

 PRINCETON UNIVERSITY



THE PRINCETON PRIZE IN RACE RELATIONS

"To promote harmony, understanding, and respect among people of different races by identifying and recognizing high school age students whose efforts have had a significant, positive effect on race relations in their schools or communities."

**Philadelphia Princeton Prize in Race Relations
Winners List 2016**

Princeton Prize

Simone Gibson - Friends Central School

Certificates of Accomplishment

Dejah Bradshaw and Jaakirah Reid - Agnes Irwin School

Samuel Gerlach - Springside Chestnut Hill Academy

Blessing Osazuwa - Lower Merion High School

Marian Rosario - Country Day School of the Sacred Heart

Anurithi Senthil - William Penn Charter School

Princeton Prize

Simone Gibson – Friends' Central School

Simone Gibson, a junior at Friends' Central School (FCS) in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, conceptualized, planned, and organized the *Different Voices, Same Vision Conference*. The Conference's goal was to promote understanding of race and other forms of diversity by broadening the perspective of how students from different environments experience the world and to help them develop their own voices while honoring the perspective of others.

Simone was the leader in every aspect of the conference. She sent letters to school administrators introducing herself and building relationships, created a conference vision statement, sent out flyers, and recruited faculty to train student discussion leaders. The conference, which took place at Friends' Central, was attended by over fifty students and two dozen faculty and staff representing city and suburban Archdiocesan and private schools and Philadelphia public schools. It featured awareness workshops, activities, discussions, and the formation of affinity groups. Participants reached out to their school communities through social media describing what they had learned and also took an activity or practice discussed at the conference to their school. Students came together in a safe setting where they learned from and had conversations with one another about social justice and fostered racial harmony, understanding, and respect. Students thus became more engaged and willing to have difficult conversations about race. The conference also resulted in improved communication between students and faculty on racial and other diversity issues. An on-line community of students from the participating schools grew out of the conference.

The conference will become a yearly event and Simone is creating a blueprint for the next group of students to take over its management and will train the next leader. She created the original budget for the conference, and will work this summer to increase resources for the conference, so that registration is free.

Keino Terrell, the Coordinator of Diversity at Friends' Central, says Simone "really cares about making the world a better place by bringing attention to injustices. Simone wants others to understand and to honor the idea of difference, believing that only then will we reach our true potential as a society."

Certificate of Accomplishment

Dejah Bradshaw and Jaakirah Reid – Agnes Irwin School

Dejah Bradshaw and Jaakirah Reid are seniors in the Agnes Irwin School. In 2014, they helped found the Acceptance and Awareness of Diversity (AAD) Conference and worked for months to make it a reality. The Conference, held on October 25, 2014, was attended by sixty students and ten faculty members from six schools.

The conference was intended to combat ignorance and lack of communication on the subjects of unconscious bias, race, socioeconomic privilege and their intersectionality by giving the faculty and students the information that allows an educated and productive discussion of these constructs with the goal of creating a deeper understanding of ideas and opinions different from one's own, dispelling stereotypes, and opening doors for acceptance, interest, admiration, and empathy for others.

AAD began as a diversity conference but Dejah and Jaakirah turned AAD into a social justice and diversity organization to tackle problems in their community regarding diversity, mostly race. It has made significant progress addressing this issue within Agnes Irwin by opening up the conversation between racial groups. This resulted in white students understanding the bias that black students feel and black students understanding that white students were afraid to address some of these issues for fear that they would be viewed as racist. At Agnes Irwin these discussions involved students, faculty and staff.

A Multi-Cultural Student Board with representation from all the schools that attended the 2014 conference has been formed and has taken responsibility for planning the 2016 and subsequent conferences. It is anticipated that about 160 students, 16-20 faculty members and 30 student facilitators will participate in the 2016 conference. Jaakirah and Dejah have been devoting almost all of their time outside of school including time over summer and holiday breaks to AAD.

Mrs. Charesse Ford, their advisor and Director of Equity and Inclusion, describes Jaakirah as cooperative, innovative, trustworthy and a positive leader and Dejah as an insightful, bright, principled, innovative, and an assertive and passionate leader. Since their freshman year both Dejah and Jaakirah have assisted Mrs. Ford in facilitating diversity and inclusion initiatives for both middle and upper school students at Agnes Irwin.

Certificate of Accomplishment

Samuel Gerlach

Samuel Gerlach is a junior at Springside Chestnut Hill Academy. His sponsor describes him as a student with a powerful voice who is not afraid to open up a racial dialogue. Sam has been able to gain the support and trust of the head administrators at the school to be impactful in addressing the dialogue of racial diversity and understanding head on.

At a student-faculty diversity retreat in the summer of 2015, Sam was charged with assembling a student panel. Sam really went into the student community and purposefully chose an extremely diverse group of 10 panelists. There were students who were African- American, Asian, White, Jewish, Muslim, boys and girls. Each student was able to address the faculty and administrators and share their perspective as a student in their school community. The presentation was so powerful that Head of School tapped Sam as a student leader to continue the dialogue of race relations at the school.

After the retreat, Sam formed the Upper School Affinity Group for students of color which focuses on student-centered programming to promote diversity and understanding. Sam has led nine assemblies this school year on diversity. The assemblies, while at times uncomfortable, have continued the dialogue on race relations at the school. On Martin Luther King Day, Sam and the Affinity Group showed "I'm Not a Racist, am I?" and facilitated group discussions for students, parents and faculty.

