Have you ever experienced difficulty performing ordinarily simple tasks or functions such as walking, brushing your teeth, speaking, identifying colors, or even clapping your hands? Imagine these situations are a daily experience for you. Accessibility issues, often referred to as disability, can affect us all; whether we are the individual living the experience, the caregiver, or someone who provides emotional support. I challenge you to exhibit understanding, not pity, and seek knowledge about the particular disabilities you encounter. During the month of October, National Disability Employment Awareness Month recognizes the societal and workforce contributions of people with disabilities. March is designated as Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, which highlights the contributions and needs of those living with a developmental disability. We all make adjustments in our lives in order to cope and journey through life, and persons affected by disability are no different. What thought processes do you embrace relating to this issue? Are our expectations or outlooks clouded due to observing through our own lens?

Welcoming our new Assistant Director for Accessibility Services

by: Devin D. Carr

Technically, there is no need to welcome Christie Williams to the university community. She has been a part of the UWG family for quite some time. Throughout her years of service, she has served in various roles at the institution. However in September of 2014, she started a new chapter in her UWG journey when she assumed the role as the Assistant Director for Accessibility Services. I had the pleasure of meeting with Christie to discuss her transition, career path and her insight as it relates to students who have disabilities on campus.

HOW HAS THE TRANSITION BEEN INTO THE NEW POSITION?

It has been wonderful. I had a history with the counseling center because I interned with the department while I was working towards my counseling degree at West Georgia. I have been at West Georgia as either a student or employee for much of my adult life. I worked with the financial aid department in my 20’s. During that time I learned about the counseling center and fell in love with what they do. Ultimately, that experience led me to pursue my graduate degree. In addition, I worked with the early entrance program which taught me about working with special populations and meeting their needs. I also worked with the EXCEL Center, which is now the Center for Academic Success, where I learned about support functions. My previous experiences prepared me well for this position. I am still learning, but it has not been difficult. The staff here has been amazing during this transition.
**What do you like most about being at the University of West Georgia?**

I am a native of Carrollton, GA, having lived here my whole life. I am a first generation college student so I know how important it is for students to feel supported and welcomed. It was such an exciting, but scary, experience to start college! After graduating, I found out about a job in financial aid through happenstance. When I applied I had no idea I would actually have a career in higher education. I saw it as just a job at the time, but I fell in love with the work and the environment. I so value the chance to make UWG a welcoming place for students now.

**That seems to be how a lot of people get into higher education. They sort of fall into it.**

Yes, you get a job and decide that you will only do it for a while, but then you realize you really love the field and decide to stay.

**What are some of your responsibilities as the Assistant Director of Accessibility Services?**

The goal of this department is to make sure that students have access to everything they need to be a part of the UWG community. Access does not necessarily guarantee success. We want to make sure we “even the playing field.” The needs of students vary greatly depending on whether or not a student has a physical, learning, or psychological disability. We want to provide the appropriate accommodations so students have a chance at success. Students with disabilities still have to work hard and fulfill their end of the bargain like all other student. However, we want to make sure that they are not hindered by obstacles caused by their disability. We work with students to make sure we document, per University System of Georgia requirements, and create an accommodation report that they can share with their instructors. The report informs the instructor of the accommodations appropriate for that particular student. We have processes and procedures to follow, but taking care of the student is first and foremost for us.

**As the Assistant Director is there some type of impact or change you would like to see happen here at UWG?**

In my short time in this role, I have been very pleased. I think we have very supportive faculty. They do wonderful things for our students. We plan to expand and improve communication with them so that they better understand the needs of students with disabilities and how we can ensure compliance with Federal law. I would like to explore other things we can do with students as a group. For example, collaborating with your office [Center for Diversity & Inclusion] to do more programming. In general students are happy with the services we provide, but we are always open to their suggestions to improve campus accessibility.

“The goal of all college students is to learn, but to also develop the soft skills necessary to be successful. Those skills include managing one’s time and resources, communicating effectively, and taking responsibility for one’s own well-being. The self-advocacy and independence required in college allows students with disabilities to grow, mature, and prepare for their future.”

—Christie Williams

Editor’s note: Soft skills are personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people.
Maritza Pitelli shares her role in Accessibility Services

by: Dr. Lisa Adams Somerlot

Persons with disabilities are the nation’s largest minority, and the only protected group that one may join at any time as a result of injury or illness. Protection under the law for persons with disabilities was late in coming to the civil rights movement with the Americans with Disabilities Act being passed by Congress in 1990. This law, like other civil rights legislation, provides persons with disability the same rights to services and access that all other Americans hold. Accessibility Services provides equal access through accommodations to those persons with a disability who are seeking an education at UWG.

