

# DIVERSITY PERSPECTIVES

SPRING 2008

## Expressions of Diversity Conference Opens April 28

### *Annual Week of Events Lead into First Innovation Festival, May 3*



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**Diversity Drives Innovation** is the theme for this year's week-long Expressions of Diversity Conference. The annual event, sponsored by the President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion, will be filled with five days of distinguished presenters, workshops, reunions and awards. The conference leads into the first IMAGINE RIT: Innovation + Creativity Festival at RIT on May 3, and should prove to be a springboard into how diversity and ideas inspire innovation.

This year's conference opens with the fourth annual Diversity Day sponsored by the RIT Board of Trustees. Featuring author, Frans Johansson, the Diversity Day session is open to all members of RIT. This year, the event will take place at the Gordon Field House to ensure more can participate and interact with guests.

Johansson will discuss how the most innovative companies build upon diverse talent pools to form teams as a defined strategy to be more cutting-edge. These companies have become brand leaders, strong research and development centers – and very profitable. In his address Johansson shows what happens when different cultures collide and ignite an explosion of extraordinary new ideas and discoveries. Participants at Diversity Day will learn: why diversity drives innovation; how critical diversity is for organizations that want to innovate; and that most organizations have a long way to go in leveraging diversity.

The Expressions of Diversity Conference continues on Tuesday with international poet, and NTID alumni, James Cohn. As founder of the National Deaf Poetry Conference, Cohn will present ASL and the Post Beat Poetry Era in the afternoon.

A centerpiece of the Expressions of Diversity Week Conference is the awarding of the Isaac L. Jordan Scholarships and Faculty/Staff Pluralism Award. The scholarships are given to outstanding students based on academic merit and participation in campus and community organizations to further the concepts of diversity and pluralism. The Faculty/Staff Award is given to a member of the RIT community who best exemplifies the spirit of Isaac Jordan, the award namesake and first chairperson of the Commission for Promoting Pluralism. The awards will be presented on Wednesday afternoon in the Fireside Lounge.

Later that same day, Minett Professor, G. Peter Jemison and the College of Liberal Arts Professor Jason Younker will discuss 'Stereotypes of Native Americans in Movies', held in the Fireside Lounge.

When the Right Brain/Left Brain workshop was first presented in 2006 it quickly became a favorite session in the Campus Week of Dialogue. The presentation, by Professors Michael Peres and David Cok, is reprised on Thursday in the Fireside Lounge. The speakers will focus on the seemingly divergent goals of the traditional right brain/



Frans Johansson

left brain thinking-- art vs. science or creativity vs. technology, where both work together toward a desired end.

The week is filled with different events, many of which are highlighted in this newsletter. Don't miss the movies or the second "Coffee House" series. For the full listing of dates, times, and topics for the Expressions of Diversity Conference see our website at: [diversity.rit.edu](http://diversity.rit.edu).

*"If we can just reach an intersection of disciplines or cultures, we will have a greater chance of innovating..."*

-- Frans Johansson  
The Medici Effect

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## 2008 Isaac L. Jordan Awards and Scholarships Presented Honorees Embody the Best of Diversity Efforts at RIT

The Isaac L. Faculty/Staff Pluralism Awards set a standard of excellence for service on behalf of diversity efforts at RIT and within their communities. Named after Isaac L. Jordan, first chairman of the Commission for Promoting Pluralism, the prestigious awards recognize faculty and staff who best exemplify his spirit of community, diversity, and pluralism. Students are awarded scholarships for their activities related

to pluralism and academic merit. They will also serve as members of the Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion for one year after winning this award.

Join the President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion for the awards ceremony on April 30 in the Fireside Lounge. It will be hosted by Commission chairperson, Thomas Warfield, and guest speaker, Dr. James Watters, RIT's

2007 recipient of the Isaac L. Jordan Pluralism Award.