Sam has also been working to expand the Affinity Group to the Middle Schools and even the Lower Schools. He is currently working to cultivate Middle School student leaders so that programming about racial acceptance can begin there. Sam wants to empower other students to be leaders in the discussion because he feels that kids are more likely to be receptive to positive peer influences.

Certificate of Accomplishment

Blessing Osazuwa

Blessing Osazuwa is a senior at Lower Merion High School, where she serves as the Co-head of the Lower Merion School District's Girls Leadership Council. In that capacity, she pushed the GLC to confront and address the unique issues facing women of color, and the ways in which women of color experience gender inequality differently. She developed a series of workshops called "Conversations with Girls of Color" at her own high school, which has been expanded to the other high school in the District. The workshops are designed to encourage discussion about race and give an opportunity for students to express their feelings about changes the school can make to better support minority students.

Blessing has been a student voice in the school district's strategic planning process and serves as the sole student representative on the district's Committee to Address Race In Education (CARE). CARE has led a multi-year effort to address the achievement gap within the district. She has contributed several articles to her school paper, as well as on her own blog, related especially to the intersectionality of race and gender. She approached the President of the School Board to secure funding to bring in guest speakers to address racial issues, which has led to discussions regarding potential further educational opportunities for district employees.

Her sponsor describes her as "an extraordinary young woman – brave, confident, caring and driven." "Her work has been focused, goal-oriented and highly productive. She has changed the narrative in our school community – particularly within the student community – from one of occasional dialogue to informed, meaningful action."

Certificate of Accomplishment

Marion Rosario

Marion Rosario is a senior at the Country Day School of the Sacred Heart. The Multi-Cultural Club she began in tenth grade helped expose her school community to the voices and experiences of students of color. In doing so, as her sponsor, Sister Matthew Anita MacDonald, notes that “Those closest and open to hearing and understanding are being transformed. Those who are not so open are seeing and experiencing the acceptance and leadership that other cultures have to offer.” The scope of the Multi-Cultural Club grew and evolved under Marion’s leadership from a vehicle to explore food, culture, and dress to an open forum for discussion of race, stereotypes, and other germane topics.

Recognizing the need for students of color to have a space to voice their opinions, share their common experiences, and share their common experiences, Marion approached the school administration with her idea of a Multi-Cultural Club. Her inspiration for the Club came after noticing that the school did not have any activities recognizing African-American contributions for Black History month. The Club she formed in tenth grade began initially as a haven for Black students at Sacred Heart.

Under Marion’s leadership, however, the Club expanded both in the depth of its mission but also in its appeal to others from different ethnic backgrounds. Instrumental in this evolution was last year’s Club organized screening of the documentary, “Prep School Negro”, about the travails of a black adolescent given the chance to attend an elite private school. The discussion that ensued, following the screening, was instrumental in improving the understanding of both the teachers and other students about diversity. This year, the Club has initiated a two-person dialogue during the school’s weekly assemblies during Black History Month. The dialogue is designed to highlight the contribution of African American leaders. The Club also was responsible for the final February assembly that highlighted the poetry, music, and dance of various cultures.

Marion’s work is well deserving of the Certificate of Accomplishment. She had worked diligently to improve and educate her community on issues surrounding race and diversity. The work of the Club matured with Marion’s understanding and comfort in her school environment. It will be exciting to watch Marion’s continued growth as a leader in race relations.

Certificate of Accomplishment

Anurithi Senthil – William Penn Charter School

Anurithi Senthil is a sophomore at William Penn Charter School whose sponsor described her as an incredible human being, a thought partner, and a leader. Anu has made a difference in her school by engaging in difficult discussions about race with both her peers and adults, and she has done so with compassion and respect.

Following the deaths of several unarmed African-American young men, Anu wanted a forum in which to discuss these issues. She raised the idea with her classmates and together they brainstormed about what they could do to create that forum. Anu explained that her goal was to educate her school community about racial injustice as well as to understand the thought process of the police officers involved in these events. The students decided to commence a dialogue with the Philadelphia Police Commissioner's Office. The correspondence culminated in Commissioner Ramsey's accepting the students' invitation to speak at their school.

Anu and her classmates planned the event and facilitated the discussion with the Commissioner, which was attended by the students and faculty of the Upper School. The students asked Commissioner Ramsey what their school could do to help and the Commissioner encouraged the students to stay involved and understand that racial injustice is not someone else's issue, but everyone's.

In that spirit, Anu made sure that the discussion at Penn Charter did not end with this event. The students planned and facilitated several follow-up discussions after the Commissioner's visit. In addition, Anu founded a Diversity Council to create a safe space for students to voice their concerns and plan activities to address those concerns. There is little doubt that Anu's efforts to advance the discourse around race and social responsibility at her school will have a lasting impact on her community.

Committee Members

Co-chairs

Nancy R. Fox '75 P'10 P'11

Jerry Porter '58 P'88 P'90 P'93

Judith Porter S'58 P'88 P'90 P'93

Jaliya Stewart Faulkner '00

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Walter W. Schanbacher '73 P'04

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