



COLORADO  
COLLEGE

# THE DIFFERENCE

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The Collaborative for Community Engagement Newsletter

## Inside this Issue:

Kids Are Dramatic	1-3
New Staff	4-5
Duchess Harris	5-6
War on Christmas?	6
Stocking Shuffle	7
Upcoming Events and Announcements	8

## *Kids Are Dramatic*



KAD performs *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*— photos courtesy of Jacob Kirksey

by Laurel Hecker '13

## Service Quote of the Block:

He who wishes to secure the good of others has already secured his own.

-Confucius

Twice a week after school, a group of students at Mann Middle School gather to spend some time with acting, games, and theatrical activities—but with a purpose: emotional growth. These students are part of Kids Are Dramatic, one of eighteen K-12 initiatives sponsored by the CCE. The program was founded last year by Jacob Kirksey '15 with the goal of using theatre to help kids express themselves in healthy ways.

Kirksey has long known that he was interested in education, and the inspiration for KAD struck in the classroom. “I did an observation over at Mann Middle School for my block four last year, *Education: Theory into Practice*, and basically being in a classroom, you begin to realize that all day long you’re

*continued on page 2*

expected to sit down and not talk and not express yourself,” he explains. Kirksey struggled with the internal ramifications that he perceived the traditional classroom model having on these students.

The issue is largely one of self-esteem, according to Kirksey’s observations. Having a disposition that is at odds with classroom rules takes its toll on young students, who often feel they have “no excuse” for earning poor grades. The bright kids who underperform in school because they have a hard time conforming to the usual expectations inspired Kirksey into action. “I decided I have to do something that taps into these emotions that these kids are having to repress every day just to make it through,” he says of the impulse behind the program.

KAD gives kids an outlet for their energy and emotions, but the program is very structured. Kirksey has written a curriculum, which is divided into eight-week stages and individual lessons. Each of the



KAD founder Jacob Kirksey '15



A scene from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

four stages has a theme, which are Pantomime, Stage Acting 1, Stage Acting 2, and Performance. During the twice-weekly lessons, time is divided into a regular sequence. First is the warm-up activity, which physically and mentally prepares the students for the lesson. Warm-up is followed by the main focus, a brief lecture that introduces the day’s topic. Kirksey is well aware that “kids don’t come to an after-school activity to take notes,” so he keeps the main focus short and moves right into the reinforcement games, which put the ideas from the lecture into practice. These make up the bulk of the lesson each time. At the end of each session, there is a cool-down period for students to talk about the activities, ask questions, and reflect. The culmination of each stage of the program is a showcase performance, in which the students demonstrate what they have learned over the past eight

weeks.

As with any new organization, Kirksey and KAD have challenges to face. His biggest difficulty, he says, has been reconciling people’s more casual expectations about volunteer service with what he wants for the program. “This really is a unique organization in the sense that we are targeting emotions that most people avoid,” he explains. “In order to target those emotions and in order to improve on them, we have to make sure we are creating the safest environment possible, which requires the most consistent instructors who are punctual, professional, and treat this like a job.”

One of the challenges faced by many service groups is the lack of consistent volunteers. Not everyone will prioritize that commitment and show up on a regular basis, which is unacceptable to Kirksey in the context of his program. “This program is very professionally based and

rooted in teaching experience,” he says, elaborating that, “there are fewer members of the organization for that reason, because we look for really committed members.” In this sense, Kids Are Dramatic is on the forefront of the Collaborative’s goals to improve the quality of service that the college performs. Intentionality, consistency, and academic engagement are essential to the CCE mission.

Despite these challenges, KAD is looking to expand in the future. Next semester Kirksey hopes to run the program at the West Side Community Center and Imagination Celebration in addition to Mann Middle School. Spring 2013 will also mark the beginning of the KAD internship program, allowing other interested CC students to get involved with the program. The timing could not be more appropriate, as CC President Jill Tiefenthaler has discussed increasing internship opportunities as part of the Strategic Plan for the college.

Kirksey’s interns will have a curriculum of their own, consisting of modules to help them develop their teaching abilities. Already there has been marked interest in the program. “There are some members of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity who have approached me; they’re joining Teach for America next year and they have no teaching experience,” Kirksey explains. KAD in the future will prove to be educational for the interns, just as it is for the students, as they learn first-hand the kind of skills and dedication



A KAD student shows off her acting skills

it takes to teach kids.

Kirksey’s hard work and careful consideration in the development of his program is evident in the kids he instructs. He recalls one student in particular, “Last year, he was really rambunctious the whole class time...kind of antagonistic. And after going through a mere eight weeks of the pilot program last semester, he came back this year ready to hit the ground running, and from Day 1 in September

to now he has dramatically improved.” The program has effects both on stage and in life. This same student, Kirksey says, “has shown a huge sense of maturity and a huge sense of mental stability and really has found his friend group to set off for high school.” Though it may seem like fun and theatre games, Kids Are Dramatic teaches the skills that these students need to survive and thrive in school and in life.



# New Staff

by Laurel Hecker '13

On December 3, Virginia Visconti joined the Collaborative's team as the most recent addition to the new office's staff.