We have approximately 700 students at UWG who receive accommodations for a disability. Most of these disabilities are unseen, and unless you were close with a person, you may never know they have a disability. Others are quite obviously disabled in some way. Students with disabilities have the challenges all students have of transitioning to college, learning to take care of oneself, and finding social groups. For students with disabilities there is an added burden of managing symptoms in addition to typical college issues. Many disabilities make daily living more demanding and can increase the challenges students with disabilities face in and out of the classroom.

It is sometimes difficult to relate to someone with a disability, it feels uncomfortable. We are afraid of offending, or just don’t know how to deal with our own feelings of discomfort/pity when someone is impaired. Students with disabilities most need understanding and respect. An excellent way to gain understanding of another person’s experience is to get to know the person, and to “walk a mile in his shoes” if you will. Understanding is the first step to truly knowing another person. Having a diverse group of friends creates a rich and meaningful life and better prepares one for success in an ever more diverse work place.

Accessibility Services serves students with disabilities, providing them with appropriate accommodations so that their class room experience is the same as that of all other students. If you would like more information about Accessibility Services please visit our website, www.westga.edu/accessibility, call 678-839-6428, or come by 123 Row Hall.

Maritza Pitelli has been with the UWG family since 2006. She has worked in different capacities since her start here, but currently serves as an Accessibility Counselor

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH AND HOW YOU WERE LEAD TO THIS POSITION?

My former career experience was garnered working in public, private and non-profit healthcare/health
care advocacy, with a focus on providing Spanish Language access to clients looking to receive much needed services. I was looking to further my education and become a counselor, and continue working in a field where I could continue the meaningful work of being a bridge to services for diverse populations. When Disability Services had a position open piloting a captioning system to provide live classroom access to deaf and hard of hearing students, I pursued the opportunity to develop the new program here at UWG. The career experience working with students with disabilities concurrent with completing my education in Professional Counseling made the position of Accessibility Counselor a fit for me. I was thrilled when the opportunity to work providing equitable access and counseling services opened up here at the Counseling Center.

**WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT BEING WEST OF ALL THE REST?**

UWG as a whole is a thriving, growing institution that is both committed to its students and to its staff. It is exciting to be the part of the changes that are happening here. I feel fortunate to have a meaningful career and work within this dynamic community. Also, “Working West” would not be same without my colleagues here at the counseling center. These talented and hilarious people make this department a second home.

**WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN ACCESSIBILITY COUNSELOR?**

As an Accessibility Counselor I work to ensure that students are granted equitable access and reasonable accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. This means that I evaluate documentation submitted by UWG students with disabilities and assign accommodations for both classroom and campus access. Like the rest of my team, I answer questions posed by faculty, staff, students and families regarding the implementation of accommodations. I provide referral to students linking them to other supportive campus and off campus resources and assist students in developing skills in self-advocacy. I meet with students regularly to provide counseling services.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?**

Students with disabilities face all the challenges inherent to being a student. They balance work, relationships, finances, and schoolwork in their pursuit of higher education. I believe that the greatest difficulty is that these students encounter the same developmental and psychological challenges as every other person, but often do so in physical and learning environments that are not designed to provide access to all people. Barriers of all kinds provide major difficulties for students. Furthermore, our student are also tasked with self-advocacy, needing to learn how to let others know that the environment excludes them by not providing access. While I believe UWG is a progressive environment, encountering discrimination through ableism and disableism is a lifelong concern for many students.

**BESIDES THE SERVICES ALREADY BEING PROVIDED, WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE OFFERED TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?**

I would like to see offerings that go beyond compliance available to students with disabilities. Our department has discussed ideas focusing on the social cultural sphere including Greek life, honor societies, social groups, etc. I would also be interested in seeing more disability awareness events.

**WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF YOUR JOB?**

I think the most rewarding aspect of working for access is the opportunity that I receive to partner with both students and colleagues with the shared goal of creating a successful and engaging experience for students here at UWG. To me, there is no greater purpose than being a part of a student’s journey towards accessing and developing their innate potential. My heart feels full to bursting when students cross that stage… and leave West to the new possibilities that lie ahead.*

“...encountering discrimination through ableism and disableism is a lifelong concern for many students.” —Maritza Pitelli
Behind the Scenes with Chris Childress

by: Dajuan Crooms

On every team whether it is a sports, academic, or even a professional team there are people that often go unnoticed that are of much importance to the success of the team. The Center for Diversity & Inclusion felt that it was necessary to highlight the immaculate performance and duties of Captioning Coordinator for Accessibility Services, Chris Childress.

