

The Journey

from the **Office of Institutional Diversity**
of the *University of West Georgia*

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Dr. George Kieh Dean of Arts and Sciences

by Elizabeth Bell

The Journey sat down for an interview with the new Dean of Arts and Sciences, Dr. George Kieh. Dr. Kieh is a native of Liberia who after coming to the United States, has served in a variety of academic and administrative positions.

How did you become interested in the field of Political Science?

I have always had a fascination with the study of politics both at the domestic and global levels. My interest in this area was developed initially through my active involvement in student politics. For example, I was president of virtually every one of my classes at the elementary level, except the third and fourth grades, if I recall correctly. And then, as I moved on, I became president of the student government in middle school, high school, and college. My study of Political Science at the undergraduate level gave me formal academic training that helped provide me with the requisite knowledge base about politics. My knowledge base was expended during my study for the masters' and doctorate degrees. So, my interest in Political Science and politics has developed over the years.

When you were what the U.S. considers college-aged what were you doing to prepare for your future?

Well, I sort of had an interesting pre-college age set of experiences and I believe that was because of where I was born and raised. I was born and raised on the

Firestone Plantation, which is the largest rubber company in the world. And as I grew up on that plantation, I got to see first-hand naked exploitation and injustices and I lived with that every day. I saw that every day for years until age 18, when I went to

high school. I went to high school at the age of 18; and the reason for that is because of the way that the Liberian educational system is set up: you go from pre-K to K, then first grade and all of that stuff; so, I had two years added to the grade sequence, if you place this in the context of the American educational system.

Therefore, I didn't graduate from high school until I was 20. But the experience essentially was that I knew having being born and raised on a plantation, and having seen those injustices and the exploitation on a daily basis for 18 years, that I was going to basically dedicate my lifetime to fighting injustice in any form, and everywhere. I think it is interesting that you make that kind of decision even before the age 18. This is because while I was in Junior high school from 1971 to 1973, I was already actively participating in the protest movement. And that sort

of framed my orientation and desire to be part of the effort to fight against injustices in general. No matter what form it comes in, whether it is economic injustice, gender injustice, racial injustice, injustice against sexual orientation, ethnic injustice or any other type, I am simply opposed to injustice in whatever forum it rears its "ugly head". Professionally, my interest clearly was to become a university professor. The rationale was



that I believe that such a career would provide me an opportunity not only to be a political activist, but to help work with, and mold young minds along the lines of why it is so important to basically support and fight for justice.

Please describe your educational background?

I did my elementary and middle school education at the Firestone Plantation's schools. Then I went to high school at two church related institutions. I spent one semester at a Seventh Day-Adventist Institution called Konola Academy, and then I transferred to a Methodist institution called The College of West Africa, where I spent two and a half years. I graduated from high school there. I did my undergraduate work in Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Liberia, earning my B.A. degree. Thereafter, I came to the U.S. in 1981. Between that time and 1986, I did my masters and doctorate degrees in Political Science at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. When I completed my doctorate in 1986, I was appointed to serve on the Political Science faculty for two years (from 86' to 88'). In late 1988, I was offered my first tenure –track position at the University of Memphis. For two years, I was an assistant professor of Political Science and International Studies and Assistant Director of the International Studies Program. Then, I moved to Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Illinois, where I served as an assistant professor of Political Science (later associate professor with tenure) and Director of the International Studies Program. In 1993, I accepted the offer to become the Founding Director of the Morehouse College Center for International Studies, and an associate Professor of Political Science. Then, in 1996, I became the Founding Director of the Morehouse College Center for Conflict and Development Studies. In 1999, I became a full professor of Political Science at Morehouse. Then, in 2001, I took a year's leave of absence from Morehouse to serve as Dean of International Studies and professor of Political Sciences at Grand Valley State University in Michigan. Then in 2002, for family reasons, I took a leave of absence from Grand Valley State University, and returned to Morehouse, where I served as Chair of the Department of Political Science (Political Science, International Studies and Urban Studies) for three years. In 2005, I took a semester's leave from Morehouse to run for the Presidency of Liberia. In 2006, I resigned from Morehouse, and returned to Grand Valley State University and served as professor of Political Science and African and African-American Studies (joint appointment). On July 1, 2009, I became Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Political Science at the University of West Georgia. In short, this has been my professional journey.

What was it like being educated in Liberia V.S. the U.S.?