We are proud to announce this year's nominees:

Twyla Cummings  
Howard Ward  
Karen Wilson  
Benjamin Varela  
Ila Parasnis

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## Partnerships in Pluralism Members Meet for First Reunion Campus Members Invited to Talk to Partners and Join New Cohort

Have you ever wondered about a new neighbor, co-worker, or classmate from a different culture? Want to approach them to learn more about who they are yet, backed away unsure of what to say? What if there was a way to do this in a structured environment, among friends and peers? At RIT, there is such a way!

One of the premier programs facilitating communication across cultures is the RIT Partnerships in Pluralism program. Taking diverse faculty and staff, pairing them together to participate in activities together throughout the year, this program has opened the door to meaningful communication and rich friendships. Partnerships in Pluralism is now four years old and boasts more than 100 campus pairs.

To celebrate current and previous partners, and to encourage new participants, the first Partnerships in Pluralism Reunion is taking place during Expressions Week on May 1 from 3-4 p.m. in the Fireside Lounge. The campus community is invited to attend the Reunion, to learn more about the Partnerships in Pluralism Program and to join the group for next year's session.

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## Spring Quarter Coffee House - Featuring: Black /White TV Series

What's it like to live in someone else's skin?

Find out by watching this fascinating documentary series developed by filmmaker R.J. Cutler and actor-rapper Ice Cube, in which an African-American family trades places with a Caucasian family.

Using Hollywood make-up the two families temporarily switch race and agree to share a home for six weeks. You will find out how the experiment challenged their beliefs and core values in ways they couldn't have imagined—resulting in a new and totally unique cultural perspective

that's anything but black-and-white!

The ultimate message of the show is that we are still a vastly divided nation. We can come together with understanding if we're willing to honestly talk about our differences and find ways to move forward collectively.

Allow yourself the opportunity to join with others watching and discussing this intriguing and insightful series - Fridays 3/28, 4/4, 4/11, 4/25, from 1- 3pm in the Idea Factory at the Wallace Memorial Library. The films are closed captioned.



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## Author Frans Johansson to Speak at Diversity Day: An Excerpt from *The Medici Effect*

The following is a short excerpt from Frans Johansson's book, *The Medici Effect*. In it he describes the interconnection of diversity and innovation, how people and ideas from a wide variety of fields, endeavors and backgrounds come together at the Intersection – that place where unique ideas, bring about valuable and creative solutions and new directions.

*"For most of us, the best chance to innovate lies at the Intersection. Not only do we have a greater chance of finding remarkable idea combination there, we will also find many more of them. To be specific, stepping into the Intersection does not mean simply combining two different concepts into a new idea. These types of combinations are part of both directional and intersectional innovations. Instead, the Intersection represents a place that drastically increases the chances for unusual combinations to occur. Imagine that you are a health*

*care worker caring for paralyzed patients. If you wish to develop new treatment strategies from within your field, you have to understand that field thoroughly. It is critical that you master most concepts within your field to find new ideas that work. In addition, since it is easy to predict where the field is heading, you will have a lot of competition at every turn.*

*Now imagine that you reach out and connect your experience with that of neuroscience. Suddenly there will be many new options and ideas for you to explore. Neurological concepts you had no idea even existed can potentially be combined with existing treatment strategies to generate breakthrough intersectional ideas. By stepping into the Intersection you will, in other words, have unleashed an explosion of fresh, intriguing idea combinations.*

*This explosion of remarkable ideas is what happened in Florence during the Renaissance,*

*and it suggests something very important. If we can just reach an intersection of disciplines or cultures, we will have a greater chance of innovating, simply because there are so many unusual ideas to go around. And as the following chapter will show, there has never been a better time to do it than now."* [Johansson, *The Medici Effect*, 2006]

### About Frans Johansson

Frans Johansson is an entrepreneur and thought-leader. He is also a consultant and the managing director for a hedge fund. This young businessman previously co-founded and managed two companies, a Boston-based software company and medical device company operating out of Baltimore, Maryland and Stockholm Sweden. Raised in Sweden by his African American and Cherokee mother and Swedish father, Frans earned an MBA at Harvard School of ScB in environmental science at Brown University.

