Diversity 20 Years Later: Opportunity, Obstacle or Something Else Altogether?

Can you believe this year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Diversity Conference? Started with committed faculty, staff and students, what began as an opportunity to engage aspects of interpersonal, institutional and structural oppression has become a signature event for Weber State and Northern Utah.

What sets this conference apart from other events is the intentional effort made to provide large-scale, safe (albeit often uncomfortable) opportunities to engage in the difficult discussions of our time, including (dis)ability, democracy, sexual orientation, gender, immigration and more.

This year we examine the concept of diversity and inclusion 20 years later — where we were, where we are, and where we’re going. We ask, “Does diversity still matter?” By participating in these conversations, we more fully engage in the marketplace of ideas making us stronger critical thinkers, problem solvers and citizens of the world.

I invite you to participate. These conversations are more important than ever as we work to understand each other and ourselves.

20th Annual Diversity Conference ‘Breaks Down Walls of Contention’

Fifty years ago, the day after Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, Jane Elliott, a young teacher in Riceville, Iowa, wanted her class of third-graders to understand discrimination, so she devised the now famous Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes exercise.

Her husband warned it would get her fired, but Elliott believed the lesson was worth the price.

She told her students that those with brown eyes had more “Melanin” and were thus smarter, better, more deserving. They were rewarded with longer recesses and drinks directly from the water fountain.

“I watched my brown-eyed children become brilliant because I raised their expectations,” Elliott remembers of that day. “Obviously, if you have magic eyes, you can do anything.”

Conversely, the blue-eyed children were quickly shaken, subdued and even scorned.

Although the exercise has critics, it has been cited as a social science landmark. Textbook publisher McGraw-Hill listed Elliott on its timeline of 30 notable educators, along with Plato, Horace Mann and Booker T. Washington.

“An educator is one who leads people out of ignorance,” Elliott said. “I was determined that no person at any age would ever leave my presence with attitudes of discrimination unchallenged.”

She has kept that promise, advocating “justice for all” before hundreds of groups across the country. She’ll bring her message and passion to the 20th Annual Diversity Conference as the keynote speaker.

Forrest Crawford, Weber State’s first assistant to the president for diversity, said the desire to “break down walls of contention” inspired the Diversity Conference 20 years ago.
October
04 | 20TH ANNUAL DIVERSITY CONFERENCE
WSU Davis · D3 Ballrooms, 6–8 p.m.
05 | 20TH ANNUAL DIVERSITY CONFERENCE
WSU Ogden · Shepherd Union, 8 a.m.–1 p.m.
05 | WSU DRAG SHOW
WSU Ogden · SU Ballroom B, 6–8 p.m.

8–12 | WSU PRIDE WEEK
WSU Ogden, ALL WEEK
10 | CULTURAL CONNECTIONS: SATURDAY CHURCH FILM SCREENING AND DISCUSSION
WSU Ogden · SU Wildcat Theater, 7–9 p.m.
11 | LGBTQ+ AWARENESS: COMING OUT OF MY CAGE (AND I’VE BEEN DOING JUST FINE!)
WSU Ogden · SU Wildcat Theater, noon–1 p.m.
16 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
17 | TABOO TALKS: THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE? DISCUSSING ATHEISM AND CHRISTIANITY
Center for Diversity & Unity · SU 232 10:30–11:30 a.m.
18 | STOP THE HATE: NO MORE SKELETONS IN THE CLOSET
Center for Diversity & Unity · SU 232 noon–1 p.m.
23 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.

November
01 | DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS CELEBRATION
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, 6–8 p.m.
05, 08, 15 | 13TH ANNUAL NATIVE SYMPOSIUM
Various Locations
05 | 13TH ANNUAL NATIVE SYMPOSIUM SUNRISE CEREMONY
WSU Ogden · Ada Lindquist Plaza, 8:30 a.m.
05 | 13TH ANNUAL NATIVE SYMPOSIUM BREAKFAST
Center for Diversity & Unity · SU 232, 9–10 a.m.
05 | 13TH ANNUAL NATIVE SYMPOSIUM WORKSHOP
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
06 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
07 | DAVID GRANN - KILLERS OF THE MOON
WSU Ogden · Elizabeth Hall Auditorium 11:30 a.m.
08 | 13TH ANNUAL NATIVE SYMPOSIUM KEYNOTE & LUNCHEON
WSU Ogden · SU Wildcat Theater & Skyroom (Room 404), 10:30 a.m.–1 p.m.

December
04 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
06 | POSADAS NAVIDEÑAS CELEBRATION
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, 6–8 p.m.
18 | MULTICULTURAL YOUTH CONFERENCE
WSU Ogden · Val A. Browning Center & SU 9 a.m.–6 p.m.

January
08 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
21 | MLK FREEDOM BREAKFAST & MARCH
Ogden · Marshall White Center & Ogden Amphitheater, 8 a.m.–2 p.m.
22 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
25 | GOSPEL MUSIC FESTIVAL
WSU Ogden · Val A. Browning Center, 7–9 p.m.

February
05 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
19 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
20 | WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
26 | STORIES ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.