Given the historical relationship between the United

States and Liberia, the Liberian educational system is patterned after the American one. This was quite helpful for me in making the transition from my undergraduate study in Liberia to graduate school in the United States. However, one of the major differences, especially from the elementary to the high school level, concerns the types of courses that students are required to take. For example, in the Liberian educational system, English, including grammar, is a required course for all students from the first to the 12th grade. Also, students from the primary to the secondary levels in the Liberian educational system do not have the flexibility to choose some of their courses, especially at the secondary level, as their counterparts in the United States do.

What was it like running for President in Liberia?

Well, this was a real sobering and memorable experience on a number of counts. First, during all of my years of political activism in Liberia, including being held as a political prisoner twice (1979 and 1984), I never really thought of running for president. This was because I concentrated my efforts on the critical struggle for justice and people-centered and holistic democracy. Therefore, I really never thought about running for president or holding a political office. But, the perennial crises of underdevelopment—cultural, economic, ecological, political, security, and social—that have enveloped the country since its founding in 1847 culminating in two civil wars (1989-1997, and 1999-2003) made it imperative to search for an alternative leadership with a new vision that transcended the old and failed model based on authoritarian peripheral capitalism that benefitted the ruling class and their relations while depriving those in the subaltern classes. Against this background, several of my colleagues and I, who had played active roles in the pro-democracy movement in Liberia for a number of years, decided to organize a new political party as the vehicle for providing Liberia with transformative leadership based on a social democratic ideology. It was against this background that the New Democratic Alternative for Liberia Movement (The New DEAL Movement) was organized. The process of organizing and legalizing the party took three years. Thereafter, the question arose concerning the party's presidential candidate. Several of the leading members of our party convinced me to seek our party's presidential nomination through our presidential primary process. Accordingly, we held our presidential primaries in the fifteen counties in Liberia, and the party's chapters abroad in Ghana (West Africa) and the United States. At the end the primaries, I felt extremely honored when my fellow partisans nominated me unanimously during our national convention to serve as our party's standard bearer in the 2005 national elections. Unfortunately, I entered the presidential race with a critical problem: Although, I had the "name recognition," I did not have the financial and logistical resources that were required. In Liberian and

general African politics, the presidential candidate is responsible to fund his or her campaign. My family did not have the financial resources, and the contributions that I received were nowhere near the financial and logistical resources that were required to be competitive. Clearly, this major pitfall was a decisive factor in the electoral outcome. Beyond this, I also made some major mistakes. One of them was that I went into the elections believing that given the fact that Liberia has had so many problems since its founding in the 1800's, the thrust of my campaign strategy should revolve around giving people some ideas about what Liberia could become given its enormous wealth—natural resources. The valuable lesson that I learned was that I did not put my campaign strategy in the context of the fact that the country was coming from 11 years of war; and thus, people were not interested in long term issues. Instead, they were thinking in terms of short-term survival issues—"eating today." And I missed that. The second lesson was that African politics is by and large one in which the candidate is expected to spend money on the people's basic needs—food, etc—, and others. The unfortunate thing, as I have indicated, was that I didn't have that kind of money personally. The little money we were able to come up with for the campaign basically bankrupted my family (my wife and I). For example, we sold our house in Lawrenceville, Georgia in 2005, and literally cleared out our savings account, and used the funds for the campaign. On the positive side, the privilege that I had to run for president gave me the opportunity to meet with Liberians from diverse ethnic, regional, religious, class, gender, age and other backgrounds from across the country, and to learn from their various experiences. And this has helped my process of continuing to learn about the country, and enriched my life.

What attracted you to the University of West Georgia?

During the time I served on the faculty at Morehouse College (1993-2005) in Atlanta, I had the opportunity to learn about the University of West Georgia. Colleagues, who were familiar with the institution, referred to it as "up and coming." Additionally, I was able to conduct some research about the institution, especially its transition from a small college to a mid-sized university. So, I thought that it would be quite exciting to join an institution that is in transition, especially to work with faculty, students, staff, administrators, alumni and other interested parties in shaping the direction of the institution. During my brief tenure here, I continue to maintain the view that the University of West Georgia has great potentials, including an excellent faculty that could take it to the next level of excellence and prominence. During my tenure as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, I am committed to working with the aforementioned constituencies in helping the university to make its transition successfully.

In addition to the professional reasons, we were

desirous of returning to Georgia, because our children, grandchildren and other relatives live in the Metro Atlanta area. Additionally, the cost of living and the weather were factors as well.

Deeply distressful times really influenced me a lot. You cannot understand psychological dynamics without understanding the social economic political context of the dynamic. This involvement helped me realize that.

What were some of the processes that you went through in order to write your books?