**How long have you been with the University of West Georgia?**

I have been working for UWG for seven year in different capacities.

**Could you please tell me about your career path?**

I have served in numerous capacities here in Accessibility Services: From assistant manager to manager, and now serving as the Captioning Coordinator.

**Describe a typical day as the Captioning Coordinator for Accessibility Services at UWG.**

A typical day for me would not involve much face to face interaction with students, but would more so focus on helping students find solutions that fit their accessibility needs. My main focus right now is trying to get the new assistive technology lab set up in the library. We plan on implementing a couple of options such as digitally scanning books and getting those into a format that is easily read in a timely manner. Other technologies that we are planning on interfacing are JAWS (Job Access With Speech) and Dragon. JAWS is a screen reading software that allows a person without sight to use a computer. Dragon is a speech recognition software used to control a computer. Interfacing these two software programs would mean that we would be able to provide a keyboard and monitor-free solution. This would allow someone to navigate a computer using their voice and the machine reading it back to them.

**Could you describe how tough it is to implement new technology in accessibility services?**

There are so many different technologies out there and there is really no standard operating practice. Some of the technologies can be so individualized, require training from faculty and staff amongst a number of other things; it is just about finding the right match for the student.

**What is the most rewarding aspect of your job?**

The most rewarding part of the job is definitely watching students graduate. Just knowing that I was part of assisting them get to that point is very gratifying.

**What do you think of the diversity of students, staff, and faculty at UWG?**

Aforementioned, I have very limited interaction with others on campus, but I do see diversity and know that it is encouraged here at UWG. I believe that accessibility could play a pivotal role of adding to the diversity of the university. By properly marketing accessibility and diversity to the public, the University would expand its target market to a pool of people that are not effectively being captured. Accessibility and diversity should be brought to the forefront of our efforts instead of being reactive to these two things that we know are needed.

“Accessibility and diversity should be brought to the forefront of our efforts.” - Chris Childress
Through A Different Lens: UWG Student Shares Their Experience

by: Devin D. Carr

Names and Various Details of Events Have Been Omitted to Protect the Privacy of Those Involved.

I had the opportunity to meet Michael, a sophomore here at the University of West Georgia. Michael is not that different from the rest of the student body. He navigates the rewards and challenges of being a college student much like his peers. However, Michael happens to manage the effects of both Asperger Syndrome and Epilepsy. Asperger Syndrome is an autism spectrum disorder. Those affected by it can have difficulty with social interaction and possess a restricted range of interests or repetitive behaviors. Epilepsy is a group of neurological disorders characterized by a tendency for recurrent seizures.

Michael was diagnosed with both of these conditions at an early age. It has taken him longer than others to get his learning permit and driver’s license, but he considers himself lucky. He has not had an epileptic seizure in several years. Though there are limitations placed on when he can drive, Michael informed me that he has known others with epilepsy who cannot drive at all.

Michael is not the only member of his family with a disability. He also has a brother on the severe end of the autism spectrum who is nonverbal and developmentally challenged. Michael said his brother’s disability has had a significant impact on his family.

Family outings are extremely difficult and they are limited in their choices.

Michael has not been without his challenges here at UWG. He had to deal with an unpleasant roommate experience that resulted in him having to find other accommodations. Our discussion about this incident highlighted the need for more educational opportunities for students about various disabilities. In addition, it illuminated the need for some students to be more understanding and accepting of difference.

Overall, Michael has always felt welcomed at UWG. The sense of seclusion he felt in high school does not exist here at the university. Michael stated that because of that he has learned to appreciate himself more. The faculty and staff here at UWG have been very cooperative as it relates to providing him the necessary accommodations to ensure his success.

The Counseling Center has been extremely useful in helping Michael’s transition into university life. After the difficulties he experienced with his first roommate, the Counseling Center reached out to him to help him process the events. Beyond providing him with tools to manage his disabilities, Michael uses the resources provided by the Counseling Center to manage things experienced by many students such as stress and depression.

I asked Michael if he could say something to a student who’s life has not been affected by a disability what would it be. He said that it is important that we respect all those we encounter. We must remain mindful of how we treat others. Michael thinks it is important that we learn to understand and appreciate differences and accept people as they are. He believes that despite our differences, we have a lot in common.