March
02 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE: NATIVE STYLE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
11 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
29 | ANNUAL INTERCOLLEGIATE LUAU
WSU Davis · D3 Ballrooms, 5–8 p.m.

April
11 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
06 | 42ND ANNUAL INDIGENOUS VOICES POW WOW
WSU Ogden · SU Ballrooms, 10 a.m.–10 p.m.
16 | SESSIONS ON THE LEDGE
WSU Ogden · SU Atrium, noon–1 p.m.
“We can debate, with some trepidation, the relative value of these diversity initiatives and whether Weber State’s model of incremental progress has served us well,” he said. “However, the current diversity conference, along with those who supported and sustained it for over two decades, has cultivated untold educational forums, fostered institutional policy-related frameworks and encouraged students to incorporate diversity into their courses of study, potentially transforming systemic changes we believe are part of that tattered mosaic we aim to repair.”

The conference has facilitated discussion about racial divides, disability, religion, gender and income inequality. One of the original conference planners, Barry Gomberg, Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action executive director, said diversity awareness is now woven into the fabric of Weber State.

“WSU’s 20 annual conferences have reflected the motto: E pluribus unum, out of many, one,” he said. “By courageously exploring challenging dimensions of our differences, the WSU Diversity Conference strives to build greater overall unity through mutual respect and understanding.”

Although progress is slow, uneven and sometimes discouraging, this year’s keynote speaker will remind participants and organizers they must press on until the lessons are learned.

“If we could get the idea of different races out of our heads, and instill the knowledge that we are all one race — the human race — we could change the situation in a generation,” Elliott said. “You do it by education. The answer to this problem is education.”

### Diversity & Education Resources

#### WSU

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<th>Service</th>
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<tr>
<td>Access &amp; Diversity</td>
<td>801-626-7006</td>
<td>weber.edu/accessanddiversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity</td>
<td>801-626-6239</td>
<td>weber.edu/aaeo</td>
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<td>Chief Diversity Officer</td>
<td>801-626-7243</td>
<td>weber.edu/diversityoffice</td>
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<td>Davis Campus Learning &amp; Support Services</td>
<td>801-395-3460</td>
<td>weber.edu/DavisStudentServices</td>
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<td>Diversity &amp; Inclusive Programs</td>
<td>801-626-6957</td>
<td>weber.edu/diversity</td>
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<td>Disability Services</td>
<td>801-626-6413</td>
<td>weber.edu/disabilityservices</td>
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<td>LGBT Resource Center</td>
<td>801-626-7271</td>
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<td>Women’s Center</td>
<td>801-626-6090</td>
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#### Community

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<td>Fund for Civility, Respect and Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah Dispute Resolution</td>
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### Ask Yourself

Questions Jane Elliott Asks

- Have I aggressively sought out more information in an effort to enhance my own awareness and understanding of racism (talking with others, reading, listening)?
- Have I re-evaluated my use of terms, phrases or behaviors that may be perceived by others as degrading or hurtful?
- Have I openly confronted a racist comment, joke or action among those around me?
- Have I been investigating and evaluating political candidates at all levels in terms of their stance and activity against racism, sexism and ageism?
- Have I made an effort to learn some of the language of those in my community who may speak something other than standard English?
- Have I become seriously dissatisfied with my own level of activity in combating racism, sexism and ageism?

For more questions, visit janeelliott.com/commitment
Workshops, Presentations, Panels to Discuss Privilege, Deportation and More

Inequality may present itself in unexpected places, like a school dress code.

In their WSU Diversity Conference workshop, Diversity ≠ Inclusivity: Recognizing Privilege and Embracing Growth, WSU assistant communication professor Bobbi Van Gilder and University of Oklahoma lecturer Roni Jackson-Kerr will discuss policies and attitudes that have led to unequal treatment. For example, an Oklahoma charter school disciplined a 7-year-old African-American student over her natural hairstyle.

“She was sent home for wearing dreadlocks, because, according to the school, her hair could distract from the respectful and serious atmosphere that it strives for,” Van Gilder said.

This year’s Diversity Conference workshops tie in with the conference theme, Diversity 20 Years Later: Opportunity, Obstacle or Something Else Altogether? “All of the workshops speak to how the word diversity can be looked at from one or more of those three ways,” said Alexander Lancaster, WSU assistant communication professor and co-chair of the conference planning committee.

Along with discussing obstacles involving privilege (unearned entitlements), Van Gilder and Jackson-Kerr’s workshop will focus on opportunities to challenge it.

Workshops will also focus on topics like language barriers and immigration. “A lot of the workshops are speaking to how we’re using pedagogy to increase awareness of diversity and to help students understand what the word means,” Lancaster said.

In addition to workshops, the conference will feature a research presentation on the toxic stress of deportation, and panel discussions, including students sharing their perspectives on diversity and faculty discussing intersections of pedagogy and diversity.

Jean Norman, faculty advisor of The Signpost and assistant communication professor, will ask a panel of students to share their perspectives and experiences in professional organizations, including the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

“I would like people to understand the value of professional organizations, but especially professional organizations for professionals of color,” Norman said.

Workshops, presentations and panels will be held Friday, Oct. 5 at the Shepherd Union and are free/open to the public.