Writing and publishing academic books in particular involve several steps. First, a topic is chosen. Second, you develop the major argument around which the book would revolve. Third, you write a proposal, including the various chapters of the book. Fourth, you contact publishing companies. Publishers have various processes, standards and requirements. Fifth, once you get a publisher, the manuscript is then prepared and published.

As Dean of Arts and Sciences what are some of your responsibilities?

As the chief academic and chief administrative officer of the college (with 16 departments, the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies, the Writing Center and 9 interdisciplinary programs), I have several functions spanning daily administrative tasks, the recruitment

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and hiring of faculty, the performance review of the faculty, including tenure and promotion issues, and oversight of the various degree programs that are offered in the college, and the budget, addressing staff and student-related issues, ensuring compliance with the policies of the university, the Board of Regents, the State of Georgia and the federal government, representing the college in various forums, both on and off campus, among others. In short, I am always busy!

How does it feel to have accomplished so much in your life?

Well, whatever little success I have achieved in my life is attributable to God's grace and mercy.

What are your most fulfilling accomplishments in life?

The most fulfilling accomplishments of my life are twofold. First, as an academic, I have had the privilege to work with and mentor thousands of students at various colleges and universities in the university, where I have had the opportunity to serve; and several of these students are now making invaluable contributions to their families, communities, countries, and our common world. Second, my involvement in the struggle for social justice has contributed to the curtailment of the excesses of politicians and others in authority in Liberia and at various institutions in

the United States, where I have served, who have, and continue to thrive on the abuse of people's rights.

What would you like the students at UWG to know about the current state of the people of Liberia?

Despite the hype about the current Sirleaf regime being propagated by the Obama administration and some sections of the American media, substantial changes have not been made in the last four years. For example, Liberia still has the "imperial presidency," which entails the over concentration of powers in the hands of the president; the social and economic conditions of the majority of the people have gotten worse, evidenced by spiraling poverty and unemployment rates, and the lack of adequate educational opportunities, health care and housing. Amid the state of deprivation, government officials and their relatives are enriching themselves through various corrupt means. These were the issues that set the country on the course to two civil wars. And if the current tide is not reversed, the Sirleaf regime is setting the country on another perilous course. In short, the election of Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, an oligarch and a long-time member of the Liberian ruling class that ruined the country, represented a change of regime, not a pathway toward societal transformation.

Dr. Mautusi Mitra

by Stania Philzaire and Jack O. Jenkins

Dr. Mitra, assistant professor Biology, joined the faculty of UWG's Biology Department at the beginning of Fall Semester 2009. Dr. Mitra has Bachelor's and Master's of Science degrees in Botany from the University of Calcutta in India. Calcutta, considered the cultural capital of India, is located in West Bengal. Many languages such as Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and English are spoken there.

Dr. Mitra received her doctorate degree in Plant Biology from Louisiana State University. She has published numerous research articles with undergraduate and Master's students, was a teaching and research assistant at LSU and research specialist at the University of California-Berkley. She also delivered special guest lectures on "Plant Biochemistry" and "Concept of Biofuel" courses at UC, Berkeley. When asked to describe if things were different where she received her education in India compared to her experiences

in the United States, Dr. Mitra stated that there was less hand's on learning in her bachelor's and master's programs. This was due to less funding for practical



learning experiences compared to universities she attended in the United States. But she feels that a high school education in India provides a more solid foundation to students going on for a college education compared to what high school students receive in the USA. Dr. Mitra stated that she is high on student interaction, participation, and opportunities for students to achieve a deeper comprehension of the course material. Dr. Mitra enjoys one on one interaction with her students. She is interested in making students understand how what they are learning can be and is applied in the real world. Dr. Mitra explained that it is challenging to engage students in the classroom because they simply depend on her to provide all the information to them in condensed

lecture notes and expect to be tested on memorization type, straightforward questions that require no critical thinking or logical reasoning.

Dr. Mitra loves teaching and research and is very happy that she has the opportunity to do every day, what she loves to do.

Dr. Mitra's primary research interest is in the area of plant molecular and cell biology. Her research focuses on "the molecular aspect of photosynthesis in the model unicellular green alga *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii*." To an average person, plants mean "green stuff." She uses a very small and tiny plant cell as a model system for her research, which is cost effective in research funding. The purpose of Dr. Mitra's research is to study how *Chlamydomonas reinhardtii* can acclimatize to changes in light intensity in the environment and perform photosynthesis under fluctuating light conditions. Such research has implications in improving photosynthetic productivity and solar conversion efficiency of aquatic photosynthetic organisms in the mass culture. This research has fundamental application in the commercial exploitation of microalgae or aquatic photosynthetic bacteria by the nutraceutical, chemical and bio-energy industries. She identified one novel gene, TLA1, which is responsible for the irradiance acclimation process in *C.reinhardtii* and which can be manipulated by scientists working in the bio-energy sector. UC, Berkeley filed a research patent on this gene identified by Dr. Mitra in 2006 and Dr. Mitra has 50-50 share in this research patent with her postdoctoral research supervisor Dr. Anastasios Melis. This research patent to date has been purchased by two Biotech companies in California who are involved in the production of "clean green biofuel."