Visconti is the Assistant Director for Community-Based Learning and Research. As such, she will oversee those two arms of the larger CCE mission. "Among my duties will be to support community-based learning on campus," she explains, "there are faculty that teach CBL courses, so I'm there to support them and to generate even greater interest in teaching those kinds of courses." Community-based learning classes at CC link academic content with practical experience that allows students to interact with and benefit the community. The criteria for CBL classes encompass a variety of experiences, from applied teaching experience with the Education department to writing poems with partners at the Colorado Springs Senior Center, as in Re Evitt's Intro to Poetry class (last year's winner of the Prize in Community-Based Learning).

The other half of Visconti's efforts will be devoted to the research branch of the CCE. "My other role is to help develop a formal community-based research program," she says. As any good researcher would,



Visconti plans to explore the wants and needs of the campus community, as well as the challenges of establishing this type of program. She says, "I'm excited about spending the first three or so months on the job doing what's sort of like a feasibility study. I'd love to be able to talk with faculty, students, staff, and community organization members." Though there are already small groups of people at CC who are engaged in community-based research, the Collaborative hopes to make it a larger and more established part of campus academic life.

Visconti will be instrumental in this process, and she has a long history with community-based research to draw from. Before coming to CC, she was the director of the Public Service Research Program in the Haas Center for Public

Service at Stanford University. There, she taught classes on the methods and theory of community-based research. She secured funding for teams of researchers who partnered with community stakeholders, and advised them throughout the research process.

Though she now has an abundance of experience conducting, advising, and teaching community-based research, she discovered her passion almost by accident. "I'd been trained to do research [in the traditional] way," she says, and was not directly exposed to community-based research until she went to Vietnam to conduct field work for her dissertation. Though her primary research explored the impact of rural household economies on children's formal education, she also worked on a project that focused on alternative pig feed technologies. "This was very much a CBR project because the farmers themselves were helping to collect the data and make sense of the data," Visconti explains. "That was my first exposure to working with the community members on the project itself, on a question that was of tremendous interest to them."

From then on, direct attention to the community has been a priority in Visconti's work. As an educator, she enjoys fostering these values in her students. "I had such a

good time being involved in this type of work back at [the Haas Center], because I really felt like the students who walked in the door were extraordinary,” she recalls. “They were curious, they were committed, they were compassionate. I’ve always thought those were really good qualities to have as a researcher, and it seems like a very similar set of values are operating [at the CCE].” Through her work, Visconti is helping to promote action-oriented research, as an alternative and a partner to traditional academic research.

Visconti is excited to collaborate with CC students and faculty with these innovative methods. “I think a lot of students are curious about the opportunity to work with the community in a different sort of way,” she says. She is also eager to get to know the other branches of the CCE: “There are so many things here that make a lot of sense,” she exclaims of the connections across areas such as public health, research, education, and military engagement efforts. “Everywhere I turn there’s

something that connects with my background or my interests, so it’s just win-win all the way around. And to be among students that are so bright and articulate, it really feels like a dream.”

Virginia hopes to receive input on the topics of community-based learning and research from any and all members of the campus community. She can be found in her office, Worner 205A, or contacted via email at [Virginia.Visconti@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:Virginia.Visconti@coloradocollege.edu)

## Duchess Harris

by Mackenzie

Mulligan-Buckmiller ‘15

Just because Obama is president does not mean that America has become a post-racial nation. The actions of those in leadership positions have shown that racism still exists at a national level.

On December 3, Colorado College brought Duchess Harris, Assistant Professor and Chair of American Studies at Macalaster College, to speak about her book, *Black Women Feminists in the Age of Obama*. In her talk, she began with 1961 and worked her way to the present, outlining the how’s, why’s, and what’s of black women’s attempts to gain political involvement and why these women were often unsuccessful. Through numerous organiza-

tions such as black feminist organizations, theatrical productions, beauty pageants, and Presidential appointments, some black women did gain political involvement.

Yet, this success was and is often short-lived. Anita Hill, Senator Carol Moseley Braun, and Shirley Sherron are three such women who have resigned from their jobs. Harris states that if America was a truly post-racism nation, Anita Hill would have received support in her controversial testimony against Clarence Thomas, Senator Moseley Braun would have been re-elected, and Shirley Sherron would not have been forced to resign from her job.

Anita Harris was a lawyer who attended Yale Law School and then got a job in 1981 as attorney advisor to the



Duchess Harris

Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, Clarence Thomas. One year later, Thomas became the Chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and Hill was again

*continued on page 6*

his assistant. The next year, in 1983, Hill left the position to teach at a university. During George H. W. Bush's presidency, Thomas was nominated for the U.S. Supreme Court and Hill spoke out testifying that Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her during their time at the Department of Education and at the EEOC. Anita Hill received no support and was publicly spoken against by many of Thomas' supporters even after he took the seat.

Senator Carol Moseley Braun was a senator from Illinois and was the subject of an investigation by the Federal

Elections Commission in 1993 for unaccounted campaign funds. She was never charged because there was not enough evidence, but her alleged actions kept her from continuing to be senator and in her campaign for Illinois mayor.