It was a pleasure meeting Michael. It is my hope that students in the university community use the resources and opportunities provided here at UWG to expand their knowledge about various disabilities that impact our student body. Different does not mean deficient and we must remain mindful of that as we interact with each other within the UWG community.
VOICES OF UWG
by: Jordan Legree, Vanessa Patrick, Jessi Watkins

CALEB

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY?

Diversity is a group of individuals who are different in all the aspects that make us human. It is not limited by gender, race, or ethnicity, but includes likes, dislikes, and habits. I have met friends, one of African American descent and the other Caucasian descent who both enjoyed rock climbing as a hobby. That is diversity.

IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

The world is diverse, so why shouldn’t a campus replicate it? School’s purpose is to prepare students for the future and the world they will encounter when they graduate. Diversity should start at school just like the struggle to succeed. It always helps to know more people from different walks of life; what better place to start then at school?

WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

I believe people with disabilities face challenges such as ridicule and underestimation. When I was young and naive, I never understood what it took to overcome adversity.

HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE STRESS OF BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT?

I believe being a good student takes more than going to class and making exceptional grades. It’s about the experiences you have; good or bad. I manage the stress of class by living everyday like the next one is not promised.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING WEST OF ALL THE REST (A STUDENT AT UWG)?

My favorite part of being a UWG student is the family atmosphere. There is always someone who knows someone else that you may need to help you along your path. I have made connections with people at UWG that will last a lifetime.
**Danielle Jackson; Sophomore**

**What is your definition of diversity?**

My personal definition of diversity is a mix, variety, or range of different things. Diversity can also refer to people. People have different nationalities, origins, and even backgrounds.

**Is it important to have diversity on campus? Why or Why not?**

I strongly agree that it is important to have diversity on campus. I am a people’s person and I have a natural tendency to talk to people that I don’t even know. I enjoy speaking to those of different cultures and learning more about their beliefs and cultural values. It is always fun.

**What do you think are some of the challenges faced by students with disabilities?**

Some of the challenges I think students with disabilities face are communication with other students who don’t have a disability. Being able to learn at a normal rate as others, or being allowed to participate and engage in physical activities as others can be hard for those with disabilities.

**How do you manage the stress of being a college student?**

Managing stress in college is the hardest part about being in college. To manage stress, I like to go home to my family. Being around my loved ones motivates me and eases all the stress I may have built up. My family brings the laughter and love that I need to keep me going.

**What is your favorite part of being West of all the rest (a student at UWG)?**

My favorite part about being a student at UWG is the resources my school offers to help me succeed. Tutoring is available, the library is always open and professors are always helpful during office hours. There is no reason why anyone should fail or miss opportunities to learn.

**Lalique Sweeney; Freshman**

**What is your definition of diversity?**

My definition of diversity is having many different cultures and personalities in one area or place.

**Is it important to have diversity on campus? Why or why not?**

It is important to have diversity on campus because then everyone can experience something different than their norm. They might find something new that they really like from a different culture or from another person.

**What do you think are some of the challenges faced by students with disabilities?**

I think the challenges they might face is just simply fitting in. We live in a society where people just judge one another rather than getting to know one another. People with disabilities are judged the most because they are different from everyone else.

**How do you manage the stress of being a college student?**

The way I deal with stress is talk about it to my mom or my best friend. They always know what to say to make me feel better. If I can’t talk to them, I either go read a book or play video games to relieve stress.

**What is your favorite part of being West of all the rest (a student at UWG)?**

My favorite part is just being around friends. They help me through my hard times. I love the campus and it’s very entertaining.
**What is your definition of diversity?**

My definition of diversity is being surrounded by people that are different than you. It is not necessarily about race. I think it is about all possible differences that can exist between people.

**Is it important to have diversity on campus? Why or why not?**

Yes, absolutely. I have learned so much about others and from others because of the diversity of people and perspectives on the UWG campus. There is no such thing as “too much diversity”

**What do you think are some of the challenges faced by students with disabilities?**

I would think that a challenge faced by students with disabilities is inclusivity. I do not believe that they are offered the same privileges as others.

**How do you manage the stress of being a graduate student?**

I have to take time to set school and work apart. I have fun with my friends, spend time with my family, and do things that do not related to school and work. It is all about balance.

**What is your favorite part of being west of all the rest (a student at UWG)?**

Oh my gosh. I love everything about UWG! I went west for undergrad and I stayed west for graduate school. There is an opportunity here to be somebody. I was able to grow as a person, a student, and most importantly as a leader because of the students, faculty, and staff at UWG. Going west was the best decision that I have ever made.

