.P.A.
Associate Diversity Officer
Director of TRIO Programs
She/her

Jayla M. Heller
Executive Assistant
She/her

Sha’Ketah Ledford
Graphic Designer
She/her

Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Units:
Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs | The Q Center | The Women’s Center
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