Dr. Mitra, was asked "What advice would you give students, whether in a field of science or not?" She replied: "Most importantly, as a student you have a time barrier because you want to graduate." She advised students to first pick a broad field such as a major in

the arts, business, humanities, or etc. They should then explore different emphases within that field to find what interests them the most. This decision should be based on what the student finds interesting and not on what society or one's parents thinks is most important. In the end, if one is unhappy with his or her work, Dr. Mitra believes the person will not be successful. Dr. Mitra stated that students should talk with their professors to gain more knowledge about fields in which they are interested. Lastly, she advised students to take challenging upper level courses because potential employers look at more than just grade point averages. Research and "hands on experience" is also valuable in increasing one's chances in gaining entrance into graduate school and eventually getting employed. Dr. Mitra has developed an upper level cell and molecular biology course which entails the study of the molecular make up of a cell and how these molecules coordinate with each other to help a cell to perform its physiological functions.

Dr. Mitra became the newest faculty member on the Multicultural Ball Committee not long after she arrived on campus during fall 2009. The Multicultural Ball is sponsored annually by the Office of International Diversity. Dr. Mitra stated that she enjoys the West Georgia community and has always preferred small towns.

When Dr. Mitra arrived in Baton Rouge approximately 13 years ago, she stated that she adapted to social, cultural, environmental, and educational differences quickly, although the culture in Louisiana was quite NSF funded STEM Institute conference on campus in February, 2010. She is currently supervising research of two undergraduate students at the University of West Georgia and intends to introduce many more undergraduate students in future, to the exciting research world of plant molecular biology and its applications in the field of biotechnology.

Pauline Kiarie

United Voices Gospel Choir

by Stania Philizaire

What is the mission of the United Voices Gospel Choir?

To allow students who have some kind of religious background to be able to worship and be comfortable and to provide an atmosphere where they can let go of school work, problems, and issues.

About how many students make up the UVGC?

80 students. We had to replace our stage this year for the concert.

How did you become involved with UVGC?

I was invited by a couple of friends who dragged me to rehearsal. I went and I have never missed a rehearsal since then.

As president, what are your expectations for the organization?

My expectations are for these students who come to choir rehearsal to come and have a genuine experience every time they come. I want them to feel different every time they leave choir rehearsal and concerts. In addition,

for students to know there is a way to live, a righteous lifestyle even on a college campus.

What goals do you have for the spring semester?

We want to do more outreach programs on campus. We currently participate in community service, soup kitchens, afterschool programs, churches and competitions. We won Second place at a competition at Georgia State in 2009.

What legacy does the UVGC want to leave with West Georgia?

We want to stand out as the people who are not ashamed to represent the God they serve. I know for me I would have never known that college would be the place for me to grow my relationship with God. I have been in church all my life and never thought that here would be the place for that relationship to thrive and that is what is happening with this ministry.

What are the benefits of becoming a UVGC member?

Above all things, the most awarding thing is spiritual growth because you are in an atmosphere where you are constantly challenged to grow and you are around people

who are spiritually mature and that is how I became spiritually sharpened.

What upcoming events can the University look forward to?

The Spring UNITED VOICES GOSPEL CHOIR CONCERT will be held Wednesday, April 28, 2010 at 7:30 p.m. in the Campus Center Ballroom and Saturday, May 1st at 5:30 p.m. at a location to be announced soon.

As the president of UVGC's, what is the one message you would like to give to the University of West Georgia community?

Message: Dreams do come true. Dreams you did not know you had become realized and if only you find the place where your potential can be activated and you can find those dreams that you never knew you had. In the beginning, it is hard because students do have busy schedules. They work and have other classes, so when we hold events, only a few people show up. The good thing is that when those two or three students begin to trickle in, the number can only grow from there. I am not trying to make some fabulous change, but that tiny change has brought many differences in this [our university] culture. United Voices Gospel Choir- President: Pauline Kiarie; Major: Sociology; Status: Senior

Student Opinion Survey

by Elizabeth Bell

Jason Cole



What do you think about our newly elected president, Barack Obama?