---

**Hanah Watkins, Junior**

**What is your definition of diversity?**

My definition of diversity is when different cultures, people and things coexist in one place at the same time.

**Is it important to have diversity on campus why or why not?**

It is important to have diversity on campus because when people learn together they can also learn from one another.

**What do you think are some of the challenges faced by students with disabilities?**

Sometimes, students with visible disabilities are treated differently than their peers and often have to work harder to be treated equally.

**How do you manage the stress of being a college student?**

I use my family, especially my sister, as a source of support.

**What is your favorite part of being west of all the rest (a student at UWG)?**

I love all of my classes and how accepting and open people are of one another.
The Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) works to reinforce and increase appreciation of the many aspects of diversity and culture through a variety of programs, initiatives, and collaboration.

University of West Georgia Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) Staff

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Director

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Associate Director
Multicultural Achievement Program (MAP) Coordinator

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Carina Arellano-Garcia
Student Assistant
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www.facebook.com/UWGdiversity

@UWG_CDI
Center for Diversity and Inclusion
“Beyond Differences”

UPCOMING EVENTS

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<tr>
<th>FEBRUARY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-28</td>
<td>Black History Month Observance Display: Row Hall 2nd Floor East: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm (M-F)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Black History Program Co-Sponsors: UWG English Department and School of Arts. Featuring Dr. Kiese Laymon, readings: Campus Center Ballroom 108.2 @ 7:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Multicultural Conversations Series: Diversity Roundtable :11:30 am- 1:30 pm: Z-6 (Hubbard Dining Hall)</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage Movie: Black History Month: Row Hall East 2nd Floor: 11 am – 1 pm: MRC</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>MAP AWARD Pictures: Campus Center Ballroom 108.2: 7:00 pm</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>African American Male Initiative (AAMI) Lecture Series: - Campus Center Ballroom 108.2 @ 7:00 p.m. Guest Speaker: Mr. Odell Bizzell</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion- 3rd Annual Living Legacy Series: Women’s Issues @ 7:00 pm Campus Center Ballroom 108.2</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage Movie: Black History Month: Row Hall East 2nd Floor: 11 am – 1 pm: MRC</td>
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<td>1-31</td>
<td>Women’s History Month Observance Display: Row Hall 2nd Floor East: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm (M-F)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion: Controversies of Culture: The Game of Life: Lessons in Diversity</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage Movie: Women’s History Month: Row Hall East 2nd Floor: 11 am – 1 pm: MRC</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>AAMI State of the African American Male @ 7:00 pm :Campus Center Ballroom 108.2</td>
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<td>Multicultural Conversations Series: Dr. Jennifer Beggs-Weber, Sociology Department :11:30 am-1:00 pm: Z-6: Hubbard Dining Hall</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion - 6th Annual Multicultural Festival: CCB: 12 Noon-5:00 pm:</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion 5th annual Women History Month Celebration: Freedom Speaks Ink. (Spoken Word): CCB 108.2 :7:00 p.m. co-sponsor: UWG Women’s Studies Department</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage Movie: Women’s History Month: Row Hall East 2nd Floor: 11 am – 1 pm: MRC</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>31st Annual Multicultural Achievement Program (MAP) Awards: Campus Center Ballroom 7:00pm</td>
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<td>1-30</td>
<td>Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion -6th annual Older American’s Month: Sock Drive: Row Hall 2nd Floor East: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm (M-F)-<strong>donate NEW socks</strong>- Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
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<td>Cultural Heritage Movie: Asian American &amp; Pacific Islanders Heritage Month Row Hall East 2nd Floor: 11 am – 1 pm: MRC</td>
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<td>Multicultural Book Discussion: Row Hall East 212: 12 Noon-1:00pm</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Center for Diversity &amp; Inclusion -Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month Program – Speaker: Judge Meng Lim @ 7:00 pm Ingram Library Nook</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>2nd annual AAMI Banquet: Campus Center @ 7pm</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Cultural Heritage Movie: Asian American &amp; Pacific Islanders Heritage Month Row Hall East 2nd Floor: 11 am – 1 pm: MRC</td>
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<td>Asian Pacific Heritage Month Display: Row Hall 2nd Floor East: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm (M-F):</td>
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<td>Older Americans Month- Sock delivery to nursing homes</td>
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INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING WITH CDI? CALL US @ 678-839-5400