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## Drawn to Diversity Performers Coming to RIT

Comic book heroes come alive in the Drawn to Diversity program, scheduled for Tuesday, April 29, 7 – 9 pm in the Fireside Lounge. The interactive program featuring a cast of 'superheroes' is one of the creative ways students at Alfred University sought to promote ideas of diversity. The group, consisting of undergraduate students who take on the personas of familiar comic book characters, use story telling, discussion and art forms to address equality, stereotypes, ignorance and interpersonal communication.

Drawn to Diversity's mission is to "teach history, inspire artists,

cultivate dialogue, and fight ignorance using popular art and media forms." The group first began developing the idea for Drawn to Diversity with sponsorship by Marvel Comics and MTV. The art project-turned-diversity-forum grew from a study in stereotypes to educational workshops presented to local elementary schools, high schools and now, college audiences.

Last year, the group began to look at the various advertising icons, familiar faces such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben for example, and the images portrayed by these icons. In 2007, they formed a partnership with Wegmans to

develop informational posters about the images, their background and relationship to diversity perspectives to be used in the local supermarkets. Learn more about the organization at: <http://my.alfred.edu/index.cfm/fuseaction/drawntodiversity.home.cfm>



## Expressions of Diversity Conference Events & Schedule

### MONDAY, APRIL 28

#### Diversity Day 2008 - Sponsored by the RIT Board of Trustees

9 a.m. – noon Gordon Field House & Activities Center

#### Keynote: Frans Johansson's Diversity Drives Innovation

Johansson explains how today's most innovative companies use culturally diverse talent pools and teams as a specific strategy to innovate. These companies have become brand leaders, research and development centers – and very profitable. In his address Johansson will show what happens when different cultures collide and ignite an explosion of extraordinary new ideas and discoveries.

### TUESDAY, April 29

#### Expressions of Diversity Conference - Sponsored by the President's Commission on Pluralism and Inclusion

4 - 5:30 p.m. Fireside Lounge

**Poet James Cohn**, The Avatars of American Sign Language, The Postbeat Poets and the Museum of American Poetics - A Discussion on Poetry, Diversity and the Digital Age.

Jim is the author of five collections of poetry: most recently the *Quien Sabe Mountain* (Museum of American Poetics Publications, 2004). In 1986 he received his M.S. Ed. in English and Deaf Education from the University of Rochester and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf.

7 - 9:00 p.m. SAU, Fireside Lounge

#### Drawn to Diversity: Dan Napolitano & students from Alfred University

Drawn to Diversity features a cast of 'super art heroes' who use comic books, advertising, and other popular mediums to explore diversity. D2D creatively 'teaches history, inspires artists, cultivates dialogue, and fights ignorance'. They recently partnered with Wegman's Food Markets to bring educational posters into the supermarket aisles.

### WEDNESDAY, April 30

#### Isaac L. Jordan Sr. Faculty/Staff Pluralism Award Recognition Ceremony

noon - 1:00 p.m. SAU, Fireside

Named after the Commission for Promoting Pluralism's first Chairperson, Isaac L. Jordan, Sr., this ceremony recognizes the accomplishments of several RIT faculty and staff who have contributed in unique ways to diversity and pluralism.

#### Stereotypes of Native Americans in Movies: Peter Jemison and Jason Younker

3:00 - 4:30 p.m. SAU, Fireside Lounge

### THURSDAY, May 1

#### Left Brain/Right Brain: Arts vs. Sciences

Presenters: Professor Michael Peres, RIT Center for Imaging Arts and Sciences) and Dr. David Cok, Kodak Research Lab) noon - 1:30 p.m. Fireside Lounge

At RIT, science and art merge; creativity collides with cutting edge technology. Do these diverse worlds work together or are they opposites? This panel discussion will focus on the seemingly divergent goals of traditional right brain/left brain thinking where both work together toward a desired end.

### FRIDAY, May 2

#### Higher Education Panel: How Diversity Drives Innovation on Neighboring Campuses -

11:30 - 12:30 p.m., Fireside Lounge

Intercollegiate Diversity Agora

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