I think it's great. I really don't pay too much attention to politics or anything. I am glad we have kind of moved away from that whole "afraid of different ethnicities" [thing.] I'm glad people voted for him. I don't necessarily agree with all of his political stances or anything, but then again I don't really agree with a lot of the other sides either so I think he is doing the best he can and I am happy he is in there.

What would you like to see him accomplish?

I would like to see more assertive actions to be taken about the war. I don't really agree with it. I'd like him to be a little bit firmer about changes with the economy. The healthcare thing he could be a little bit more assertive about that. I believe if they are going to change anything they need to be assertive about it and really crack down hard on what they want to get accomplished.

What do you think of our campus' diversity?

I think it is very diverse and I really like it. I'm a fan of a lot of diversity. I like being able to sit down at a table with a bunch of different people of different

experiences and everything so I really enjoy the campus and its student population.

How do you feel about the new changes this year on campus?

As far as I'm concerned and what I'm doing, I'm still going to class. I live off campus so I don't really notice changes as most people do. The new facilities are excellent if that's one of the changes. I really like the stadium a lot, the coliseum is nice and everything and I like the new buses too so that's pretty much that I guess.

What made you decide to come to UWG and how long have you been here?

This is my 5th semester. What made me decide to come here, I guess just locality. I'm from Carrollton and I kind of wanted to stay in the area. [Staying here meant] cheaper room and board, affordable tuition, and good educational opportunities.

Are you involved in any organizations?

I am a member of the national honorary band fraternity Kappa Kappa Psi, and I'm a member of a gospel group of students from here that is not campus sponsored but we go around and play at different churches.

What do you hope to see between the organizations here on campus in terms of diversity?

I think they've got a pretty good selection for people of different backgrounds and different views, so I don't know I think they're doing a pretty good job at what they're doing now. Maybe just work more closely I guess. There's always room for more cooperation between people.

What curiosities do you have about other cultures?

I've always been fascinated by them. I have taken a couple of anthropology classes and I was always fascinated by the different cultures and backgrounds and I've always loved learning about histories of different cultures and stuff, and I've always been fascinated by them. And as far as in the present I'm still fascinated with them. I like to hear about different experiences and what other people bring to the table in society and I just have always been intrigued and I value their experiences.

If you had a free ticket to any part of the world where would it be and why?

Hmmm....free ticket...probably the Far East because it is so culturally rich. They have been established as long as anybody so they really have a lot of history to them, a lot of cultural identity and so I think they'd be a really interesting culture, both the Chinese and the Japanese.

Homero Esparza



What do you think about our newly elected president, Barack Obama?

I like him and what he has done.

What would you like to see him accomplish?

I'd like for him to get congress to approve legislation that helps immigrants.

What do you think of our campus' diversity?

It's very diverse.

How do you feel about the new changes this year on campus?

I don't seem to notice any.

What made you decide to come to UWG and how long have you been here?

The proximity to where I live and I've lived here for 15 years.

Are you involved in any organizations?

LCS (Latino Cultural Society)

What do you hope to see between the organizations here on campus in terms of diversity?

More involvement with each other, basically more different ethnicities participating together

What curiosities do you have about other cultures?

I guess the way they used to do things back in their native countries.

If you had a free ticket to any part of the world where would it be and why?

The Andes Mountains

Student Opinion Survey

Students gave the Office of Institutional Diversity their opinions

By Abia K. Sogbo

Alix Carnes, Senior, English Major

How do you think President Barack Obama has done since he took office?

I think he's done well in terms of diversifying the US if you want to put it that way. Especially with international relationship. He's trying to reach out to other world leaders; however, I know most people are not too happy about the health care issue; not exactly what I voted for him to do.

What would you like to see President Obama accomplish in the future?

I would like to see better focus on the economy itself oppose to only health care, but there are plenty of other aspects of the economy that he is ignoring right now.

Did you think that our campus was this diverse before you came? How do you feel about the new changes this year on campus?

I always thought west Georgia was a really diverse campus as opposed to the Colleges in the town where I grew up. I'm offended by some of the changes, I can't lie, but the stadium, I felt like that money could be spending on some other things like the dorms. Like most freshman dorms on campus, they need a lot of work.



What made you decide to come to West Georgia and how long have you been here?

I have been here for 4 years. I checked a whole bunch of different schools and really, UWG seems perfect. It was far away enough from my family that I can have my independence, and I could still go home if I needed to. Not to mention that I had a lot of friends who are coming here too. It turned out to be a good thing.