Shirley Sherrod was forced to resign in 2010 from her position as Georgia State Director of Rural Development. In a whirlwind of events, during an address to the NAACP, several excerpts of her speech were posted and condemned as racist. That same afternoon, U.S. Government officials called on Sherrod to resign. When the

full video was reviewed and the context of the comments clear, all the accusers apologized and offered Sherrod a new position. She declined this job and initiated a lawsuit for defamation.

Harris spoke about racism at a national level and disputed the idea that since Barack Obama is president, the inclusion of Black women in politics is no longer an issue. Her talk reminded us that there is still a long way to go on the road to equality for all groups, and just because there was a victory for one group, that does not mean there is a victory for all.

## *Holiday Discussion*

by Laurel Hecker '13

On December 11 in Bemis Hall, the CCE hosted a panel discussion themed around national holidays, religious freedom, and the separation of church and state. Members of the panel were: Gail Murphy-Geiss, Associate Professor of Sociology; Jim Parco, Associate Professor of Economics & Business; Darrell Doyama, advisor to the CC Navigators campus ministry; and Amanda Udis-Kessler, chair of the CC IRB.

Each member of the panel spoke on an aspect of the intersections between holidays, religion, and nation. Murphy-Geiss discussed Supreme Court

rulings on nativity scenes being displayed on public lands, which state that they are acceptable only if equal opportunity is given to non-religious displays.

Parco talked about the role of religion at the US Air Force Academy, in relation to a lawsuit that was filed after a number of evangelical officers publicly asserted their faith in the Academy newspaper.

Doyama spoke about the tension between the clauses of the Constitution that prevent the federal government from making laws that either establish religion or prevent the free exercise thereof. He posited that the founding fathers purposefully included those opposites in

an effort to foster balance.

Udis-Kessler discussed the commercialization of Christmas and its contrast with the way many people interpret the values of Christ in the Bible. The meaning of Christmas, she said, should be about serving the poor, rather than the amassing of material goods.

Once each panel member had delivered their position, there was an interactive period of questions and answers. Even after the panel had left, discussion continued in small groups of attendees for over an hour.

Many attendees also brought toys or warm clothing donations to benefit the Care and Share Food Bank for Southern Colorado.

# Stocking Shuffle 2012

by Laurel Hecker '13

On December 8, Colorado College hosted the sixth annual Stocking Shuffle, an initiative under the Public Health branch of the CCE. The 5k race and walk raises money for the El Pomar Foundation's Empty Stocking Fund.

While most people used their Saturday morning to sleep in, Stocking Shuffle participants gathered early at the starting line. Many came in friend or family groups for this relaxed event, and participants frequently dress in festive costumes. This year's race/walk had about 145 runners, according to Sara

Bodner '13, one of the event's organizers. Most were Colorado Springs residents.

Once the starting gun sounded, runners and walkers set off on a course that wound through campus before arriving at the finish line. That course may be challenging to some participants, but it is also a challenge for the planners of the event. "We spend a ton of time on the event the day before the race and the morning of the race. We woke up at 2:45 a.m. to mark the course and set up the start and finish areas," says Bodner. They also spent a great deal of time before the event advertising it in the community, through the



Pikes Peak Road Runners newsletter and various running blogs.

All their hard work has paid off, however, as the Stocking Shuffle continues to grow each year. This year, they raised an estimated \$2,000 for the Empty Stocking Fund through registration fees and t-shirt sales. The Fund supports 15 health and human services agencies in El Paso County, including Marion House, the local Red Cross chapter, and Urban Peak. Over the past five years, it has raised and donated nearly \$6 million. Much of that money is raised through fundraisers like the Stocking Shuffle that are planned and hosted by businesses and organizations across the city.



Stocking Shuffle 2011— photo from Pikes Peak Sports

*For more information on the Empty Stocking Fund, visit [fillanemptystocking.org](http://fillanemptystocking.org)*

# Upcoming Events and Announcements

<b>Steering Committee Retreat</b>	
Jan. 9-10	The Collaborative for Community Engagement will host the members of its Steering Committee for a two-day retreat at Stewart House.
<b>Year of Planning Winter Conference</b>	
Jan. 17-18	President Tiefenthaler’s Year of Planning continues with the Winter Conference and the goal of gathering broad community input.
<b>Women in War Panel Discussion</b>	
Jan. 30	The Collaborative for Community Engagement and the Office of Communications will co-host this panel discussion on women’s role in the military in Gaylord Hall at 6 p.m.

*Happy Holidays!*

*We hope you enjoy winter break*

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**Our Mission Statement:**

*The Collaborative for Community Engagement challenges students and faculty to integrate rigorous liberal arts scholarship with collaborative community-based work in ways that strengthen and transform both in the process. In the tradition of liberal education and its emphasis on active citizenship, we provide a continuum of opportunities for the Colorado College community to deepen and contextualize classroom learning by engaging in reciprocal and sustainable collaborations with local, regional, national, and global partners. By fostering skills for planning, implementing and examining civic action, the Collaborative facilitates leadership development and promotes a social responsibility that is reflective, imaginative, and self-aware.*