

was like, 'Noooo. I'm not...'" Jones was able to turn this incident into an opportunity to introduce and reinforce diversity training, and since that time feels that things have improved.

Mays describes a situation that happened while shopping on her lunch hour. "I'm waiting in line," she says. "I'm dressed professionally, and there are a couple of other people in front of me who write checks — no problem. I get up there, and I'm asked for my ID." She rolls her eyes and sighs in exasperation. "I'm on my lunch break, I'm in a hurry, I show my ID, but I'm thinking, 'You didn't ask *them* for *their* IDs...'"

"The store representative then proceeds to call Telecheck to verify my check. That's when I just *lost it*. There are times when I'll say, 'OK, I'm going to the mat on this one.' After I conveyed my concerns, asked to speak to the manager, went and talked to the manager, it was, 'Oh... well, we...' and they don't have a good excuse."

"When I didn't get results locally," Mays says, "I went to this store's corporate office up in Portland and ... the corporate office got involved, came down to Eugene, talked to the staff, did some diversity training."

She smiles and says with satisfaction, "They also underwrote our NAACP three-on-three basketball tournament that year. ... I've never had any other negative incidents with them. We call this company every year now to support our tournament, they're always very open to it, they want to send volunteers. So it was really a learning experience for them as well..."

Ultimately, both Jones' and Mays' situations ended in a positive way, and each is determined to remain in Eugene — at least for now. But doesn't it sound exhausting to think that because your skin color makes up only five or one or less than one percent of the population, you have to leave your home every day preparing for some sort of trouble or other?

College Town

More than once I've heard, "If it wasn't for the university, I could never live in Eugene." The University of Oregon affords this town an influx of culture and diversity that it would not otherwise have. But the UO also contends with issues of diversity — last winter's KUGN Voice of the Ducks fiasco was evidence of that.

John Shuford of the Center on Diversity and Community says, "In October 2000, President Frohnmayer gave a rousing State of the University speech promising that UO would become a diverse institution. There have been a number of new diversity initiatives since then, with many good results. But we're running into a wall of economics and public perception that hinders fulfillment of that promise... It's a hard time for higher education in general, due to the shift in corporate and foundation interests and the major economic downturn."

He says that these realities, and the perception in many circles that diversity and diversity issues are "peripheral" or "political," make it very hard to create meaningful institutional changes that will keep UO educa-



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tionally competitive and serving the state of Oregon.

Carla Gary, university advocate and director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, also has an insider's understanding of diversity at the UO. It frustrates her on some levels. She says, "We have become exceedingly creative in avoiding the elephant in the living room. But the longer it goes, the more space that elephant takes up..."

But she is hopeful. "In many ways we have stepped to the challenge. We have accepted that diversity is core to the institution. We know that if we send out technically competent but culturally unconscious students, we have failed."

Shuford says that within a 30-year period, the Census projects a major population shift in Oregon: In 1995 one in 10 Oregonians were non-white. By 2025, that number is going to be one in five or greater.

But even now, he says, the UO struggles to keep pace of the demographic changes in the state. Both Shuford and Gary articulate what is, in theory, the university's sentiment on diversity, and what many students and faculty seem to agree on: that a diverse campus is powerful and empowering. It remains to be seen whether financial and administrative support will truly cultivate and encourage that theory. The UO, like Eugene at large, has had its share of the "revolving door" phenomenon, where people of color come and leave when diversity issues become too overbearing.

But there are signs of hope: Gary says the university has launched a personnel search for a Vice Provost of Institutional Equity who will be, according to the job description "responsible for providing leadership, guidance, and direction for all university equity and diversity matters..."

Making a Difference

Elliot Cooke, 30, walks into the coffee shop for our interview and his black dreadlocks swing a little around his dark face and beneath a nylon cap fit snug to his skull. Cooke moved to Eugene from Chicago with his family when he was 10. He had been a good student in Chicago, but that quickly fell apart here in Oregon. "I moved out here," he says, "and I'm instantly labeled ADD, problem child..." School administration just looked at him, he says, and saw "a black child from the ghetto of Chicago — boom — instantaneous 'He's going to be a problem...'"

He bounced through two elementary schools, struggling mightily as the only black student around. Things finally came to a head when he entered Jefferson Middle School. In sixth grade, he says, "There was this picture drawn by a student. It was of a black man hanging from a tree, with a burning cross and KKK underneath. I'm looking at it, and I went to the teacher and asked, 'Is this what you're teaching in this school?' He looked at me and said, 'It's freedom of speech; there's a right to express that, and it's part of your history.'" In frustration with his teacher's dismissal, Cook went to the principal's office with the drawing, where he was again rebuffed.

So he went to his mother. And from there, his mother took Cook and his brother out of school, and they were homeschooled. After that incident, Cook says, "Some heads rolled... some people were fired and the school became committed to being a racism-free zone." He smiles and says, "And now that's where I work as a staff assistant."

Cook and Jefferson Middle School are just a few rays of hope on Eugene's racial

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-Marilyn Mays



TODD COOPER