What interest you about other cultures?

You name it. I've studied Spanish cultures since I was about five, and everything about other culture's tradition, I think it's interesting personally. I would love to learn stuff about that; not even just Spanish, but anything. There's no better way to learn about cultures than be thrown into it.

Bonus: If you have a free ticket to any part of the world, where would it be? Why?

I would probably go to London. I'm an English major and I would love to visit all those historical sites I learned in my classes, and I would love to see the Globe Theatre, where Shakespeare performed his plays. I would like to see more about the literature; I'll probably be going to all kind of museums as well, more culture stuff.

Nadja Moore, Junior, Psychology Major

How do you think President Obama has done since he took office?

I'm not really that much into politics, but from what I've heard, from what I'd seen, I think he's on the right track, he's doing a good job so far, so we'll see how this plays out.

What would you like to see President Obama accomplish in the future?

Bring the economy up such as creating more jobs. That is all that matters now because our economy is bad right now.

Did you think that our campus was this diverse before you came? How do you feel about the new changes this year on campus?

No. I feel as if we are still not there because a lot of people don't know much about diversity and about other cultures, and some people are not interested in it. Overall, I think



we are making progress, as far as the African Student Association, BSA, and the International Student Club; so we are definitely making progress.

What made you decide to come to West Georgia and how long have you been here?

This is my 3rd year at West Georgia. I came because I like the environment and the laid back Carrollton life.

What interest you about other cultures? Just how different it is. It's amazing to me how different every culture is in every single country. For example, in Africa, there are so many different cultures. No one is the same.

Bonus: If you have a free ticket to any part of the world, where would it be? Why?

Australia. Because it's such an amazing beautiful country. I would love to live there. I like learning about the Aborigines.

My Final Thoughts

by Chantal Cary

Editor's Note: Ms. Chantal Cary is a student at Florida A&M University who was one of five students in the University of West Georgia's Initial Summer Undergraduate Research Program sponsored by the Office of Institutional Diversity. During fall 2009 Ms. Cary participated in a study abroad program in the Dominican Republic. She wrote back to Dr. Jack Jenkins and Mrs. Deidre Rouse in the Office of Institutional Diversity and shared her experiences in the Dominican Republic. She agreed to write this article for *The Journey*.

When I first considered studying abroad, I had no idea about the road that lay ahead of me. Would the people like me? Would I feel comfortable? Would I be all alone in a country so far from my own? Now, looking back, I can see that I have been to some of the most beautiful places in the world, made tons of friends, and had the opportunity to do things that I would have never done on my own.

I look back on my time in the Dominican Republic thankful for all the experiences I had. Being able to experience a life without the many luxuries that I had grown accustomed to over time, such as: hot water, safe drinking water, air conditioning, and at some times even electricity; has made me a stronger person. Not in a million years would I have thought that I would feel so at home so far away from friends and family and everything I had known. A friend of mine once told me how proud he was and much he admired me and another girl in the program. For us to be so strong to come to another country with no friends or family and to create them without any problems, spoke of our character. It was then that I realized how much I had grown from going into this situation. Not until it was time to say goodbye, did I realize how many people had touched my life. Everyone from the street vendors selling fruits on the streets that I passed everyday, to the guy who sold me chimis, to the watchmen in front of my house; had all become important people in my life. My doña and her daughter taught me so much and have become

like a second mother and sister to me. They taught me how to be more open and affectionate with the people that I care about.

Thanks to the excursions included in the program, I had an opportunity to explore the beautiful country. Going to islands, waterfalls, and beaches, white water rafting down a mountain, horseback riding up a mountain, I experienced many of the Dominican Republic's beautiful treasures. One of my closest friends and I would joke that it felt like we were on

the *Amazing Race*. Riding in a speedboat, sitting in a packed guagua (bus), riding with two other people on the back of a motorcycle, sitting with six other people in a public car, or just taking a taxi or the metro; I truly exhausted every form of transportation available in the country. One of the most rewarding experiences abroad was exploring different cities with my friends. We would meet people along the way and get advice on the best places to go in the area. The excitement and unpredictability of venturing out into a new area just made it that more rewarding.

Overall, this entire experience has allowed me to re-evaluate everything in my life. From what I want to do after graduation, to what kind of person I want to be later in life. From day-1 in the Dominican Republic my worldview was changed. To be able to see the

world from a different position, culture, class (because as an American I am privileged in this country), and language; has forced me to think differently. Seeing at an arms length the world's richest and poorest places and people have had a huge impact on me. Visiting the ranchos of Jarabacoa and Samana where people roam the streets with little clothes, no shoes, and in search of food; contrast vastly with the beaches of Puerto Plata and Punta Cana where some of the world's richest celebrities vacation. The high illiteracy rate is contrasted with the 40 universities found in the capital alone. My experience volunteering with a domestic violence organization, in addition to attending my



classes, coupled with the experiences with Dominican people and life in general; have me wondering off on to a new path.

All my life I have always prided myself on not only having goals, but plans on how to get to my goals. But after experiencing a different world, I feel my life going in a new direction. I was so involved in a world that was not realistic, a world where superficial things held value. Like what sorority or fraternity you were in, how many outfits you have, and how many friends you have on Facebook. And although school and grades have always held the most value in my life, the superficial are the things that get the most recognition. Now, as I reflect on my experiences, I see just how ridiculous it all is and how ridiculous I was for thinking that being in a

sorority would make me a better person. I am a better person for the things that I have seen and done and have been successful at.

So as I take all of this, I am beginning to plan my next steps preparing myself for graduation and the pursuit of a graduate degree. I have decided that I want to return to the Dominican Republic for my master's degree. I will use this time to not only study but to continue to travel and learn about the people of the world. It is all so funny how much things and people can change in such a short amount of time. Looking back a year and a half ago, I can remember when I was first inspired to inquire about study abroad and I cannot believe how far I have come having actually completing this wonderful and memorable experience.

Mrs. Doris Railey Kieh, Office of Institutional Diversity

Reaching out to the student body to appreciate Cultural Diversity

By Abba Sogbo

Mrs. Doris Kieh, a new member of the West Georgia staff, sat down with The Journey for an interview.

How long have you been here at the University of West Georgia? How do you find our campus so far?

I have been here since July 20th. When I first came to the university, I was very impressed with diversity of the student body.

What impressed you the most that you decided to join the West Georgia staff?

My husband got a position as the Dean of Arts and Sciences, and that's the reason why we came to the University of West Georgia.

How do you like working here at the UWG's Office of Institutional Diversity?

I love working in the Office of Institutional Diversity.



I love working with the staff. We all work as a team to get the job done, and I believe in team work.

Why did you apply for the position you hold at the Office of Institutional Diversity?

Well, the first reason is that I was looking for a job. Secondly, when I got an interview, I thought this will be a good area because of my background and because I'm from the Multicultural Community. I'm very diverse and I have worldviews, and I thought that my skills could be utilized here in the office.

Can you describe more about that position? What types of Programs are you going to put on?

The position requires a person to be able to work on programming activities. I am working with the Program Coordinator on the Multicultural Ball, Fair Trade coffee tasting, Native American Heritage Month, Hispanic

Heritage Month, and the Multicultural Festival in the spring, the conversation series and multicultural book discussion.

What is the most exciting thing about your position?

I think building relationships is the most important aspect. For example, I like to build relationships with students and staff, with other departments, and the community around Carrollton. For instance, this past weekend, I attended two activities reaching out to the communities: Atlanta Asian Film Festival. We were invited by Mr. Li Wong. I also had the opportunity to go by the Mecca Fest, hosted by the Carrollton Cultural Arts Center, in Carrollton, GA. It was very exciting, and there are great artists out there. I met an artist by the name of Mr. John Martin, who is a multicultural painter focusing on black personalities. He has paintings of President Obama, and Rosa Parks to name a view. Overall, it was a nice activity. There is some great artistry out there. I also attended the JapanFest at the Gwinnett Center. I actually spoke with a representative from the Japanese consulate office to see if we can have a speaker to visit our campus and talk about Japanese culture.

What does Cultural Diversity means to you?

When you think about cultural diversity, personally to me, it means the ability to understand, and to be prepared to work with other groups of people irrespective of their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, religion, mental and physical abilities, and nationalities.

As diverse as our campus is, how is it different from others where you have worked in terms of student and faculty diversity?

Well, I don't want to make comparison, but what I've seen here is that the student population is very diverse.

Where are you from originally? Can you give some details about your original country?

I'm originally from Liberia, West Africa. I came to the U.S. to attend college in Texas. I spent my formative years in Liberia. I do visit very often. Liberia was founded by the American Colonization Society, and has had a longstanding relationship with the United States.

Since you came abroad to continue your studies, what comparison can you make about education at various levels where you went to school?

I had a great educational background in Liberia so when I came to college in the US, I had no problem adjusting. Furthermore, Liberia's official language is English and it made my transition easier.

If you have considered working in another profession, what would it be?

I like the library, because I love to collect books, especially biographies, and children books. I have list of books that are my favorites. I've read Maya Angelou's book, such as I Know Why The Caged Birds Sing, Nelson Mandela's biography, and Hilary Clinton's biography, to name a few. Also, I love to read some of my husband's books. He writes mostly academic books.

What message do you want to send out to the student body concerning cultural diversity? Are there any particular issues you would like The Journey to address?

The Office of Institutional Diversity is open to faculty, staff and students. We are inviting them to come over to see what we have to offer, and to encourage them to attend all of our programs. The office is trying to reach out to the university community and to let them know about the different cultural groups we have on our campus. And because we have students from various backgrounds, we want students to appreciate different cultures. Culture is important. We are all different and in various ways. We have different norms, values, traditions. Hence, we should all appreciate these differences. If we are all going to work together, we need to understand our respective cultural backgrounds and differences.

I have been seeing the 3rd annual Multicultural Ball Poster around campus and can you tell me more about it and how many students you expect?

I think last year we had about 300 students; and I hope this year we will have more than that. This will be my first one, and so I am excited. The African Students Association, the Latino Culture Society, and other groups will be performing. Hopefully, we can get the Asian groups organized as well.

Nancy Watkins

The Journey sat down with Nancy Watkins, Departmental Assistant for the Office of Institutional Diversity.

How long have you worked for West Georgia?

Eight months.

Have you worked at any other Universities? If so, how did the environments differ from West Georgia's campus?

Yes, while in college I worked as a student assistant in the Office of Admissions. The only difference is the size of the campus. The college I attended had an enrollment of only 800 students compared to West Georgia with an enrollment of over 11,000 students.

What does your job entail here at the Office of Institutional Diversity?

As departmental assistant, I am responsible for managing and balancing 3 budgets, supervising 4 student assistants, updating the departmental website, assisting and attending programs and events, purchasing supplies and other administrative duties.

How was your first day on the job here at West Georgia?

After working in corporate America for the past twenty years, where everything is extremely fast paced, a slower work pace was welcome.

How would you describe the atmosphere here at West Georgia, both with faculty and the student body, compared to other Universities or other places you've worked?

Everyone has been very helpful and patient as I adjusted to my position. All the departments are accommodating to make sure work is completely in a timely manner.

How did your previous work experience lead you to your position here at West Georgia?

My 25 years of customer service, administrative, accounting, marketing experience and skills as well as my extensive software knowledge helped me acquire this position.



Where did you receive your degree and how would you say it has helped in furthering your work experience?

I attended the University of North Carolina in Wilmington, North Carolina and received my Bachelors of Arts Degree in English from Paine College in Augusta, Georgia. My degree in English has been a valuable asset in all my work experience; it has allowed me to express my creativity; write and think analytically in different work environments.

What was it that interested you about this department?

It was the opportunity for learning about and experiencing other cultures through events, books and lectures. I love being a part of the planning process for a program and seeing the program come into fruition.

As a successful college graduate yourself, what advice would you give to UWG students?"

Stay focused on your goal, pursue your passion, and never give up on your dream. Remember to "aim for the moon, even if you miss you'll land among the stars."

A Year in Pictures

2009-2010



Open House - August



Diversity Workshop - September



Banking Seminar - September



Hispanic Heritage Month - September



Yusef Komunyakaa - September
Co-sponsored by the Library's Penelope Melson Society, the Office of Institutional Diversity, the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, the English and Philosophy Department, and our Creative Writing program



Multicultural Ball - October



Coffee Tasting - November



Conversations About Culture Series





Native American Month - November



Mix-It-Up



Artist Amos Paul Kennedy
co-sponsored by the Art Department



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Program - January 2010 Elisabeth Omilami-Guest Speaker



Operation Haiti-Benefit Concert - January
The Haiti fundraising event was sponsored by SGA, Alpha Kappa Psi, Phi Mu, Young Democrats, UVGC, STAND, Amnesty International-including the Office of Institutional Diversity and coordinated primarily by Ms. Stania Philzaire, Ms. Jeannie Jean, and Ms. Jody Carter.



Experiencing Africa - Quencina Gardner



Beyond Stomp the Yard, Dr. Walter Kimbrough, Jr. - March



Multicultural Festival - March



"Nappy Edges & Goldy Locks: African American & The Politics of Hair"
Dr. Neal Lester - April

Sponsored primarily by Dr. Stacy Boyd and the English Department. The Office of Institutional Diversity help co-sponsor the event by creating posters and otherwise helping to advertise the event.



Sharada Ramanathan Sringaram -
A Dance of Love - April